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Delusion in Poisonville: Suspense in Dashiell
Hammett's *Red Harvest*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Umberto Eco claims that philosophy, psychoanalysis and detective fiction all are based on one fundamental question: Who is the culprit? "To be able to identify the culprit, one has to presume that all facts follow a certain order and logic – the logic of the culprit"¹ (64). But what is the logic of the culprit? Sinda Gregory argues that "[R]eason, just because it presumes an external order to life, will always fail in the end to explain fully human conduct and emotions" (13).

The two authors who invented and popularized the genre of detective fiction, Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, introduced two fictional detectives, C Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, who defy this statement. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" Dupin employs reason to read the thoughts of his nameless companion:

"Dupin," said I, gravely, "this is beyond my comprehension. I do not hesitate to say that I am amazed and can scarcely credit my senses. How was it possible you should know I was thinking of ---- - ?" Here I paused, to ascertain beyond a doubt whether he really knew of whom I thought.
-- "of Chantilly," said he, "why do you pause?" [...]
"Tell me, for Heaven's sake [...] the method – if method there is – by which you have been enabled to fathom my soul in this matter."
(Poe, *Murders* 12)

This dialogue is echoed in Doyle's "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box",

"You remember," said he, "that some little time ago when I read you the passage in one of Poe's sketches in which a close reasoned follows the unspoken thoughts of his companion, you were inclined to treat the matter as a mere tour-de-force of the author" [...]
"Do you mean to say that you read my train of thoughts from my features?"
"Your features and especially your eyes." (Doyle, *Cardboard* 356)

Poe and Doyle presented detectives who were able to find connections and relations where others could not. But the firm belief in an underlying logic decreased in the United States of the early 20th century, a country that was kept in constant motion by its citizens' technological and economic advance. When the prohibition turned hundreds of thousands of Americans into criminals, crime became both a national obsession (Porter 96) and a profession. Dashiell

¹ "Um [zu wissen wer der Schuldige ist] muß man annehmen, daß alle Tatsachen eine Logik haben, nämlich die Logik, die ihnen der Schuldige auferlegt hat."

Hammett's post-Einsteinian culprits refuse to follow an underlying logic, and his investigators are perfectly aware of this. They do not attempt to solve cases by classical means. Instead, as the Continental Op puts it, they “stir things up”: “[S]ometimes just stirring things up is all right - if you're tough enough to survive, and keep your eyes open so you'll see what you want when it comes to the top” (*Red Harvest* 37).

As will be discussed, Dashiell Hammett did not follow the lead of the conventional mystery story, despite the fact that he was influenced by many of the genre's archetypical elements. Yet his novels and short stories have been marketed and received as such. The focus of this paper lies on the question of why and how this happened.

2. THE GENRE

This introductory chapter focuses on the history of the hard-boiled genre and the cultural environment that defined the era. The hard-boiled detective made his first appearance in the 1920s in the detective pulp magazine *Black Mask*, but ‘crime fiction’ “in the wider sense stretches back [...] to Defoe’s criminal-centred fiction and to the Newgate and ‘sensation’ novels of the nineteenth century” (Horsley, *Crime Fiction* 3). Still, Edgar Allan Poe’s Dupin (who made his first appearance in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in 1841) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes (appearing for the first time in 1887 in *A Study in Scarlet*) are usually described as the father figures of the genre of detective fiction².

2.1. THE HISTORIC CONTEXT OF *RED HARVEST*

To be able to discuss how the hard-boiled genre could come to exist as a sub-genre to the classic detective genre, one has to take into consideration the huge cultural and social changes that took place at the beginning of the 20th century. As stated by Horsley, the “[h]ard-boiled detective fiction was born in a period of political and economic changes for which people were wholly unprepared” (*Crime Fiction* 69). The changes he refers to include the stock market crash of 1927, the Great Depression, massive unemployment and the Prohibition; but also events such as Lindbergh’s crossing of the Atlantic, the evolution of the car and inventions such as the screw-base light bulb, radio and sound film. Furthermore, Americans experienced “growing evidence of illicit connections between crime, business, and politics in rapidly expanding American cities” (Horsley, *Crime Fiction* 69) as a general trend, creating a system of corruption that forms a central topic in *Red Harvest*.

Some of these issues will be discussed in detail in this chapter, as a consideration of the social and political situation of the 1920s is a key to understanding the hard-boiled genre. The century between Poe and Hammett brought huge cultural changes, and it is more than just 30 years and the Atlantic ocean that separate Hammett’s fictional characters from the ones portrayed in Doyle.

² A less successful pioneer of the genre is the 19th century French writer Émile Gaboriau with his *Monsieur Lecoq*.

2.1.1. PROHIBITION

In 1919, the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, widely known as the Prohibition, took place, “turn[ing] hundreds of thousands of ordinary working and middle-class Americans into criminals” (Porter, 96). Prohibition made crime “a national obsession” (Layman 63) and familiarized all Americans “with a large number of criminal words and phrases, and many of these [...] have entered into the everyday speech of the country” (*American Language*, qtd. in Marling 4).

The Prohibition was a national law that prohibited the manufacture, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages from January 1920 until December 1933. Although alcohol was banned, Americans would still seek out bootleggers and so-called speakeasies – illegal establishments that sold alcoholic beverages – to buy and consume alcohol, idealizing those “daring lawbreakers who exemplified strength, power, and freedom” (Layman 63) that supplied them with alcohol. One of the most famous figures of the time was Alphonse “Al” Capone, the leader of a crime syndicate that focused on the smuggling and bootlegging of liquor. Capone catered for “an appetite that could not be contained” (Porter 96) and “was a celebrity whose war against the federal enforcement agents attracted popular support” (Layman 63).

Observers sometimes exaggeratedly “joked that drinking in America increased during Prohibition” (Layman 72), and bootleggers prospered on both the northern and southern borders and the east and west coasts. Only 5 per cent of the liquor that was smuggled into the country was interdicted by the federal government (Marling 4). Besides importing foreign alcohol, the three other primary sources of illegal liquor were redistilled alcohol originally intended for industrial use, pharmaceutical alcohol, and home-brewed alcohol.

However, Americans did not restrict themselves to the illegal consumption of alcohol. In 1919, the *Traffic in Narcotic Drugs* (see Layman 73) estimated one million drug addicts in the USA, “addiction to morphine, cocaine, opium, and heroin occurred at about the same rate in the 1920s [as] it does today” (Layman 73). The majority of morphine addicts were women, the use of heroin and opium was concentrated among male lower classes and Asian immigrants. Unlike the Prohibition, the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act, which was

approved in 1914 to regulate the use of narcotics, enjoyed widespread public support.

Smuggling alcohol demanded a new type of criminal: high mobility and weapons were a prerequisite for being effective, turning bootleggers into “highjackers, extortionists, thieves, and murderers” (Layman 63) that found unexpected public support. As Porter (96) concludes, “the stage was set for an unprecedented wave of crime associated in the popular mind with speed and fire power, fast cars and machine guns”. Car-companies even “received endorsements from both Dillinger and Barrow, who extolled the virtues of [Ford’s 1932 V-8] vehicle as a getaway car” (Layman 64).

2.1.2. ELECTRICITY, CARS AND THE MASS MEDIA

Marling (1), referring to the *Americana Yearbook*, provides a telling list of life-changing inventions of the 1920s: apart from the introduction of the screw-base light bulb and the popularisation of washing machines, stoves, and refrigerators, electrical consumption increased by 50 per cent between 1922 and 1927. By the end of the 1920s, sixteen out of eighteen million possible houses had been wired for electricity. The age of the industrial revolution had metamorphosed into the age of electricity, radios, and skyscrapers (Porter 95), automobiles started to become a substitute for steam-powered trains, mass production (Ford) gave way to mass marketing (General Motors), and “U.S. capitalism [shifted] from a competitive and entrepreneurial stage to a corporate and managed stage” (Breu, *Blood-Simple* 54).

The 1920s also brought changes to the ways – and speed – that newspapers and information were spread and received. A newspaper syndicate came into being: although the number of American newspapers decreased by about 20 per cent, the readership increased by about 80 per cent – more people were reading newspapers which were controlled by fewer journalists (Layman 77). There was a shift from regional to national stories, accompanied by a growing interest in sensationalistic tabloids (which focused on entertainment rather than on information), book clubs and the development of mass-circulation magazines. According to Doherty (qtd. in Layman 79), the first radio station was licensed in 1920, and by the end of the 1920s 5 million radios had been sold. Television did not yet exist, but every week, 100 million movie tickets were

purchased by an urban population that consisted of 68 million people. *The Jazz Singer* was released in August 1927, the first movie that included recorded music and dialogue. In the early 1930s, major studios started to cease making silent movies, which created a demand for full scripts instead of simple stories. Dashiell Hammett was one of the first to respond to the new challenges of film, integrating “stylishly the plot and characterization of the detective novel with car chases and other typically Keystone elements such as exploding buildings” (Marling 115) and “participating in the writer’s migration to Hollywood in the early days of talking pictures” (Layman 9). A letter from Hammett to Blanche Knopf, the publisher of *Red Harvest*, dated 20 March 1928, exemplifies Hammett’s (over)eagerness:

In the enclosed revised pages I have cut out the dynamiting of police headquarters [...] and have changed the dynamiting of Yard’s house [...] to a simple shooting off-stage. [...] You will notice that I have left the bombing of Pete the Finn’s establishment [...] as it was. Since both of the other dynamiting episodes have been removed, I think this one might be retained, especially as it is further along in the story, not in the congested area. But it can be easily enough deleted if you so desire. (Hammett, *Letters* 45-46)

Although *Red Harvest* was almost finished at that time (and has yet to see a film-adaptation), Hammett promised Blanche Knopf in a letter dated 9 April that for his future works he would stick to “more objective and filmable forms” (Hammett, *Letters* 48).

The increased speed of living and acting was nowhere more visible than in the advent of the automobile: in 1919, 1.9 million cars existed in the USA. Ten years later, this number had almost tripled, growing to 5.6 million (Marling 57). As pointed out in chapter 2.1, bootleggers and criminals relied heavily on the use of cars, and the lack of a police force outside urban centres made it easy for them to simply escape outside city limits, forcing the local police to work in cooperation with state-wide police forces.

2.1.3. POLITICS, POLICE, PINKERTONS

The 1920s saw three republican presidents: Warren G. Harding, who was elected in 1920 and died during the unfolding of the infamous Teapot Dome scandal of 1922, which led to the resignation of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of the Navy; Calvin Coolidge, who served until 1928; and Herbert Hoover, who may “have been admired for his administrative abilities. [Yet]

Corruption, whether at the local or national level, was assumed to be a part of the governmental process” (Layman 62-63).

With the on-going urbanization the crime rate increased, and although the number of policemen in the USA doubled between 1910 and 1930, only the largest cities disposed of trained police forces. These were usually understaffed and underpaid, which often led to police corruption (Layman 64). The success rate of police investigations was extremely low: “for every one hundred felonies committed, there were seven arrests and five indictments, a situation typical of other states and probably more efficient than in less populated areas in the West” (Layman 64). No national police force existed in America before the middle of the 1920s. *The Committee on Uniform Crime Records* (qtd. in Heise 488) observed “an ill-defined yet wide-spread feeling ... that one is not secure in his life and his good, that the police have failed in their task of protection, and that all forms of crime are steadily mounting”. Urbanization was interpreted as the root of this feeling of insecurity, which carried a “contagious intimacy [that could only lead to] the disintegration of the moral order” (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie in Heise 488). However, much of this would change when J. Edgar Hoover became director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1924.

In the years before that, private detective agencies would come into action where the police failed. The most distinguished of these were the Pinkertons – Pinkerton’s National Detective Agency – who “were not bound by jurisdictional boundaries, governmental budgets, or departmental regulations. Their job was to satisfy the client as long as he was willing to pay” (Layman 64). The Pinkertons did not act out of a chivalric code, Layman goes as far as to call them a “private army [that used] brutal tactics [that were] extralegal if required. [They were] well suited for work as strikebreakers [thwarting] union disruption and radical political activists” (65). Hammett himself became a Pinkerton in 1915, where he gathered experience that would later enable him to become the writer that he was. One of these union battles, the 1917 strikebreaking of Butte³, Montana, in which the Pinkertons were involved, served as an inspiration for *Red Harvest*. Lillian Hellman claims in *An Unfinished Woman*⁴ that during his time as a Pinkerton, Hammett once was approached by vigilantes to assassinate the IWW union leader Frank Little – a proposition he dismissed.

³ see chapter 3.3.

⁴ qtd. in Layman (85).

By the time of World War II, the FBI would take over many of the national detective agency's cases, policing techniques became more sophisticated, and police forces worked efficiently together. "The private detective was relegated to a role as romantic lone crime fighter of the near-past, whose identity was more forcefully established in fiction than in fact" (Layman 72). This notion is mirrored in *Red Harvest*, when the Op flees Personville in the novel's last page, before the town is to be governed under martial law.

2.1.4. NO PLACE LEFT TO GO

Porter (95) argues that the 1920s brought an end to the American Dream, as the advancing frontier finally ran out of land in California. Slotkin identified the Op as "a modern version of the frontier Indian-killer" (12), whereas Breu (*Blood-Simple* 54) sees the closure of the frontier in combination with urbanization and the growth of mass culture as the end of the gentleman detective as well as the frontier hero. As the old agrarian lifestyle seemingly gave way to a more modern and urban one, the fictional private eyes had to face a substitute frontier: "They were to confront [the new frontier that] was the lapsed, anything-goes world of a jazz age America as it was already mutating into the era of the Great Depression" (Porter 96), making *Red Harvest* "as much a Western as a 'detective' novel" (Marling XIII).

2.2. THE FIRST STEPS OF THE DETECTIVE

As stated in in chapter 2., Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, exhibiting his skills of deducting from observation, is widely regarded as the first detective-hero of fiction – with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", published in 1841, often being considered to be the first detective fiction story⁵. Together with "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" and "The Purloined Letter", these three stories introduced some of what would become the genre's defining traits. As chapter 2.4. will exemplify, Poe invented literary techniques that were eagerly taken up by both the writers of the Golden Age⁶ and the hard-boiled school. Almost 50

⁵ Priestman (*Crime Fiction X*) identifies Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) as the first example of crime fiction, whereas Murch argues that Vidocq's *Mémoires* (1828) "could conceivably be regarded as a series of [detective short stories], for each 'case' is complete in itself, but they are little more than factual reports, written with dramatic or humorous touches but quite lacking in literary quality" (67).

⁶ see chapter 2.3.

years later, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would bring the genre to perfection by presenting his great detective to the world: Sherlock Holmes made his first appearance in Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), the following novel, *The Sign of the Four* (1890), emphasised some of the protagonist's rather unconventional traits: "When introduced to us he takes drugs – [...] he has been on three cocaine injections a day for months – and has fits of depression" (Symons 66). Lacking knowledge of literature, philosophy and astronomy – when asked about the Solar System by Watson, he replies "What the deuce is it to me? [...] you say that we go round the sun. If we went round the moon it would not make a penny-worth of difference to me or to my work" (Doyle, *Scarlet* 16). Sherlock Holmes is a master of "deduction", primarily solving his cases by finding an underlying logic or order in what seems to be a chaotic and opaque riddle, he "rejects the notion of the meaningless or accidental fact, acting instead on an underlying faith that all signs in a bounded space must be relatable" (Horsley, *Crime Fiction* 27). As Knight puts it:

The captivated readers had faith in modern systems of scientific and rational enquiry to order an uncertain and troubling world, but feeling they lacked these powers themselves they, like many audiences before them, needed a suitably equipped hero to mediate psychic protection. (qtd. in Bell 9)

Watson, the narrator of the stories and Holmes' friend and biographer, even provides the reader with a rather amusing (yet erroneous) list about the detective's (sometimes very narrow) knowledge:

1. Knowledge of Literature.–Nil.
2. Philosophy.–Nil.
3. Astronomy.–Nil.
4. Politics.–Feeble.
5. Botany.–Variable. Well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening.
6. Geology.–Practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.
7. Chemistry.–Profound.
8. Anatomy.–Accurate, but unsystematic.
9. Sensational Literature.–Immense. He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century.
10. Plays the violin well.
11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.
12. Has a good practical knowledge of British law. (Doyle, *Scarlet* 17)

Furthermore, Holmes is “a master of disguise, an accomplished actor and a man of great physical strength” (Murch 178), whose motivation for being a detective is “a love of the neutral truth (he has no interest in the feelings of the guilty or the innocent)” (Auden 22). Contrary to this, Dupin does not act out of a love for the truth but for the pure amusement of investigating: “As for these murders, let us enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make up an opinion respecting them. An inquiry will afford us amusement,” (Poe, *Murders* 23). Both his skill of deduction and his flaws of basic knowledge position him at the brink of society and enable him to look at his cases from a wider and arguably more objective angle. Dupin actually occupies a place outside of society, and he is socially dependent on his narrator: “as my worldly circumstances were somewhat less embarrassed than his own, I was permitted to be at the expense of renting, and furnishing in a style which suited the rather fantastic gloom of our common temper” (Poe, *Murders* 10).

Like Dupin, Holmes solves his cases through “an intelligent analysis of facts that leads to a resolution, a process of inductive thought” (Worthington 22). The character of Holmes shows familiarity with Poe’s Dupin, calling him “a very inferior fellow” (Doyle, *Scarlet* 23). This proves that Doyle knew Poe’s detective stories – and puts Holmes in stark contrast to Dupin, who is “a man of culture, familiar with the classics and *equally* at home when discussing chemistry, anthropology or ‘algebraic analysis’” (Murch 70, emphasis added).

Still, they share more similarities than just a calling for solving crimes (and riddles): both of them are accompanied by faithful companions who chronicle their adventures. However, unlike Poe’s anonymous narrator, Doyle provides the reader with much information on Holmes’ friend Watson. Grunwald (110) attributes the narrator’s namelessness in Poe to the attempt of creating a “narrating I” instead of an “experiencing I” – not only is Watson experiencing the action, he often plays an active and important role in Holmes’ cases. This is mirrored by the main characters’ approaches to solving crimes: whereas Poe’s stories are “purely analytical discussions of the science of detection, argued out like a geometric theorem with no irrelevant detail, Doyle’s stories are full of movement and animation” (Murch 179-180).

Another striking similarity is the use of separate and self-contained stories: after publishing the aforementioned novels (which were only minor

successes), Doyle focused on writing short stories. These first appeared in *Strand Magazine* and attracted an immense readership. The stories were of a wide variety, both regarding setting (including urban and rural settings) and plot: though crimes (and often murders) are committed in most of the stories, they don't occur in all of them. Kayman argues that Doyle's success did not only stem from his elaborate use of language and the ingenuity of his stories, but also because he

achieved the right balance of elements to provide the male middle-classes [with] an intellectual adventure, while assuaging their anxieties about the modern world. The stories celebrate the materialism of the age, showing that the ordinary small objects of everyday existence [...] have stories. (48)

Some of these “anxieties about the modern world”, the “semiotic and moral chaos” (Kayman 48) from which the rational detective protects his readers have been pinpointed and interpreted as by-products of the age of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity (1916), the Scopes trial⁷ (1925), Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (1927), and the Big Bang theory (around 1929) by DeFino, who sees the time between the two World Wars as

a period where traditional values, essentialisms and idealisms constantly found themselves threatened, where the ‘progress’ of enlightened scientific and philosophical discourse seemed to hit a wall and even the objective laws of physics gave way to probability equations [...] it isn't surprising so many writers turned their gaze back to the genre that Conan Doyle had popularized in [Great Britain's] Victorian ascendancy. (75)

However, these ‘blueprints’ for the detective short story that would be recycled over and over again by the writers of the Golden Age of the detective story can be traced back to an earlier point in time than that of Doyle: “Nearly all the conventions of the classic whodunit – from locked rooms to least likely culprits, eccentric sleuths and their admiring companions, dullard cops, and wrongly accused bystanders – originate with Poe” (Lehman 71).

⁷ In the Scopes trial, John Thomas Scopes was convicted and found guilty for teaching evolution at an American high school.

2.3. THE GOLDEN AGE

The Golden Age of crime fiction marks a time – roughly the period between World War I and II, although mystery writers would copy the style for much longer – where certain writers shared a coherent set of practices, creating a norm and abandoning certain trends, such as the use of coincidence or historical explanations (Knight 77). This trend was epitomised by the British crime writer Agatha Christie and her American contemporary Willard Huntington Wright (who wrote under the pseudonym S. S. Van Dine).

Horsley states that the mysteries of the Golden Age were “often called ‘cosy’, with reference to their resolved endings, the politeness of the language and conventional lightness of tone, their feminized investigators, and the circumscribed milieu in which they [took] place” (*From Sherlock* 31). Knight (77-80) provides an overview of the most common features of both British and American crime fiction: first of all, murder became essential as the central crime, which was – especially in American stories – reflected in the titles (nouns that were uncommon in titles before, like ‘murder’, ‘death’ and ‘blood’ became more or less obligatory).

Secondly, the majority of the stories took place in rural areas. The few exceptions usually occurred in American stories and are restricted to either apartments or a few streets, whereas the setting of most English novels was often a more or less secluded country house – Raymond Williams even saw the detective novel as “an evolution of the country-house literary tradition” (Knight 78).

Thirdly, the people portrayed in these mystery stories are restricted to the middle-class. Both victim and culprit tend to belong to it, the lower classes and servants are hardly ever guilty: at most, they play minor roles.

Furthermore, “instability is constant. The victim is also a person of little emotive value; he or she is not mourned, nor is the real pain and degradation of violent death represented” (Knight 78). This lack of emotive values is mirrored in the writing style of the authors and the detectives’ investigations, which are conducted rationally, not actively or intuitionally. Depth characterisation and analysis would only later emerge with the advent of authors such as Sayers and Allingham. Romance is rare during the Golden Age, especially because it would have “remove[d] people from the suspect list” (Knight 79) – an essential pillar of

these stories is that among the range of suspects, most have a motive to some degree and seem to be capable of the crime. Furthermore, at the end of the story the identification or unmasking of the culprit occurs – with occasional exceptions (such as suicide or other unfortunate incidents).

However, what Knight defines as the most striking feature of the genre, and what sets it clearly apart from its predecessors, is that there often are “multiple suspects and [a] rational analysis of determinedly circumstantial evidence” (79).

DeFino identifies exactly this quality of rational analysis as a key to understanding the genre’s popularity:

The detective enters the scene of the crime *after* the fact and, through a feat of *analysis*, constructs a chain of effects and causes back to the source of the crime – mode and motive – which, while not annulling the deed (the body is still dead), gives the reader a sense of intellectual control over it. The story redeems that sense of order and control by (fictionally) exposing its logic, its cause-and-effect chain, how one thing leads to another. Hence the form’s popularity: it constructs a logical discourse from seeming chaos – disparate bits of evidence, cryptic clues – through an *objective* scientific method. (74, emphasis added)

Some of the aforementioned points were integrated into ‘rules of fair play’ (equalling rough and not always serious guidelines for writing mystery fiction). These rules were formed by the Detection Club – a “Parnassus of English writers of mystery” (Chandler 529) – to which, among others, Sayers, Chesterton and Christie belonged to. The rules would later be published by Ronald Knox. The American writer Willard Huntington Wright, author of the Philo Vance novels, published similar rules in the *American Magazine* in 1928 under his pseudonym S.S. Van Dine. Some of Wright’s rules are plainly meant to be amusing; however, they describe the genre surprisingly well, although they were quite often broken by the mystery authors. Seven of these rules will be presented here and later be referred upon, as they underline how much Hammett and many of his fellow hard-boiled writers deviated from them and sometimes even mocked them:

1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described
2. No willful tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself
5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions

- 6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that will eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter
- 10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story
- 12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed
- 15. The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent (Van Dine)

Two major features that separate Poe and Holmes from their successors are that the former focused on short stories and that they targeted a different audience: whereas the vast majority of *The Strand's*⁸ readership had primarily been male, the clue-puzzle novels of the Golden Age writers were mostly read via lending libraries. These had a 75 per cent female audience (Knight 81).

2.4. THE HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE

As mentioned before, the hard-boiled detective made his first appearance in the early 1920s in the detective pulp magazine *Black Mask*, and in the less influential magazines *Dime Detective*, *Detective Fiction Weekly* and *Black Aces* (Horsley, *From Sherlock* 33). His creation and popularisation can be acclaimed to Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, whose first professional work was published in 1933 in *Black Mask* magazine, a time when Hammett had already been at the height of his creative output. Chandler and Hammett are the two most famous representatives of the genre, and together with Carroll John Daly – a co-contributor of Hammett, whose detective stories were in the long run far less successful than Hammett's – they are widely regarded to be the first of their kind (Moore 4). The end of the Gilded Age⁹ as well as several social factors heavily influenced these writers and their contemporaries, most of which have been outlined at the beginning of this thesis.

As stated in chapter 1.1.4, the advancing frontier finally ran out of land in California in the 1920s, and Breu (*Blood-Simple* 59-60) draws a connection between the now obsolete frontier hero and the popularisation of the private eye: he argues that, unlike Poe's Dupin or Doyle's Sherlock Holmes – who embodied the basic principles of nineteenth-century manliness and followed its

⁸ (and similar magazines like *Pearson's* and *Windsor's*)

⁹ i.e. the period following the Civil War that "laid the foundations of the modern American industrial capitalist system which was more or less fully formed by the 1920s" (Porter 95).

chivalric code – the hard-boiled males mirror male autonomy and potency, masculine individualism and artisan autonomy – qualities that were prominent in the frontier fiction. But what does the term ‘private eye’ mean? According to Porter (5), the term carries the following connotations:

- a solitary eye
- a non-organisation man's eye, like the frontier scout's or the cowboy's
- an eye that trusts no other
- an eye that's licensed to look
- by extrapolation, an eye for hire

2.4.1. POE'S INFLUENCE ON THE GENRE

Porter sees the archetypical protagonist of the hard-boiled fiction as “a disabused, anti-authoritarian, muckraking hero, who, instead of fleeing to Europe [...] stayed at home to confront crime and corruption on the increasingly unlovely streets of modern urban America” (96) – and the world of the hard-boiled detective is truly urban, as will be demonstrated below.

Just like the writers of the Golden Age, the writers of the early period of the hard-boiled detective novel¹⁰ had a tradition to draw upon and diverge from: the tradition that was formed by Poe's approach to the detective genre and by Doyle's refinement of it¹¹. Moore (7-21) proposes five areas that were used and altered by the hard-boiled writers:

- the use of an urban environment
- the idea of a detective duo
- the narrative stance
- the locus of violence
- the role of reason and analysis

2.4.1.1. MEAN STREETS UNDER A GRIMY SKY

In 1841, the year that “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” was published, Paris stood at the centre of a reviving nation, peopled by writers and artists like Balzac, Dumas and Hugo. Similarly to London, it had a professional police force, made necessary because of the increasing number of crimes that accompanied the growth of the city. And although “Paris [was] a dimly lit city”, it was “not one in which Dupin and his narrator friend fear[ed] to walk at night.

¹⁰ (a period that Moore (7) dates from 1927 until 1955)

¹¹ Horsley (*Noir Thriller*, 19) also mentions Conrad, Dickens and Dostoevsky as forerunners of the genre.

Poe does not equate the physical darkness with a moral one” (Moore 8). The following paragraph exemplifies this:

Then [Dupin and the narrator] sallied forth into the streets arm in arm, continuing the topics of the day, or roaming far and wide until a late hour, seeking, amid the white lights and shadows of the populous city, that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observation can afford. (Poe, *Murders* 11)

The chaos that has entered the city with the increase of the crime has not yet corrupted the city as a whole, it always remains linked to the individual culprit and perishes the moment the culprit is unmasked and the detective re-establishes order. This stands in stark contrast to Hammett’s *Red Harvest*, where the contagious – or even poisonous – quality of Personville is reflected upon by the Op in the first sentences of the novel:

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 the city’s name. Later I heard men who could manage their r’s give it the same pronunciation. I still didn’t see anything in it but the meaningless sort of humor that used to make richardsnary the thieves’ word for dictionary. A few years later *I went to Personville and learned better*. (*Red Harvest* 3, emphasis added)

Personville is called Poisonville in the novel’s first sentence, and by chapter two, the Op himself will start to refer to the town by this moniker. At the time of the Op’s arrival, corruption has already spread and infected the whole town, including its police force. The Op does not only emphasize the town’s ugliness in the very first chapter of the novel, he links it to the town’s corrupt police force:

[I] went out to look at the city.
The city wasn’t pretty. Most of its builders had gone in for gaudiness. Maybe they had been successful at first. Since then the smelters whose brick stacks stuck up tall against a gloomy mountain to the south had yellow-smoked everything into uniform dinginess. The result was an ugly city of forty thousand people, set in an ugly notch between two ugly mountains that had been all dirtied up by mining. [...]
The first policeman I saw needed a shave. The second had a couple of buttons off his shabby uniform. The third stood [...] with a cigar in one corner of his mouth. After that I stopped checking them up. (*Red Harvest* 3-4)

The appearance and behaviour of the policemen are enough for the Op to classify and even judge them. Once Noonan, the chief of police, orchestrates an assassination attempt on the Op’s life, this initial judgement will prove to be

true. But the corruption in Personville goes deeper: (Big) Nick tries to shoot the Op (and pays for it with his life), the detectives Shepp and Vanaman steal jewellery, money and incriminating letters¹² from a crime scene, and corrupt policemen help Max Thaler and the Op to escape a police operation:

A uniformed copper held the back gate open, muttering nervously: "Hurry it up, boys, please." [...] [They] climbed into a black automobile that stood at the curb [...] the last I saw of it was its police department license plate vanishing around a corner. (*Red Harvest* 55-56)

Whereas Dupin did not trust the eyes of the police, "not trusting to *their* eyes, I examined with my own" (28), the Op does not trust them at all. It is important to mention that Dashiell Hammett described his characters – in this case the police – not through their thoughts, he described them through their actions (or the lack of them), a point that will be discussed in chapter 6. The Op's first evaluation of the city is expressed in the succeeding paragraphs: when asked about his opinion on Personville by Mrs. Willsson in chapter 1, the Op replies: "'I haven't seen enough of it to know.' That was a lie. I had. 'I got in only this afternoon.' Her shiny eyes stopped prying while she said: 'You'll find it a dreary place'" (*Red Harvest* 4).

Wolfe states that the "key difference between [the Op] and his British counterparts is that he does his reasoning in mean streets and police stations rather than in the laboratory, the country-house library, or the Duke's castle" (Wolfe, 25). And "mean streets" (Chandler 533) they are, providing "no values [the Op] could identify with" (Nyman 295). Urbanization is omnipresent, as is reflected in Hammett's choice of vocabulary. The grass in Personville is hedged¹³, with the exception of a short trip to the outskirts of Personville, trees in *Red Harvest* are always mentioned in combination with urban elements – "Our ride ended under a line of trees in a *dark street* not far from the *center of town* [...] she took me away from the *crowd*, back in the shade of some trees [...] Up the *street* a *black coupe* stood under some trees" (49; 133; 204, emphasis added) – or they are part of idiomatic phrases: "He can go climb trees for all I care [...] he could go climb trees or jump in lakes" (81; 133).

¹² (the Op later finds these letters on the corpse of Charles Proctor Dawn, who had intended to use them to blackmail Elihu Willsson).

¹³ "They brought me to a house set in a hedged grassplot on a corner" (*Red Harvest* 4).

The three times the word dog appears in the novel, it is linked to human beings or human behaviour: “Keep your dog on it [...] looked at me with eyes that were like a dog’s looking at a bone [...] you’ll have your city back, all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again” (137; 144; 203). No cats populate the city, the only rats that appear are humans turned rat: “I want a man to clean this pig-sty of a Poisonville for me, to smoke out the rats [...] I put my last thirty-five bucks in the world on that rat [...] That fellow’s a rat if there ever was one [...] They’re saying you turned rat” (42; 71; 98; 136).

Similarly, Hammett mentions two monkeys: Donald Willsson (10) and Max Thaler (81). Nyman (305) provides other examples for this dehumanization: Reno is “Yard’s pup” (*Red Harvest* 149) and the Op warns Dick Foley that Helen Albury is “crazy as a bedbug” (185). But Hammett did not only “[give back] murder to the kind of people that commit it for reasons” (Chandler 530), he also made them the only animals capable of it – unlike his predecessors Poe (in the form of an orang-utan in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”) and Doyle (e.g. the poisonous snake in “The Adventure of the Speckled Band”, a dog in *The Hound of Baskerville*), who confronted their readers with animal predators. Murder is clearly restricted to human beings in *Red Harvest*, as they are seemingly the only species that populates the city. As a consequence, Personville consists of streets, houses and roads through which the Op manoeuvres – and often ‘rides’ – in cars.

	Street	Road	House	Car
Number of times mentioned	116	57	98	163

Table 1

It is interesting to notice that Hammett chose a much more direct approach to describing the corrupt city Izzard in his earlier short story “Nightmare Town” (1924) compared to Personville:

It’s been terrible here! The town – I can’t get accustomed to it. It’s so bleak. No children play in the streets. The people are different from those I’ve known – cruder, more brutal. Even the houses – street after street of them without curtains in the windows, without flowers. No grass in the yards, no trees” (Hammett, *Nightmare* 22). Unlike Personville, Izzard is a relatively new city, “[i]t’s only three years old” (Hammett, *Nightmare* 22).

What will be perceived as an intrinsic part of life in Personville has still to be highlighted here, it has to be directly addressed.

2.4.1.2. MY DEAR WATSON – THE DETECTIVE DUO

Both Poe's unnamed narrator in the three Dupin stories and Doyle's Watson act as chroniclers of the adventures of their respective detectives, and they play important roles in them. There is nothing like a detective duo in *Red Harvest*, and few of Hammett's contemporaries chose to include a detective 'sidekick' in their stories. Before addressing *Red Harvest*, it might be worth mentioning two other novels of Hammett: *The Maltese Falcon*, which (theoretically) features Sam Spade's partner Miles Archer, and *The Thin Man*, describing the adventure of Nick Charles and his wife Nora. It is problematic to see latter as a part of the hard-boiled canon, as Hammett introduced a lightness and humour in his last novel that stands in contrast to the majority of what he wrote before. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Sam Spade's partner Miles Archer (the agency is called "Spade & Archer") is murdered shortly after briefly appearing in the very first chapter of the novel (and consecutively the agency is renamed to "Samuel Spade").

In the second half of *Red Harvest*, as things start to turn bad for the Op, he is forced to call his agency for help, and two colleagues are sent to aid him: the taciturn Dick Foley and Mickey Linehan, "a big slob with sagging shoulders and a shapeless body that seemed to be coming apart at all its joints" (*Red Harvest* 116). However when one of them starts to doubt the innocence of the Op in a murder case, the Op sends him home: "[Dick Foley] seemed to think I'd killed Dinah Brand. He was getting on my nerves with it" (*Red Harvest* 205). Although both of them help the Op to orchestrate the chaos that he is creating in the city, they only play menial roles and serve little to develop the plot. As Thompson (63) argues, they do however allow Hammett to reveal the Op's moral discrepancy while keeping true to his narrative style.

2.4.1.3. THE NARRATIVE STANCE

Although their stories are narrated by (and filtered through) the companions of the detectives, Moore (14) identifies Poe's and Doyle's use of the first person narrative as setting the standard for the hard-boiled writers, where the detectives are at the story's centre and little focus is given to the surrounding characters. Neither Poe's nor Doyle's narrators are omniscient, and although they tell their stories in the past tense, the fact that they are in the middle of the

action at the time when events unfold “provides a dramatic tension tempered by the shaping of the story after the events” (14). Furthermore, Moore claims that

the typical first-person narration by the [hard-boiled] detective admits the reader to greater intimacy even while one remains aware of the detective's corresponding control. [...] the detective [...] often suppresses his past life unless it is relevant to the story. Usually these bits of personal history appear in the most casual manner, inserted in passing even if connected to the plot. (15)

Yet whether this truly applies to the Continental Op stands to question, as Hammett does not provide insight into the Op's motivation (especially in *Red Harvest*) directly via the Op's narration, but via his actions and, on a more subtle level, the attributes he contributes to other people. What soon becomes obvious is that the Op's internal state of mind can never be derived "by any direct narration of his feelings" (Breu, *Masculinities* 88) – as this kind of narration is non-existent in *Red Harvest*. Thompson would disagree here, as he argues that the Op's dreams in *Red Harvest* give “give us a momentary glimpse into his own horrified soul” (63), expressing his impotency and his perceived alienation from humanity. And although the Op seems to be a reliable narrator at first, Breu (*Masculinities* 88) argues he is not. Regarding the Op's conversation during his interrogation of Helen Albury – only shortly after he has woken up next to the murdered Dinah Brand – Breu points out that it is highly questionable whether it is Helen Albury or the Op who is negatively affected by panic and fear:

"I'd like to come in and talk to you a few minutes," going in as I spoke, closing the door behind me.
She didn't say anything. She went up the steps in front of me, her head twisted around so she could watch me with her *scary eyes*. [...] The girl stood in the center of the floor, her hands still to her mouth. I wasted time and words trying to convince her that I was *harmless*. It was no good. Everything I said seemed to increase her *panic*. It was a *damned nuisance*. I quit trying, and got down to business. (*Red Harvest* 194, emphasis added)

Although the previous paragraph depicts the Op as the "hard-nosed, clear-headed detective" (Breu, *Masculinities* 79) the reader is familiar with, Breu argues that the Op is all but reliable in this situation. The “panic” the Op sees in Helen Albury resembles his own desperate attempt to find a suspect other than himself for Dinah Brand's murder, and “crazy” is the very characteristic that Dinah attributes to the Op during their last conversation.

2.4.1.4. THE LOCUS OF VIOLENCE

As pointed out in chapter 2.3., most of the stories of Sherlock Holmes (but not all of them, as “The Crooked Man” and “The Yellow Face” show) feature a crime. Furthermore, Doyle and his successors of the Golden Age exhibit a tendency to have the crime(s) committed by only one individual, disrupting society and order by his (or rarely her) criminal actions. Van Dine incorporated both of these trends into his rules:

7. There simply *must* be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. *No lesser crime than murder will suffice.* [...]
12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. (Van Dine, emphasis added)

Moore noted a very different trend in Hammett’s writing: “The stories involving Hammett’s Continental Op expand from individual violence to those in which criminal gangs invade and loot towns” (19). In *Red Harvest* this invasion has already happened long before the Op arrives in town:

Old Elihu hired gunmen, strike-breakers, national guardsmen and even parts of the regular army, to [break the strike]. When the last skull had been cracked, the last rib kicked in, organized labor in Personville was a used firecracker.

But, said Bill Quint, old Elihu didn’t know his Italian history. He won the strike, but he lost his hold on the city and the state. To beat the miners he had to let his hired thugs run wild. When the fight was over he couldn’t get rid of them. He had given his city to them and he wasn’t strong enough to take it away from them. Personville looked good to them and they took it over. They had won his strike for him and they took the city for their spoils. (*Red Harvest* 9)

This excess of criminals leads to an – even for the hard-boiled genre – unusually high body count (at least 28 people die in *Red Harvest*, as shown in table 6 in chapter 3.4.). However, this “large-scale action [...] [reaches] a dead end in the early hard-boiled detective novel” (Moore 19), hard-boiled authors would soon learn to shun it, making *Red Harvest* an exceptional example of the hard-boiled genre. Here, violence is omnipresent due to this sheer amount of murder, turning every inhabitant of Personville into a potential suspect, not distinguishing between gender, age or profession. It is also important to point out that whereas Holmes usually enters the crime-scene *after* violence happens (or, as the showdown between Holmes and Moriarty in “The Adventure of the Final Problem” and “The Adventure of the Empty House” exemplifies, in the

absence of the narrator), the hard-boiled writers are prone to show “violence in progress” (Moore 18).

2.4.1.5. THE ROLE OF REASON AND ANALYSIS

The anonymous narrator in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” states in the opening paragraph of the story that “[a]s the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which disentangles” (Poe, *Murders* 7). This suggests a clear division of intellectual and physical feats, something that is mirrored in the battle between Dupin’s reason and the ape’s inhuman strength. And indeed, Poe’s Dupin exclusively makes use of his observational techniques and his intellect to solve the crimes he faces. Still, both Dupin and the narrator are proficient in the use of guns, Dupin even uses pistols to intimidate the stray orang-utan’s owner,

“Here are pistols; and *we both know how to use them* when occasion demands their use.” [...] “Be ready,” said Dupin, “with your pistols, but neither use them nor show them until at a signal from myself.” [...] He then drew a pistol from his bosom and placed it, without the least flurry, upon the table. (Poe, *Murders* 25, 37, 38, emphasis added)

Contrasting to this, Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, who is very much capable of forceful and even violent action, occasionally resorts to violence. One example of violence in progress, although narrated by Holmes to Watson only much later (and in a different story) than it actually happened, can be found in the interrelated stories “The Adventure of the Final Problem” and “The Adventure of the Empty House”:

[Moriarty] knew that his own game was up, and was only anxious to revenge himself upon me. We tottered together upon the brink of the fall. I have some knowledge, however, of baritsu, or the Japanese system of wrestling, which has *more than once* been very useful to me. I slipped through his grip, and he with a horrible scream kicked madly for a few seconds, and clawed the air with both his hands. But for all his efforts he could not get his balance, and over he went. (Doyle, *Return* 9, emphasis added)

Holmes narrates a more directly depicted (yet less fatal) instance of violence in “The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist”, where he describes a bar fight to Watson that he has just been in. Similar to the previous example, the scene of

violence happened in the absence of Watson, and again, Holmes stresses the fact that he is an experienced fighter:

“I get so little active exercise that it is always a treat,” said he. “You are aware that I have some proficiency in the good old British sport of boxing. Occasionally, it is of service, to-day, for example, I should have come to very ignominious grief without it. [...] He ended a string of abuse by a vicious backhander, which I failed to entirely avoid. The next few minutes were delicious. It was a straight left against a slogging ruffian. I emerged as you see me. Mr. Woodley went home in a cart.” (Doyle, *Return* 111)

Holmes has trained himself to withstand violence, which, although a minor part of his professional life, is not part of his everyday life. Quite contrary to this, violence can often be seen as one of the hard-boiled detectives' main means of making an advance in their investigations. Still, the role of reason and analysis must not be neglected in the hard-boiled genre.

Although somewhat brutish and always balancing on the edge of *going blood-simple*, the Continental Op “is sent out on cases by the Old Man of the Continental Detective Agency because of his ability to question extensively, observe closely, and reason his way through the lies and deceits he encounters [...] [Like Dupin and Holmes, he] must see the pattern and then close the case” (Moore 21).

In addition to applying force, the Op is able to gather information concerning the crimes via interrogation, dialogue and the collection of clues. He “plan[s] deaths” (*Red Harvest* 157) and is able to foresee the outcome of his (consciously chaotic) scheming (as is exemplified in the fixed boxing match he sabotages). But, not unlike his predecessors, the Op always remains a puzzle-solver, although this quality is more prominent in the short stories and his second novel, *The Dain Curse*, where we “recognize that the Op’s skill lies not so much in acting as in perceiving (Thompson 196). When confronted with the chaotic core of Personville, he is forced to resort to new methods:

“Plans are all right sometimes,” I said. “And sometimes just stirring things up is all right—if you're tough enough to survive, and keep your eyes open so you'll see what you want when it comes to the top.” (*Red Harvest* 85)

It is not without irony, that stirring things up is what costs Donald Willsson, the first victim of *Red Harvest*, his life, and this underlines the danger of the Op’s task: “Mr. Elihu told him to stop stirring things up, but he wouldn't stop” (*Red Harvest* 8). By stirring things up, by feeding the chaos that rules Personville with

even more chaos, the Op is able to gather clues thanks to his ability to observe and question anything and anyone remotely associated with the crime, receiving his information "from police detectives, from hired informants, from taxi drivers and railroad employees" (Moss 33).

Unlike Donald Willsson, the Op survives Personville thanks to his immense amount of masculinity, his (almost inhuman) toughness and his ability to "[adapt] venerable investigative concepts to modern police methods" (Moss 33) – but also because he follows a basic code that will be discussed in chapter 4.2.

This code forces him to choose his battles wisely and to act discreetly, he never allows himself to lose sight of what "comes to the top" (*Red Harvest* 85). He is always informed about what happens in Personville and he knows what motivates his antagonists. The Op's capacity for violence is not a substitute for reason and analysis, the two forces co-exist. The former, however, is more often spotlighted by Hammett.

2.5. FURTHER SIMILARITIES

Whereas the explosion of crime in Hammett's first novel marks a departure from his predecessors, the influence that writers such as Doyle and Poe, but also Agatha Christie and Van Dine, had on Hammett's short stories is obvious. Hammett was familiar with Van Dine's fiction, and he wrote a review of Van Dine's *The Benson Murder Case* for the *Saturday Review of Literature*¹⁴. In his review, "Dashiell Hammett noted that in reality the gun would have knocked the victim halfway across the room, and he thought the major clue was that someone had lifted him back into the chair. But such mundane actuality is not the business of a Van Dine text" (Knight 83). Other 'actualities', however, were the business of both Hammett and his fellow writers: as Wolfe (25-26) points out, the solution of Hammett's "In the Morgue" (1923) comes as unexpected as in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", and the Op's final comment in "Fly Paper", "That's the only total that what we've got will add up to" (70), "has a logical irrefutability worthy of Sherlock Holmes" (Wolfe 26).

Yet, Hammett's short story "The Tenth Clew" reads like an outright mockery of the archetypical detective story and the aforementioned 'only total'.

¹⁴ Qtd. in Knight (83).

Here, Hammett shows the Op's refusal of Holmes' "underlying faith that all signs in a bounded space must be relatable" (Horsley, *Crime Fiction* 27). When the Op and the police find nine clues at a crime scene, among them a threatening letter, a jewel case, a bunch of yellow hair, and "the fact that the dead man's shoe and collar buttons were carried away" (Hammett, *Tenth Claw* 23), the Op, instead of following the clues, follows a tenth clue that discredits all the other clues:

That's our tenth claw – the one we're going to follow from now on. [...] From now on I'm considering all those nine lovely clues as nine bum steers. And I'm going just exactly contrary to them. I'm looking for a man whose name isn't Emil Bonfils, and whose initials aren't either E or B; who isn't French, and who wasn't in Paris in 1902. [...] A man who didn't kill Gantvoort to recover anything that could have been hidden in a shoe or on a collar button. (Hammett, *Tenth Claw* 23-24)

He recognizes that one of them, a list with names, has been forged and consequently dismisses the other eight clues, doubting that their overabundant amount will help him find the culprit. This reads like an antithesis to Holmes' famous statement: "How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth?" (Doyle, *Sign* 51)

3. STORY AND DISCOURSE

Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* describes a city in – and an age of – unrest, and although the novel follows a straight plot (or rather, as discussed below, a straight sequence of kernels), the novel's many characters and its fast pace can easily confuse the reader. At least 28 people die in *Red Harvest*, although this number seems to be open to discussion: according to Layman (85), 'only' 24 people are killed in *Red Harvest*¹⁵. And although he does not specify which 24 characters these are, this number is wrong, as shown in table 6 in chapter 3.4.

3.1. NARRATIVE THEORY

The introductory part of this chapter follows Chatman's *Story and Discourse* and will briefly discuss the levels of story and discourse. Structuralism argues that a narrative consists of two parts: the story, which includes the content or chain of

¹⁵ Layman does not specify who these 24 characters are.

events (actions, happenings) and existents (characters, items of setting), and discourse, “the means by which the content is communicated” (Chatman 19). The figure below exemplifies this:

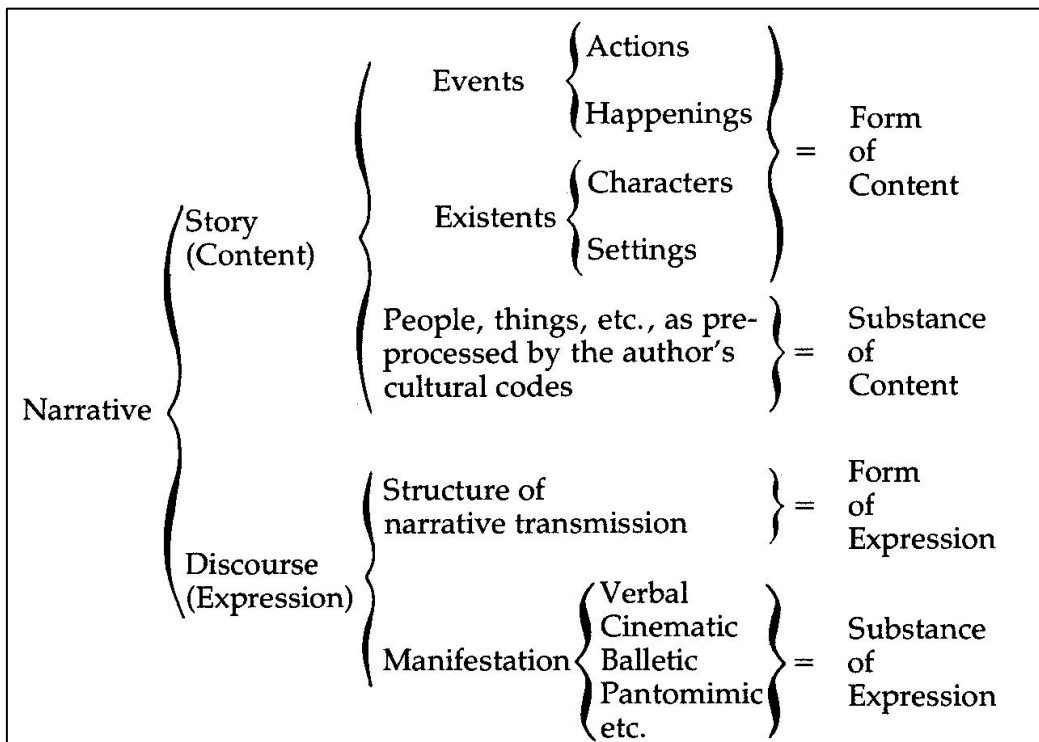


Figure 1

Regarding the story level, Chatman distinguishes between events, which are bound to the dimension of time, and existents, part of the dimension of space. Events, which constitute a narrative's plot, can either be actions, “change[s] of state brought about by an agent or one that affects a patient” (Chatman 44) or happenings, “predication[s] of which the character or other focused existent is narrative object” (ibid. 45). The term plot will be used in this paper as the causal or logical structure that connects events. The events can be classified into kernels and satellites. Kernels are necessary for the plot as they “propel the narrative forward” (Wulff 2) and cannot be deleted without destroying the narrative, satellites are minor events that have little to no impact on the plot but may prepare the way for kernels and can be part of foreshadowing.

The settings and characters of a narrative – the flat and round characters or “‘people’ captured somehow between the covers of books” (Chatman 108) – are its existents.

The question of how and in what order a narrative is told belongs to the field of discourse. Other features that belong to discourse are the author's style and his choice of vocabulary and syntax.

3.2. HAMMETT'S STYLE

Marling identifies Hammett's style as "deft but muscular [...] characterized by short, simple, largely Anglo-Saxon words. In a typical story, his vocabulary is 77 percent monosyllabic and only 2 percent non-Anglo-Saxon". Raymond Chandler expressed his admiration for Hammett's style in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder":

Hammett's style at its worst was as formalized as a page of Marius the Epicurean¹⁶; at its best it could say almost anything. I believe this style, which does not belong to Hammett or to anybody, but is the American language (and not even exclusively that any more), can say things he did not know how to say, or feel the need of saying. (530)

This runs in line with Layman's observation that Hammett presented a "realistic depiction of a private detective's work" (9). Marling (116) states that the sentences (not clauses) of Hammett's early work average thirteen words per sentence, which does not seem to apply to *Red Harvest*: with the notable exception of the Op's recounting of his dream, the average sentence length of the novel is 10.1 words per sentence, as the table below shows:

	<i>Red Harvest</i>	First Full Page (4)	The Dream (163)	Shooting (196-197)
Words	60874	332	370	625
Full Stops	4878	28	24	44
Question Marks	643	4	0	4
Colons	390	1	0	5
Exclamation Marks	85	0	0	1
Semicolons	24	0	0	0
Commas	3220	6	25	43
Average Sentence Length	10.112	10.061	15.417	11.58

Table 2

The numbers in each column show the amount of full stops, question marks, colons, exclamation marks and semicolons, the bars in the background show their relative proportions. Commas (direct speech that is initiated by commas) have not been taken into consideration regarding the average sentence length. The bottom row compares the average sentence length of four representative

¹⁶ A historical novel by Walter Pater, published in 1885.

parts of the novel with each other, and it aims to exemplify how strictly Hammett kept to his sparse style.

Looking from a wider perspective, there seems to be an interesting trend of reduction of the average sentence length from Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" – where sentences average 16.5 words – to Doyle's "Silver Blaze", with 14.1 words per sentence, and Hammett's *Red Harvest*. On the other hand, a proportionate increase of question marks is displayed.

	"The Murders in the Rue Morgue"	"Silver Blaze"	<i>Red Harvest</i>
Words	13963	9574	60874
Full Stops	721	561	4878
Question Marks	18	67	643
Colons	8	0	390
Exclamation Marks	10	36	85
Semicolons	88	14	24
Commas	1081	645	3220
Average Sentence Length	16.524	14.121	10.112

Table 3

Marling (116) attributes Hammett's relatively short sentences to the format of the pulp magazine, where short "sentences were not only easy to read but also formed their own tiny paragraphs, leaving white space, as in art nouveau, to indicate a quickened action" and he points out that Hammett's prose very often features the first-person pronoun and eschews the passive voice and passive verbs. The verbs are often simple and "run as high as 20 percent of the word count" (117), as is exemplified in the following excerpt:

We *crossed* an alley, *were beckoned* through another gate by a big man in brown, *passed* through a house, out into the next street, and *climbed* into a black automobile that *stood* at the curb. [...]

I *walked* around a few blocks until I *came* to an unlighted electric sign that said *Hotel Crawford*, *climbed* a flight of steps to the second-floor office, *registered*, *left* a call for ten o'clock, *was shown* into a shabby room, *moved* some of the Scotch from my flask to my stomach, and *took* old Elihu's ten-thousand-dollar check and my gun to bed with me. (*Red Harvest* 56-57, emphasis added)

Hammett's diction strictly avoids superfluous and redundant information. *The New York Times* called his prose "clean and entirely unique." This is taken to the extreme by Dick Foley, the Op's quiet colleague who "saved all the words he could" (*Red Harvest* 116). Foley reduces language to the limit, avoiding verbs, pronouns and adjectives when possible. He often uses slang, as in "[s]he showed right away. To 310 Green Street. Full of *coppers*. *Mouthpiece* named

Dawn killed. Police took her to the Hall” (*Red Harvest* 186, emphasis added) and talks in code: “Spot two. Out three-thirty, office to Willsson’s. Mickey. Five. Home. Busy. Kept plant. Off three, seven. Nothing yet” (*Red Harvest* 142). The Op provides a key to this code and decrypts it for the reader:

That was supposed to inform me that he had picked up Lew Yard at two the previous afternoon; had shadowed him to Willsson’s at three-thirty, where Mickey had tailed Pete; had followed Yard away at five, to his residence; had seen people going in and out of the house, but had not shadowed any of them; had watched the house until three this morning, and had returned to the job at seven; and since then had seen nobody go in or out. (*Red Harvest* 142)

It seems as if it took Hammett some time to develop this short, clear-cut style. Dick Foley appears in Hammett’s earlier stories: in “House Dick”, he is introduced as “the Agency’s shadow specialist” (47), and his diction is far more accessible than in *Red Harvest*:

Picked him up when he got his mail yesterday afternoon. Got another letter besides yours. Got an apartment on Van Ness Avenue. Took it the day after the killing, under the name of B. T. Quinn. Packing a gun under his left arm – there’s that sort of a bulge there. Just went home to bed. Been visiting all the dives in North Beach. (Hammett, *House* 48)

The clean style of Hammett’s later works has been interpreted as expressing the speed of his age, which is further increased by skilful transitions, elisions, and periodic sentences, compressing space and time (Marling 117). Marling points out that “[i]f the Op seeks information from someone windy or inarticulate, he summarizes” (117). The following paragraph exemplifies this: “the explanation was profane and lengthy and given to me in a loud and blustering voice. The substance of it was that [...]” (43). This technique is repeated twice in the first dialogue that takes place between Dinah Brand and the Op:

The girl and I wrangled over the money question while we had more drinks. I kept trying to keep the conversation on Thaler and Willsson. She kept switching it to the money she deserved. It went on that way until the gin bottle was empty. My watch said one-fifteen. [...] She went on that way for five minutes, telling me in detail just which and what sort of a girl she was, and always had been, and why. I yes-yes’d her until [...] (*Red Harvest* 35-37)

3.3. A REAL-LIFE MODEL FOR PERSONVILLE

Regarding the spatial setting of the novel, it is worth mentioning that there has been an on-going discussion regarding the real-life model for the city: whereas Layman (73) sees Butte as a model for Personville, Marling (108) states that the purely fictional city of the Montana town Personville, although it “had only some forty thousand” (*Red Harvest* 70), is not based on Butte (referred to in the first sentence of the novel and the only town in Montana at that time that was of the same size), but rather on the 1920s San Francisco: “[how] else could frontier Personville have streetcars that run at night, telephones, or a city hall where crowds loiter waiting to see famous criminals” (108). Nevertheless, the relatively small size of Personville is remarkable and of major importance to the story's plot. It makes it impossible for anybody to hide for long in Personville, a convenient circumstance with regards to the novel's relatively fast pace.

Although Butte may not have been the model for Personville, Layman (85) points out that the *plot* of the novel is loosely based on Butte's history and its labour disputes between 1917 and 1920 that ended in a violent strikebreaking. And indeed, the story is set shortly after an eight-month strike that took place in 1921, and it was published in a year that saw 921 strikes that involved more than 288,000 workers (Heise 506). Furthermore, Hammett's first wife, Josephine Dolan, lived in Butte during the time of the strikebreaking, working at the St. James Hospital.

Hammett's use of language has been interpreted as trying to express what is ‘real’, and so has his depiction of a city in the early 1920's: Joseph Shaw, the editor of *Black Mask* magazine, promoted the fourth part of the serialization of *Red Harvest* with the following words:

We are hearing about this “Poisonville” series from all over the country. Readers have identified “Poisonville” in half a dozen different sections of the United States. That is the great point about Mr. Hammett's story. It is real, true to life; you seem to recognize the characters as people recognize the town. (qtd. in Layman 24)

3.4. STRUCTURE AND SERIALIZATION

An earlier draft of *Red Harvest* was originally serialized in four parts in *Black Mask* magazine before Hammett revised it and published it as his first full length novel. The publication history of the short stories is shown in the table below:

Title of Serialization	Deaths	Plot	Pages
"The Cleansing of Poisonville" (1927)	3	Donald Willsson is killed, the Op finds out that the murderer is Albury	4 - 64
"Crime Wanted - Male or Female" (1927)	3	The Op decides to take revenge; he fixes the prizefight (85)	65 - 115
"Dynamite" (1928)	10	The peace conference takes place, the killing that the Op orchestrated starts	116 - 152
"The 19th Murder" (1928)	10	Dinah Brand is killed next to the pass-out Op who Op "cleans" Personville (203)	153 - 216

Table 4

Interestingly enough, each of the four serializations follows a different, yet connected plot-line. Furthermore, some readers might have expected the series to stop after the first serialization: at the end of this "first, complete episode in a series" (Shaw qtd. in Layman 24) a dénouement takes place: the murderer of the first victim is unmasked and arrested by the Op. The other two deaths of "The Cleansing of Poisonville" do not need further investigation: the "proowler" (*Red Harvest* 46) Yakima Shorty is shot by Elihu Willsson for breaking into his house (with the possible intention to assassinate him), and the Op shoots (Big) Nick when Noonan tries to have him killed. Even the title of the episode, "The Cleansing of Poisonville", suggests a closure.

Red Harvest was published in 1929 as a novel that consists of 25 chapters that average 8 pages. The novel's excess of murder marks a departure from the classical detective story, in which the detective was rarely confronted with more than one crime (let alone death) per story. Murder and death are omnipresent in the novel, occurring in 15 chapters of the novel:

Chapter	Page	Chapter Length	Deaths
Chapter 1 - A Woman in Green And a Man in Gray	3		9
Chapter 2 - The Czar of Poisonville	12		9
Chapter 3 - Dinah Brand	21		10
Chapter 4 - Hurricane Street	31		10
Chapter 5 - Old Elihu Talks Sense	41		8
Chapter 6 - Whisper's Joint	49		8
Chapter 7 - That's Why Sewed You Up	57		8
Chapter 8 - A Tip on Kid Cooper	65		5
Chapter 9 - A Black Knife	70		9
Chapter 10 - Crime Wanted—Male or Female	79		7
Chapter 11 - The Swell Spoon	86		8
Chapter 12 - A New Deal	94		8
Chapter 13 - -\$200.10-	102		7
Chapter 14 - Max	109		7
Chapter 15 - Cedar Hill Inn	116		9
Chapter 16 - Exit Jerry	125		6
Chapter 17 - Reno	131		10
Chapter 18 - Painter Street	141		5
Chapter 19 - The Peace Conference	146		7
Chapter 20 - Laudanum	153		9
Chapter 21 - The Seventeenth Murder	162		7
Chapter 22 - The Ice Pick	169		11
Chapter 23 - Mr. Charles Proctor Dawn	180		8
Chapter 24 - Wanted	188		7
Chapter 25 - Whiskeytown	195		5
Chapter 26 - Blackmail	200		8
Chapter 27 - Warehouses	208		9
		Average Length: 8	

Table 5

The 28 (or more) murders do not make it easy for the reader to keep track of them. Twice the Op provides the reader with summarizations of who has been killed in the novel:

There's been what? A dozen and a half murders since I've been here. Donald Willsson; Ike Bush; the four wops and the dick at Cedar Hill; Jerry; Lew Yard; Dutch Jake, Blackie Whalen and Put Collings at the Silver Arrow; Big Nick, the copper I potted; the blond kid Whisper dropped here; Yakima Shorty, old Elihu's prowler; and now Noonan. That's sixteen of them in less than a week, and more coming up. (*Red Harvest* 154)

Yard died Tuesday morning, Noonan the same night, Whisper Wednesday morning, and the Finn a little while ago. (*Red Harvest* 202)

Note that these lists are far from complete, and one of them is inaccurate as well: the Op wrongly assumes that Whisper is dead at this point in the novel. A detailed table that lists everyone who is directly involved in a death is provided below. This table should help the reader to understand the complex action of the novel, characters in red lettering die in *Red Harvest*:

Name	Killed by	Kill(s)
Al Kennedy "Ike Bush"	78: killed by knife-thrower in box-fight 99: Tony Agosti threw the knife	
Another man (of Reno's)	196: shot by Pete's men	
Big Nick	52: shot by the Op 54: made obvious that he's dead	
Blackie Whalen, Put Collings, Dutch Jake Wahl	144: shot at the Silver Arrow	
Blond Kid	105: shot by Whisper	
Bob MacSwain		112: Tim Noonan
Charles Proctor Dawn	182: found dead by Op 214 the Op hints that it was O'Marra	
Dan Rolff	175: killed by Whisper	112: stabs, but doesn't kill, Whisper
Dinah Brand	164: stabbed next to the sleeping Op 175: suggested it was Whisper 212: revealed that it was Reno	
Donald Willsson	6: killed 57: by Robert Albury	
Elihu Willsson		41: Yakima Shorty
Fat	199: shot by Police or Pete's police-force	
Gray-mustached detective	121: shot by 4 of Pete's men	
Hank O'Marra	196: shot by Pete men	182: he probably killed Charles Proctor Dawn
Jerry Hooper	125: it is claimed that he was shot by the bank watchman 150: actually shot by Reno's men during the robbery	
Lew Yard	143: shot, implied it was Reno 149: suspicion confirmed by the Op	
More of Pete's men	198: by Reno (throws a bomb)	
Noonan (John)	153: shot, implied that it was Whisper 175: Ted Wright confirms that it was Whisper	
Pete the Finn	197: shot by Reno	
Pete's Men	123: 4 shot by the police 192: 1 shot by Reno's Men	121: Gray-mustached detective 196: Hank O'Marra

		199: Fat
Reno Oliver Starkey	212: shot by Whisper 216: confirmed dead	143: Lew Yard 164: Dinah Brand 197: Pete the Finn 198: more of Pete's men 175: Whisper
Reno's men		125: Jerry Hooper; 144: Blackie Whalen, Put Collings, Dutch Jake Wahl 196: one of Pete's men
Robert Albury		6: Donald Willsson
The Op		52: Big Nick
The Police		123: 4 of Pete's men
Tim Noonan	86: his death is mentioned 112: the Op finds out that the killer is MacSwain	
Tony Agosty		78: Al Kennedy "Ike Bush"
Whisper Max Thaler	175: Ted Wright says Dan Rolff killed Whisper (who killed Rolff) and that Whisper killed Dinah 212: stabbed by Rolff, choked by Reno	105: Blond Kid 175: Dan Rolff 153: Noonan 212: Reno
Yakima Shorty	41: shot by Elihu Willsson	

Table 6

It is worth to mention that only few of the novel's characters are not on that list, and most of these characters only play minor roles. These include Dick Foley and Mickey Linehan, the Op's colleagues; the corrupt detectives Shepp and Vanaman; Helen Albury, the younger sister of Robert Albury; and Mrs. Willsson, the widow of Donald Willsson.

Of the characters that kill someone and survive, Bob MacSwain makes a confession at the end of the novel, and Robert Albury and Tony Agosty are arrested by the police (although the latter escapes prison, never to be heard of in *Red Harvest* again). The Op and Elihu Willsson are the only characters that kill somebody and are not either killed or arrested.

3.5. TIME IN *RED HARVEST*

As mentioned, *Red Harvest* is set shortly after a strike in 1921. The novel focuses on the 10 days that the Op spends in Personville, starting with his

arrival in Personville on the opening page and ending when he leaves the city on the penultimate page of the novel and flees to Ogden, where Mickey Linehan, after six nights, tells him that he “was no longer officially a criminal” (215).

The transition from one day to the next happens mostly between the end of a chapter and the beginning of the succeeding chapter, but not always. The Op works during day and night, and although he sometimes provides the reader with information on what time of the day it is, he rarely mentions whether it is morning or evening (e.g.: “It was quite a bit after six when I got ready to leave [...] It was nearly eight o’clock [...] It was nearly seven o’clock [...]” *Red Harvest* 91; 110; 130). The more time passes by, the more does this lack of a daily routine tire the Op. To counter this, he takes tubs of cold water (*Red Harvest* 91; 102) or drinks alcohol:

I would rather have been cold sober, but I wasn’t. If the night held more work for me I didn’t want to go to it with alcohol dying in me. The snifter revived me a lot. I poured more of the King George into a flask, pocketed it, and went down to the taxi. (*Red Harvest* 41)

As table 7 in chapter 6.5. shows, the chronology of *Red Harvest* is strictly linear, with the exception of one anachronous instance: Dinah Brand’s three-page narration of Tim Noonan’s death (*Red Harvest* 86-89) in the summer before. However, this cannot be considered to be a flashback, as Dinah is telling the story to the Op, with whom the narrative stays throughout the novel.

It is worth pointing out that on nine of the ten days at least one death occurs. Of all the days the Op spends in Personville, the second day is the only day on which he is not confronted with shootings, bombings or other instances of physical violence.

4. GOING BLOOD-SIMPLE LIKE THE NATIVES

Before addressing the portrayal of the Op and Personville’s population in *Red Harvest*, a short introduction to identification and sympathy theories will be provided. Why do we feel suspense for characters, when we are aware that they are purely fictional? The two short stories “House Dick” and “Nightmare Town” proved extremely helpful to the author for highlighting the way in which

Hammett treats the topics of mystery, suspense and social alienation, and will be thus addressed in this chapter.

4.1. READER IDENTIFICATION AND SYMPATHY

In their article “Development of Story Liking: Character identification, Suspense, and outcome Resolution”, Brewer and Jose (911) propose a ‘model of story liking’ that predicts that increased identification leads to a greater experience of suspense. Their results show a direct correlation between similarity to character and reader identification, as well as between reader identification and the experience of suspense: the more the reader identifies with the character of a story, the more suspense he or she experiences.

Brewer (109) claims that an abstract plot summary of a novel does not suffice to evoke an emotional response in the reader, and that the readers tend to identify or sympathise with the protagonists of a narrative. A problem that was already addressed by Carroll and Zillmann with regards to the identification theory is that “the reader’s affective state is frequently quite different from that of the character” (Brewer 109).

To clarify some of his points, Brewer (112-113) provides an example of a scene in which three men enter a room in which a bomb is put by another man. For reasons that will become apparent in a later chapter of this thesis, a slightly different scenario is proposed:

1. Man A sits at a table, with his hands below the table. He is hiding a gun.
2. Woman A and Man B enter the room.
3. They talk and drink.
4. Man A shoots Man B.

In the scenario provided above, a reader would know that Man A is in possession of a gun and the reader might fear for the life of Man B. However, according to the identification theory, if the reader truly identified with Man B (who does not know about the gun), the reader would not be allowed to feel suspense. Carroll also criticises the identification theory, as “most often characters and spectators are cognitively and emotionally too unlike to warrant any presumption of identity” (80).

The sympathy theory provides a solution for the abovementioned conflict: Brewer (109-110) argues that if we hypothesise that a reader feels the same

emotions for a fictional character that he would feel for a real character in similar circumstances, a reader might be engrossed in spite of a fictional character's ignorance – the reader feels suspense although Man A is unaware of Man B's concealed gun.

4.2. THE CONTINENTAL OP – STRANGER IN A STRANGE TOWN

The following chapters will discuss whether the reader can sympathise or even identify with the Continental Op, and how and in what way he is portrayed. A passage in the short story "The Scorched Face" shows the Op's concern about ethics and the outcome of his investigation: "It's a couple of dead ones, and a flock of live ones, who certainly got mixed up with Hador of their own accords, but who don't stop being human beings on that account" (Hammett, *Scorched* 112).

For the Op, the end does not necessarily justify the means, and, with regards to the quote provided above, Wolfe states that "[s]ometimes the Op thinks more about ethics than about technique. He will try to salvage and protect what is best in people rather than punishing them for their mistakes" (25). Contrary to this, Nyman cites Glover, who argues that in *Red Harvest* "the Op does not really think about other people as human beings since he suppresses his emotions beneath his professional role" (Nyman 191). But is this really the case? After approaching Albury for the murder of Donald Willsson, the Op "apologize[s] for the village cut-up stuff [he] had put in the early part of the shake-down" (*Red Harvest* 62). He tries to act sympathetic to the murderer, but he lacks the words, he "couldn't find anything to say except something meaningless" (*Red Harvest* 62).

Still, the Op is overwhelmed by the lack of ethics he is confronted with, and he soon realizes that he has to adapt to these circumstances. He is forced to "do what he can when he can":

If it works out the way I want it to, I won't have to report all the distressing details [...] It's right enough for the Agency to have rules and regulations, but when you're out on a job you've got to do it the best way you can. And anybody that brings any ethics to Poisonville is going to get them all rusty. A report is no place for the dirty details, anyway, and I don't want you birds to send any writing back to San Francisco without letting me see it first. [...] You'll have to play it the way I've been playing—do what you can when you can. (*Red Harvest* 52)

Throughout the novel, the Op is in a moral dilemma. But who is this man, who neither shrinks from violence nor from manipulation? Not only does the Op hide his identity from most of the people he meets, he hides it from the reader. We never find out how he is addressed by the majority of the inhabitants of Personville, what they call him:

I dug out my card case and ran through the collection of credentials I had picked up here and there by one means or another. The red card was the one I wanted. It identified me as Henry F. Neill, A. B. seaman, member in good standing of the Industrial Workers of the World. There wasn't a word of truth in it. (*Red Harvest* 3)

The Op consciously chooses this card after he introduces himself to Bill Quint, whom he recognizes among a crowd of bystanders as a “chief muckademuck of the I.W.W” (*Red Harvest* 7) because of a red tie he is wearing. However, when Quint shows suspicions, the Op plays him:

“What brought you in here, if you’re a sailor?” he asked casually.
 “Where’d you get that idea?”
 “There’s the card.”
 “I got another that proves I’m a timber beast,” I said. “If you want me to be a miner I’ll get one for that tomorrow.” (*Red Harvest* 7-8)

In the age of Theory of Relativity Identity and Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, the Op does not treat identity as a stable concept. Later, the Op will give MacSwain “a name, something like Hunter or Hunt or Huntington” (*Red Harvest* 71). It seems as if he is able to adopt whatever identity he is in need of. In a town where names are important and nicknames prominent, the Op’s choice for anonymity stands out. He seems to be the only one who sees through the “homophonic confusion” of *MacS*– and *Max*, and this allows him to solve the mystery of Tim Noonan’ death:

He didn’t say *Whisper*. I’ve heard women call Thaler *Max*, but I’ve never heard a man here call him anything but *Whisper*. Tim didn’t say *Max*. He said *MacS*–the first part of *MacSwain*–and died before he could finish it (*Red Harvest* 112).

Note that, although the Op never implies that he speaks his own name, he gives Reno a piece of paper with his name written on it (*Red Harvest* 167). When addressed by the lawyer Charles Proctor Dawn, Dawn “[speaks his] name with a question mark after it” (*Red Harvest* 173).

However, there are some facts that the Op reveals about himself, mostly regarding his physical features. We know that he is about forty years old, “[he

was] a noiseless slim sharp-eyed man of forty [...] [w]e were about the same age" (13; 15) and later "[a]t forty I could get along on gin as a substitute for sleep, but not comfortably" (*Red Harvest* 91). Regarding his stature and his appearance, early on we get to know that he is rather heavy, muscular, and short, "[the man] was weedy, nearly a head taller than I, but fifty pounds lighter. Some of my hundred and ninety pounds were fat, but not all of them" (*Red Harvest* 15-16). Through his dialogue with Dinah Brand we find out that he must be about five feet six, "[Dinah Brand] was an inch or two taller than I, which made her about five feet eight" (*Red Harvest* 32). Most of the information we receive about the Op is given *in relation to* somebody else. At the end of chapter 10, it becomes obvious that others regard the Op as fat – as are many of Personville's inhabitants¹⁷: "I oughta bust your jaw, you fat crook" (*Red Harvest* 74) and "My God! For a fat, middle-aged, hard-boiled, pig-headed guy, you've got the vaguest way of doing things I ever heard of" (*Red Harvest* 84).

Marling claims that the Op's quotidian habits – "he drinks, counts his pennies, uses slang, likes women, boxing and cigarettes" (Marling 107) – signal that he is an "Everyman" (*ibid.*). However, the phrase 'likes women' can have many meanings and stands open to interpretation. What is sure is that the Op, throughout both *Red Harvest* and the other stories he appears in – and unlike Sam Spade, the protagonist of *The Maltese Falcon* – never indulges in romantic relationships, neither with female clients nor with other women. The same can be argued regarding the counting of his pennies.

William F. Nolan points out that Hammett claimed that he was taught a basic code by Jimmy Wright, the man who trained him to be a Pinkerton, and that he based the Op on this very code: "Don't cheat your client. Stay anonymous. Avoid undue physical risks. Be objective. Don't become emotionally involved with a client. And never violate your integrity" (xiii).

Statements like this are difficult to defend with regards to *Red Harvest* – note that Nolan's introduction is from a collection of Hammett's short stories. The Op "sews Elihu Willsson up" (64), he becomes a prominent figure in Personville, he gets beaten up, he – as exemplified by his own doubting of whether he might not have killed Dinah Brand – loses his objectivity and his

¹⁷ the word "fat" appears 29 times in *Red Harvest*, six times of which it is not used with regards to a character's appearance; out of these six, the word refers five times to one of Reno's gangsters, 'Fat'.

integrity when he starts his personal vendetta. There is no question that the Op breaks this code many times in *Red Harvest*, but it is clear that he is committed to it although he “becomes as lawless as the gangsters and crooked politicians” (Gregory 57) of Personville. Thompson sees the Op as “a man of his word [who] possesses a conscience” (44). And indeed, the Op does not make promises unless he knows he can keep them:

“You promise?”

“Not yet.” [...]

“Promise first.”

“No.” (*Red Harvest* 103)

“You mean you won’t tell him?” he asked eagerly. “You promise?”

“I promise you nothing,” I said. “Why should I? I’ve got you with your pants down” (*Red Harvest* 113).

The dialogue that takes place between the Op and Dinah Brand just after the peace conference highlights the moral dilemma that he is facing throughout the novel. The peace conference is exposed as a farce, “at least a dozen killings ought to grow” (*Red Harvest* 153) out of it, and the Op confesses his fear of “going blood-simple like the natives” (*Red Harvest* 154) to Dinah. Yet at this point, the Op has schemed and manipulated so much that it is hard for the reader to commiserate with him: he has shot a policeman, “juggled death and destruction” (*Red Harvest* 156), and sent Al Kennedy and John Noonan to their deaths:

Look. I sat at Willsson's table tonight and played them like you'd play trout, and got just as much fun out of it. I looked at Noonan and knew he hadn't a chance in a thousand of living another day because of what I had done to him, and I laughed, and felt warm and happy inside. (*Red Harvest* 157)

This echoes the almost sadistic tendencies which the Op develops already earlier in the novel: “I pushed my lips together to keep from laughing at the panic in his voice” (*Red Harvest* 148). But Hammett does not let the conversation end here. He shows that the Op is a man of conscience, that he is not as hard-boiled as he may seem, and – most importantly – that he is human:

That's not me. I've got hard skin all over what's left of my soul, and after twenty years of messing around with crime I can look at any sort of a murder without seeing anything in it but my bread and butter, the day's work. But this getting a rear out of planning deaths is not natural to me. It's what this place has done to me”. She smiled too softly and spoke too indulgently: “You exaggerate so, honey. They deserve all they get. I wish you wouldn't look like that. You make me feel creepy. (*Red Harvest* 157)

Dinah offers redemption by justifying his actions. Although the Op intends to follow his basic code, he fails to live up to it. The Op's weakness makes him human, it is what led him on his quest for personal revenge, and the perversity is that because of this, he makes it harder for the reader to sympathise with him when he loses his ethics:

The Op is a man who has a code, but he is also one who has exhibited a propensity to become caught up in the action, to become personally involved in feelings that have little to do with professional codes of ethics. In so doing, Hammett has made his hero more human, and more vulnerable. (Thompson 49)

Hammett presents the struggle of an ethical hero with a corrupt world who doubts that he can keep his ethics: "That's what I've been telling you. I'm going blood-simple" (*Red Harvest* 158). Unlike *The Maltese Falcon's* Sam Spade, the Op may be able to withstand a woman's sexual attraction, yet, as his last conversation with Dinah makes clear, he has long succumbed to violence:

"Now what did you bring the ice pick in for?"

"To show you how my mind's running. A couple of days ago, if I thought about it at all, it was as a good tool to pry off chunks of ice." I ran a finger down its half-foot of round steel blade to the needle point. "Not a bad thing to pin a man to his clothes with. That's the way I'm betting, on the level. I can't even see a mechanical cigar lighter without thinking of filling one with nitroglycerine for somebody you don't like. There's a piece of copper wire lying in the gutter in front of your house-thin, soft, and just long enough to go around a neck with two ends to hold on. I had one hell of a time to keep from picking it up and stuffing it in my pocket, just in case—" (*Red Harvest* 157-158)

Note that the only murder the Op commits happens in self-defence, his fears seem to be unjustified as he restrains himself. Because the Op realizes that the reason why Donald Willsson called for him in the first place will not make a difference to his approach of 'cleansing' Personville, he makes no attempts to investigate. Similarly, "the implied importance of Willsson's French wife or Old Elihu's murder of a burglar are never followed up" (Marling 108). By the middle of the novel, after the Op has solved the murder of Willsson, he sticks to his personal vendetta, attempting to clean Personville, rather than to try to solve the countless murders that surround him. His only chance to reach his goal is not to *investigate* murder, it is to *instigate* murder. If this encompasses working for Elihu Willsson, the man who controlled Personville by force, misuse of power

and corruption before he gave Personville to thugs, this is the necessary evil that comes with the job.

4.3. HOUSE DICK

When comparing the two short stories “House Dick” (first published in 1923) and “Nightmare Town” with *Red Harvest*, Hammett’s almost chronological departure from genre-conventions becomes as obvious as the decline of his protagonist’s belief in a just world. “House Dick” features a far less hard-boiled (or rather case-hardened) version of *Red Harvest*’s Op. Here, the Op cannot yet “look at any sort of a murder without seeing anything in it but my bread and butter, the day’s work” (*Red Harvest* 157): when the Op finds three corpses in a clothespress, he describes it as a traumatizing event that will haunt him for weeks:

From behind me came a scream and a thud as the maid fainted. I wasn’t feeling any too steady myself. I’m no sensitive plant, and I’ve looked at a lot of unlovely sights in my time, but for weeks afterward I could see those three dead men coming out of that clothespress to pile up at my feet: coming out slowly – almost deliberately – in a ghastly game of “follow your leader.” (Hammett, *House* 43)

Later, a flashback of this scene occurs seemingly out of the blue: “I saw those three dead men falling out of the closet in room 906!” (ibid. 51). The Op is little familiar with murder, and only twice has he had to deal with murderers: “His eyes were changing now, and the more I looked at them the less I liked them. [...] Twice before I had looked into eyes such as these – and I hadn’t forgotten what they meant – the eyes of the congenital killer!” (ibid. 51). In “The Big Knockover”, which was published four years after “Nightmare Town” and two years before *Red Harvest*, the Op’s view on violence is already much bleaker: “It was a swell bag of nails. Swing right, swing left, kick, swing right, swing left, kick. Don’t hesitate, don’t look for targets. God will see that there’s always a mug there for your gun or your black-jack to sock, a belly for your foot” (Hammett, *Knockover* 117).

However, what distinguishes the Op in “House Dick” most from his later appearances is that he still has a strong believe in cause and effect. Similar to Holmes, he acts on the assumption “that all signs in a bounded space must be

relatable” (Horsley, *Crime Fiction* 27). In a rather lengthy passage, the Op comments on his belief in an underlying logic:

We now dropped that angle and settled down to the detail-studying, patience-taxing grind of picking up the murderer’s trail. From any crime to its author there is a trail. It may be – as in this case – obscure; but, since matter cannot move without disturbing other matter along its path, there is always – there must be – a trail of some sort. And finding and following such trails is what a detective is paid to do.

In the case of a murder it is possible sometimes to take a short-cut to the end of the trail, by first finding the motive. A knowledge of the motive often reduces the field of possibilities; sometimes points directly to the guilty one. (Hammett, *House* 46)

The beginning of “House Dick” follows the conventional mystery formula: a crime happens in absence of the protagonist, he is called to the scene, nine suspects are found, men “of whose innocence we hadn’t found a reasonable amount of proof” (ibid. 47), and the investigator follows the clues he finds. The murders occurred in room 906, and Ross Orrett, who rented room 609 “arrived the day of the murders and had left the following day” (ibid. 47), making Orrett the Op’s prime suspect.

The Op disguises himself (he paints a scar on his face to impersonate the man the suspect is looking for) and follows him into a speakeasy. Exactly this point in the narrative represents Hammett’s breaking of conventions: the bar is crowded with criminals, “[f]ew of the faces to be seen were strangers to the morning ‘line-up’ at police headquarters” (ibid. 49), and the man the Op disguises himself as “had decidedly the right sort of backing – enough to buy him everything he needed in the way of witnesses, alibis, even juries and an occasional judge” (ibid. 48). Corruption and crime may be hard to see at a first glance, but they have spread from the individual of Doyle and Poe to a mass of criminals of all social statuses. From the very moment the Op steps into the speakeasy, he stops to investigate: “Just what there was between them and what bearing it had on the Montgomery murders was a mystery to me, but I didn’t try to solve it now” (ibid. 52). Indeed, the murder solves itself when the suspect and Guy Cudner, the man he has been looking for, start shooting each other, and the lethally wounded murderer makes a confession: “‘Sorry...three in hotel...,’ he gasped hoarsely. ‘Mistake...wrong room...got one...had to...other two...protect myself...I...’ He shuddered and died” (ibid. 53). It is important to

notice that the murderer *had no motive* for killing the three men in the hotel room and that the man who killed the murderer, himself a criminal, will plead self-defence, warning the Op that more killing is yet to come:

“Keep your eye on the New York dispatches,” he said, “and maybe you’ll get the rest of the story. It’s not over yet. Nobody has anything on me out here. That shooting in Pigatti’s was self-defence so far as I’m concerned. And as soon as I’m on my feet again and can get back East there’s going to be a master-mind holding a lot of lead. That’s a promise!” I believed him. (ibid. 54)

Thus the story ends on a dark note, the Op faces a moral dilemma, but there is nothing he can do but wait, while the criminal will run free. One year later, in 1924, Hammett published “The Golden Horseshoe”, where the Op faces a similar problem. The story’s conclusion echoes the final paragraph of “House Dick”, yet this time the Op has the last word,

“I can’t put you up for the murders you engineered in San Francisco; but I can sock you with the one you *didn’t do* in Seattle – so *justice won’t be cheated*. You’re going to Seattle, Ed, to hang for Ashcraft’s suicide.” And he did. (Hammett, *Golden 90*, emphasis added)

4.4. NIGHTMARE TOWN

The short story “Nightmare Town” was first released in 1924, one year after “House Dick” and three years before the publication of *Red Harvest*’s serialization. On a first glimpse, the short story seems like a prototype for *Red Harvest*: it features a stranger who comes to a town and finds out shortly after his arrival that it is overwhelmed with criminals and a corrupt police force. The protagonist investigates, and soon the town’s criminals start killing each other. Like the Op, the protagonist has to flee the city at the end, and the town is seemingly cleansed.

Yet “Nightmare Town” presents a far less radical approach to the genre than *Red Harvest*. Soon after his arrival, Steve Threefall, the story’s protagonist, finds a friend in Roy Kamp, a person he can trust – this stands in stark contrast to the Op: “Not a thousand words had passed between the two men, but they had as surely become brothers-in-arms as if they had tracked a continent together” (Hammett, *Nightmare* 15). Yet Kamp is shortly after killed in an ambush:

“Get–word–to–” The thin man tried desperately to make the last word audible.

A hand gripped Steve's shoulder
 "What the hell's all this?" The roaring voice of Marshal Grant
 Fernie blotted out Kamp's words. (ibid. 17)

Whereas Cudner's last words in "House Dick" solve a mystery, Kamp's words create one¹⁸. When Threefall suspects that Grant deliberately drowned out Kamp's last words, he starts to investigate, and he soon finds out that the city is far from clean on both outside and inside:

"It's been terrible! I came here three months ago because there was a vacancy in the telegraph office. I was suddenly alone in the world, with very little money, and telegraphy was all I knew that could be capitalized. It's been terrible here! The town—I can't get accustomed to it. It's so bleak. No children play in the streets. The people are different from those I've known—cruder, more brutal. Even the houses—street after street of them without curtains in the windows, without flowers. No grass in the yards, no trees. (ibid. 22)

Here, Hammett directly addresses what he does not even have to imply in *Red Harvest* anymore: to any attentive reader of *Red Harvest* it would appear obvious that there are neither children nor flowers or trees in Personville, or that the inhabitants of Personville are brutal. Later, Threefall will ask himself "What next? [...] Is the whole town wrong? What next, I wonder?" (28) This is extremely important, as the Op's view of Personville is very different from this: to the Op, the state Personville is in is unquestionable, if not even "natural". He knows that the whole town was corrupt *even before* Willsson opened the city's gates for thugs and the criminals arrived. Unlike the Op, Threefall looks for connections that would make sense of the chaos he faces. He tries to understand the happenings by employing reason and analysis, by looking for clues, by *thinking*:

In his room on the third floor of the Izzard hotel, Steve Threefall undressed slowly, hampered by a stiff left arm and much thinking. Matter for thought he had in abundance. Larry Ormsby slapping his father's face and threatening him with an automatic; Larry Ormsby and the girl in confidential conversation; Kamp dying in a dark street, his last words lost in the noise of the marshal's arrival; [...]

Was there any connection between each of these things and the others? Or were they simply disconnected happenings? If there was a connection—and the whole of that quality in mankind which strives toward simplification of life's phenomena, unification, urged

¹⁸ It is striking how Hammett recycled and even refined "the dying man's last words" in *Red Harvest*.

him to belief in a connection—just what was it? Still puzzling, he got into bed; (ibid. 25-26)

As the last paragraph of the quote exemplifies, Threefall believes, similar to the Op in “House Dick”, in an underlying logic that connects the mysteries he faces. But the more he finds out, the less he is able to deal with what happens to him by employing reason: “For a moment, as he crouched there over the dead man, *something akin to panic swept Steve Threefall’s mind clean of reason*. Was there never to be an end to this piling of mystery upon mystery, of violence upon violence?” (ibid. 29, emphasis added). The passage reads as if Hammett is trying to break free from the conventions Poe set: when Threefall gets entangled in action (something that never happens to Dupin and only rarely to Holmes), he has to adapt to the situation for the price of reason. Hammett continues, writing that “[Threefall] had the sensation of being caught in a monstrous net – a net without beginning or end, and whose meshes were slimy with blood. Nausea – spiritual and physical – gripped him, held him impotent” (ibid. 29). Violence embraces the investigator and renders him powerless. The traumatizing sight of three corpses that the Op experiences in “House Dick” and the Threefall’s nausea distinguish them from Holmes, to whom corpses “are always already textual [so that he] never [experiences] nausea, never shock” (Trotter 22). Although in doubt, Threefall cannot let go of the belief that there must be “something that lies behind”, and because of this, he is unable to act:

Suppose he had told the truth? Would it have helped justice? Would anything help justice in Izzard? If he had known what lay behind this piling-up of crime, he could have decided what to do; but he did not know – did not even know that there was anything behind it. So he had kept silent. (ibid. 30)

But Threefall does not have to act or to investigate, the mystery unravels when he is approached by Larry Ormsby, who tells him that “Izzard is a plant! The whole damned town is queer. Booze – that’s the answer” (ibid. 33). On four pages, the criminal Larry Ormsby tells Threefall about the town’s secret: Izzard was founded three years before, when a syndicate invested money to create a moonshine-factory under the guise of a soda nitre factory. “There was no trouble to getting the population we wanted” (ibid. 33): everybody in Izzard is part of this: “the boys who managed the game [...] a flock of trusty lieutenants [...] the slums of all the cities in America [...] bankers, and ministers, and doctors, and postmasters, and prominent men of all sorts” (ibid. 33-34). But

Izzard's population gets greedy, and they betray the syndicate, secretly start to export alcohol on their own and commit insurance fraud:

Men who had never lived were examined, insured, and then killed – sometimes they were killed on paper, sometimes a real man who died was substituted, and there were times when a man or two was killed to order. It was soft! We had the insurance agents, the doctors, the coroner, the undertaker, and all the city officials.” (ibid. 34).

On paper, Izzard's population is five times as big as in reality, houses are built in order to be burnt down for their insurance money, and corporations are founded that are “nothing but addresses on letterheads” (ibid. 35). Izzard has an expiration date from its very beginning: the townsfolk know that both the insurance companies and the syndicate suspect their fraud, and they plan to burn down the whole city to collect even more money: “[T]he fire that's to start in the factory and wipe out the whole dirty town. [...] That's the day when Izzard becomes nothing but a pile of ashes – and a pile of collectible insurance policies” (ibid. 35). However, before they can finish their plan, the criminals of Izzard start killing each other: “The game has blown up! It was too rich for us. Everybody is trying to slit everybody else's throat” (ibid. 36).

Unlike the self-sustained Personville, where most of the criminals work on their own or in loose gangs, “Nightmare Town” features a criminal collective that follows a certain goal. But exactly because of this, the town can only prosper for a finite amount of time. With the conclusion of Ormsby's monologue, Threefall realizes that he and Nova Vallance, a girl he fell in love with, have to escape the city, as there is nothing else left to be saved. The last six pages of the story focus on this goal: Hammett makes clear that they either will manage to escape “Nightmare Town” or they will be killed by the criminals while trying to, and the mystery story becomes a suspense story. This “either-or-state” the protagonists find themselves in creates immense suspense during the final pages of the story. “Nightmare Town” ends when Threefall and Vallance escape in a Vauxhall, with the town of Izzard, “a monstrous bonfire” (ibid. 41), behind them. The town may be destroyed, but they have a place to look forward to: “My mother has primroses in her garden in Delaware [...] You'll like 'em.' He is head slid over against her shoulder, and he went to sleep” (ibid. 41)

4.5. INDIVIDUALISM, ALIENATION AND ADDICTION TO VIOLENCE...

Unlike his British predecessors – or even the protagonists of Hammett's earlier stories – *Red Harvest's* Op seems to be against everyone, not only against criminals. I would argue that this is because *everyone* in Personville is *potentially* a criminal, and the Op is well aware of this. Breu points out that the Op's behaviour expresses an extremely negative world-view, stating that "*Red Harvest* is much more rigorously negative [than Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*] in its representation of its hard-boiled narrator, demonstrating the Op's amoral complicity with corporate capitalism and the criminality it produces" (112). The Op is seen as "defining himself through his ruthless self-sufficiency and individualistic opposition to the larger social order" (Breu 126). The comparison of "Nightmare Town" and *Red Harvest* exemplifies this: the moment Threefall finds out the truth about Izzard and the social order that is in power here, he realizes that his only chance for survival is to flee. The Op decides to stay and "cleanse" Personville.

Wolfe argues that the Op (and the society of Personville as a whole) can be approached and seen as a case study of social alienation. He observes that the Op is "sad and weary, haunted and self-alienated; to do his job he has had to sacrifice both his professional and personal standards" (87)

To highlight the Op's gradual dehumanization, his being "free of sentiment, of the fear of death, of the temptations of money and sex" (qtd. in Nyman 143), some examples of the Op's inability to emotionally deal with murder and violence will be presented here:

A piece of his jaw had been knocked off. His chin was tilted to show where another bullet had gone through tic and collar to make a hole in his neck. One arm was bent under him. The other hand held a blackjack as big as a milk bottle. There was a lot of blood. (*Red Harvest* 42)

His Vandyke beard was red with blood from a cut that ran diagonally across his forehead. His head was twisted sidewise and backward at an angle that could only be managed with a broken neck (*Red Harvest* 182)

Keep in mind how shocked the Op reacts in "House Dick" when he finds the three corpses. The only explanation that a reader can find here is that by the time the Op arrives in Personville, he has gotten used to seeing death. The

passages provided above furthermore exemplify how Hammett suppresses thrill by the prosaic and mechanical way he describes the novel's atrocities.

4.5.1. INDIVIDUALISM IN PERSONVILLE

The Op is not the only character in *Red Harvest* who is affected by alienation. Nyman (188–192) argues that Elihu Willsson's corrupt actions have made it impossible for the inhabitants of Personville to access wealth by any legal means and that he "endangered the existence of the traditional ideology of individualism" (Nyman 188). Thompson refers to Kenneth Keniston's analysis of Karl Marx's concept of alienation, that "being at odds with one's work leads almost necessarily to alienation from self, what he calls self-estrangement" (59). The Op calls Willsson an "old pirate", who agrees: "Son, if I hadn't been a pirate I'd still be working for the Anaconda for wages, and there'd be no Personville Mining Corporation" (*Red Harvest* 151). Just as the Op is the Continental Detective Agency – "Be Serious. When I say *me*, I mean the Continental" (*Red Harvest* 44) – Willsson is Personville: "Elihu Willsson was Personville, and he was almost the whole state" (*Red Harvest* 8). And because Willsson owns the town, he is able to block "access to wealth for those who act according to the principles of individualism" (Nyman 188).

As the Op soon finds out, everyone in Personville (including the police) seems to be mixed up in illegal business – ranging from gambling, the manipulation of a boxing match and stealing to murder. Even the novel's most prominent lawyer, Charles Proctor Dawn, has succumbed to this, as is shown in his failed attempt to blackmail the Op and Elihu Willsson. However, the most obvious and striking example of the loss of democratic individuality is Willsson's breaking of the strike and its catastrophic outcome, which led to the gangsters' rise to power long before the Op's arrival:

In 1921 it came. Business was rotten. Old Elihu didn't care whether he shut town for a while or not. He tore up the agreements he had made with his men and began kicking them back into their pre-war circumstances. [...] The strike lasted eight months. Both sides bled plenty. (*Red Harvest* 9)

It seems as if the Op has to face an impossible task: to reveal crimes committed by individuals in a city where individualism has ceased to exist (Nyman 189). Paradoxically, the novel also illustrates that companionship and trust are concepts foreign to the inhabitants of Personville. It seems as if the individual,

who cannot survive on his own, is aware that companionship would also constitute a constant threat to him, as the following paragraph exemplifies: "You can't shoot straight holding a man in your lap, another hanging on your shoulder, while a third does his shooting from an inch behind your ear" (*Red Harvest* 198). This is also made clear when the Op asks Reno for help because he needs an alibi for the night of Dinah Brands murder – ignorant of the fact that Reno is the man who killed Brand and framed the Op for it. It is nothing but ironic that Hammett decided to make Donald Willsson, who attempted to fight Personville's corruption and is one of the few individual characters in *Red Harvest*, the novel's first victim.

4.5.2. PERSONVILLE: CAPITAL OF THE ALIEN NATION

As becomes obvious in the first chapters, Hammett strongly questions a belief in American values, morality and its legal system in *Red Harvest*. This stands in contrast to his predecessors, where murder disrupted the social order and the detective tried to re-establish exactly this order by finding the culprit. Thompson points out that Hammett establishes Personville's poisonous nature in the novel's first chapter, exposing "an unholy trinity of gangsters, corrupt politicians, and a corrupt chief of police" (Thompson 38), and Nolan even compares the allegorical nature of Personville to Dante's hell:

As Dante used his native Florence as a model for hell, as Dickens depicted the horrors of London with its lust, poverty and crime, as Melville projected his gothic-vision of New York as "an inferno into which the hero falls" – so Hammett utilized Poisonville. (Qtd. in Thompson, 38)

As Nyman argues, the Op "distances himself from the representatives of both the official legal system and the alternative systems based on money and will to power" (291), the latter of which is represented by Elihu Willsson. The Op finds out early that he cannot trust in Personville's police force when Noonan tries to have him assassinated. Nyman defines the idea that "people do not feel that they belong together" (293) as central to the concept of social alienation and *Red Harvest*. But where does this social alienation stem from? Many of the factors provided in chapter 2.1. added to the blurring of the social roles that came with the rapid changes that the 1920s brought. The values that the inhabitants of Personville cherish have little to do with traditional morality, gangsters strive to gain power instead of integrating themselves into society.

Each of them acts according to his own values, and greed is the force that drives Personville. Thompson (40) underlines this, stating that

[v]alue is measured solely in dollars in Personville, and if you don't have it, you react violently. [...] Deception, violence, and money are the staples of Poisonville. [...] [A]ll the characters in Personville – with the exception of the Op – proceed from one set of values: greed and what we might call Machiavellian policy. (40-41)

The inhabitants of Personville lust for power, as is the case with Elihu Willsson and Noonan, or for money, like Dinah Brand – “whatever the particular manifestation, the basic motivation is greed” (Thompson 41). The result is a society in which no one is able to trust anyone, as demonstrated in the novel's opening chapter, when the Op meets Bill Quint:

"What's the rumpus?" I asked him.
He looked at me carefully before he replied, as if he wanted to be sure that the information was going into safe hands. His eyes were gray as his clothes, but not so soft.
"Don Willsson's gone to sit on the right hand of God, if God don't mind looking at bullet holes."
"Who shot him?" I asked.
The gray man scratched the back of his neck and said:
"Somebody with a gun." (*Red Harvest* 2-3)

Nyman describes Quint as an urban character that is driven by "suspicion and fear. In Personville any passer-by might be a potential murderer or informer, which means that one should not talk to anyone more than is absolutely necessary" (299-300). The Op has to face this very problem over and over again: the inhabitants of Personville are unable and unwilling to help him because of their selfish and contradictory value systems.

Wolfe (33) notes Hammett's "emphasis upon professional, rather than private, crime", and indeed, in *Red Harvest*, crime has become a profession, and most of the murders occur because of professional, not private reasons; the motive of two murders that happen because of personal reasons is jealousy, the murderers are MacSwain, who murders Tim Noonan, and Robert Albury, who murders Donald Willsson. Neither of them dies in *Red Harvest*. As a consequence, murder has become no more than a "day's work" to the Op, who at a first glance is able to deal with it without letting his emotions interfere. And indeed, in Personville, murder happens on an almost daily basis.

Still, the lack of emotionality in the Op's narrative when he wakes up next to the murdered Dinah Brand – with the ice-pick still sticking out of her breast – is striking. At this point, the Op knows as little about the murder as the reader, yet the way he describes his findings clarifies how much the Op has ceased to perceive the human body as more than a mere object, how he "has suppressed a part of his mind, the emotional side, in order to cope with the world" (Nyman 297)

I was lying face down on the dining room floor, my head resting on my left forearm. My right arm was stretched straight out. My right hand held the round blue and white handle of Dinah Brand's ice pick. The pick's six-inch needle-sharp blade was buried in Dinah Brand's left breast.

She was lying on her back, dead. Her long muscular legs were stretched out toward the kitchen door. There was a run down the front of her right stocking.

[...] Not much blood was in sight: a spot the size of a silver dollar around the hole the ice pick made in her blue silk dress. (*Red Harvest* 164)

As discussed in chapter 2.4.1.3., the reader has to question the Op's objectivity here, as his narrative can be interpreted as showing signs that he is in shock, and his desperate search for a culprit regarding Dinah's murder has been identified as an outburst of hysteria and paranoia (Breu, *Masculinities* 79). It is interesting to note that throughout the novel, the Op has associated Brand's physical appearance with money: "She had had her hair trimmed at last, and marcelled, and looked like a lot of money in a big gray fur coat" (*Red Harvest* 74) and watched with "a face hard as a silver dollar" (*Red Harvest* 105). Now that she lies dead next to him, it is not her face anymore that reminds him of a silver dollar, but a spot of blood. This reads like a ghastly echo of their first conversation:

"If you talked my language," she drawled, looking narrow-eyed at me, "I might be able to give you some help."

"Maybe if I knew what it was."

"Money," she explained, "the more the better. I like it." [...]

"I could give you some help," she said, "but there'd have to be something in it for me."

"Safety," I reminded her, but she shook her head.

"I mean it would have to get me something in a financial way." (33-35)

Like so many of the novel's characters, Dinah chooses greed over safety, and in the capitalist society of Personville, she pays the price for it. Thompson (52)

points out that it is the Op's immunity to greed that convinces Mickey Linehan of the Op's innocence with regards to Dinah Brand's murder: "Don't get so cocky over one lousy murder that maybe didn't happen. But what the hell? You know you didn't lift her dough and pretties" (*Red Harvest* 205).

5. THE QUEST

Malmgren claims that "[t]he basic narrative formula for murder or crime fiction is quite simple: someone is looking for someone or something" (153) and that a crime story *inevitably* involves a pursuit or a quest. Furthermore, he states that although the object of the search may vary during this pursuit, "in nearly every case the search ends up focusing on the person responsible for the crime, usually murder, which propels the narrative" (153). Malmgren cites Cawelti that the "goal of the detective story is a clear and certain establishment of guilt for a specific crime" (qtd. in Malmgren 1976) and concludes that crime fictions are quest narratives, as made clear by hard-boiled detective fiction.

Malmgren lists the six basic elements of functional analysis¹⁹ in a quest narrative as follows:

- The sender, who assigns the task (quest) to the subject.
- The subject, whose goal is the object.
- The object.
- The helper, somebody who assists the subject.
- The opponent, somebody who opposes the subject and his quest.
- The receiver, who, at the end of the quest, is given the object by the subject.

5.1. THE QUEST IN "THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE"

Before advancing to *Red Harvest*, let us quickly look at how one could apply this method to Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", a 'whodunit', a genre nickname that establishes the object as the person responsible for a crime (Malmgren 153). Dupin can easily be identified as the subject of the story. Whereas Doyle usually portrays senders in his stories (the various clients that appear in nearly all of the Holmes stories), Dupin is primarily motivated by his own amusement²⁰. The object of the story is the search for the murderer, and the murderer himself. Dupin is helped by the narrator (and, to some degree, the

¹⁹ It seems as if Malmgren confuses Propp's functional analysis with Greimas's transcoding of functional analysis into the actantial model.

²⁰ see chapter 2.2.

police), the sailor who brought the orang-utan (the object) to Paris is a potential opponent (outmanoeuvred by Dupin's display of his pistols). In the end, the sailor catches the orang-utan and sells it to the *Jardin des Plantes*, and the police release an innocent suspect.

As can be derived from this, the method cannot be fully applied to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". Both the presence of sender and opponent are questionable, and it is not the subject that returns the object to the receiver, but somebody else.

5.2. THE QUESTS IN *RED HARVEST*

Especially at the beginning of *Red Harvest* (to be more specific, in the 7 chapters that were published in the serialization of the novel under the title "The Cleansing of Poisonville"), the application of this model is more or less viable: the Op is established as the subject, and Donald Willsson, who hired him, as the sender. The object, however, remains a mystery to both the reader and the Op: Donald Willsson is shot before he can explain why he sent for the Op (*Red Harvest* 6), and thus ceases to be the sender. Interestingly enough, when the Op meets Donald's father Elihu, the latter does not hire the Op – who by now has identified himself as working for the Continental Detective Agency – but instead tells him "to get to hell back to Frisco" (*Red Harvest* 17). Nevertheless, the Op decides to stay and investigate – he decides to find out who killed Donald Willsson. Soon he meets Noonan, the chief of police, who becomes his helper. In a second meeting with Elihu Willsson, the Op is hired to "empt[y] Personville of its crooks and grafters" (RH43) for ten thousand dollars, the hunt for Donald's murder is only secondary to Elihu. "Are you getting anywhere in your hunt for Donald's murderer?" (*Red Harvest* 45), Elihu asks, but the job he pays for is "The Cleansing of Poisonville". It seems as if the search for Donald's murderer is not the (primary) object of the Op.

The next time the Op meets Noonan, the chief of police tries to have him assassinated and make it look like an accident. The Op, however, is aware that Noonan turns from his helper to his opponent. When the Op identifies Albury as the murderer of Donald shortly after, Elihu Willsson hopes to convince the Op that the search for Donald's murder was his objective all along:

"The check I gave you last night [...] is only fair pay for the work you have done." [...]

“You haven’t forgotten that your check was to cover the cost of investigating crime and corruption in Personville, have you?” I asked.

“That was nonsense,” he snorted. “We were excited last night. That’s called off.” (*Red Harvest* 63)

What does this conversation imply? The sender obviously tries to change the object. But does the subject become the sender, when he defies the (original²¹) sender’s orders? At this point, the novel becomes partly a revenge-story, the Op does not act because of what Elihu tells him, he is driven by revenge: although “[a]ll’s lovely and peaceful again” (*Red Harvest* 64), the Op decides to stay. “The Cleansing of Poisonville” did not occur by solving Donald’s murder, it is only beginning:

“Your fat chief of police tried to assassinate me last night. I don’t like that. I’m just mean enough to want to ruin him for it. Now I’m going to have my fun. I’ve got ten thousand dollars of your money to play with. I’m going to use it opening Poisonville up from Adam’s apple to ankles. I’ll see that you get my reports as regularly as possible. I hope you enjoy them” (*Red Harvest* 64).

The Op’s statement that he will give reports to Elihu exposes their employer-employee relationship as a farce: that very afternoon (and on the following page) the Op writes his reports. But he will not give them to Elihu, he will send them to the Old Man, the boss of the Continental Detective Agency: “There was a telegram from the Old Man: SEND BY FIRST MAIL FULL EXPLANATION OF PRESENT OPERATION AND CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH YOU ACCEPTED IT WITH DAILY REPORTS TO DATE” (*Red Harvest* 142). Thompson would certainly agree with this, as he stresses that the Op never becomes “Elihu’s puppet” (39) and emphasises the irony that the power that Elihu grants the Op is “exactly the kind of power and freedom Donald [the man who sent for the Op in the first place] would have probably tried to give the Op had he lived” (39).

In the remaining chapters of the novel, allegiances and motives are constantly shifting. Not only is a new object introduced when Dinah Brand is murdered, helpers become opponents, or, as is the case with Dick Foley, they are sent away when they start to doubt the subject: “I sent him back home [...] He seemed to think I’d killed Dinah Brand. He was getting on my nerves with it” (*Red Harvest* 205). Malmgren claims that in the classic detective mystery “[i]n

²¹ Note that actually Donald Willsson is the ‘original’ sender.

its typical outline, the investigator reveals the name of the murderer in the penultimate chapter and explains the detection process in the last chapter" (153). As has been stated, *Red Harvest* breaks free from many of the genre's conventions. Whether the novel can then be called a detective or mystery story is open for discussion, and this will be addressed in chapter 7.

6. MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

This chapter focuses on the topic of suspense in *Red Harvest*, and whether or not Hammett's novel achieves to make the reader feel suspense – to paraphrase: Can *Red Harvest* be classified as a suspense story. Although none of the previous chapters has directly focused on the topic of suspense, the information provided is essential for a better understanding of this chapter's train of thought. Thus the author will hark back on information presented in the previous chapters and place it in a context that is relevant to the topic of suspense. This chapter follows William Brewer's "The Nature of Narrative Suspense and the Problem of Rereading" and Carroll's "The Paradox of Suspense", and attempts to apply their theories to *Red Harvest*.

Rodell described suspense as "the art of making the reader care about what happens next" (qtd. in Carroll 76). Hammett's own view of the matter is quite different: "The essence of suspense is that while it lasts nothing happens" (qtd. in Wolfe 28). Carroll argues that "[s]uspense, in general, is an emotional state. It is the emotional response that one has to situations in which an outcome that concerns one is uncertain" (84), that "[i]n general in suspense fictions [...] one of the possible outcomes of the relevant course of events is morally correct, but uncertain" (77), and that "suspense, with respect to fiction, also requires that the moral outcome be perceived to be a live but improbable outcome, or, at least, no more probable than the evil outcome, whereas the evil outcome is generally far more probable than the moral one" (81).

6.1. WHODUNITS, SUSPENSE AND THE MORALLY CORRECT OUTCOME

The question of whether *Red Harvest* features a "morally correct" outcome is (to say the least) problematic: as argued in chapter 4.5., Personville is a place that is devoid of moral values, neither the Op nor Personville's inhabitants strictly follow moralistic codes, and Strasen (174) states that life in Personville is too

wrong to leave place for morally correct decisions. Before addressing the actual outcome of *Red Harvest*, it might prove helpful to compare the outcomes of two of Hammett's earlier short stories, "House Dick" and "Nightmare Town", and then to try to imagine how a morally correct outcome of the novel *might* look like. Bear in mind that for the *whodunits* of Poe and Doyle, a "morally correct" outcome usually meant the unmasking of the culprit and his or her consequent arrest. Carroll (75) defines a whodunit as a story that focuses on a past crime and revolves around how and by whom the crime was committed; as a consequence, the outcome of a whodunit has as many possible shapes as it has suspects. Unlike this, a suspense-story is based on binary opposites:

In the case of suspense, the course of events in question can have only two outcomes, and those potential outcomes stand in relation to each other as logical contraries – either the heroine will be torn apart by the buzzsaw or she will not be. [...] [W]ith mystery, our uncertainty is distributed over as many possible answers as there are suspects, whereas with suspense, we are "suspended" between no more than two answers, which answers stand in binary opposition. (Carroll 76).

"House Dick" thus can be classified as a whodunit. Of the ten suspects that are presented, one is exposed as the culprit. However, although the murderer of the three men is found and shot at the end, another murderer escapes punishment, promising the Op that "[i]t's not over yet" (Hammett, *House* 54). With a criminal at large, the Op fails to re-establish order and a morally correct outcome only partially takes place.

"Nightmare Town" features a similar setting as *Red Harvest*, but it plays out quite differently: the story starts as a whodunit, until Threefall finally discovers the "true" nature of Izzard three quarters through the story. He may suspect foul play earlier, but before he finds out "what [lies] behind this piling-up of crime" (Hammett, *Nightmare* 30) he finds himself unable to act. Thus it is not because of his investigations that he uncovers the truth about the fraud, it is because he is provided information by one of the town's criminals – who only approaches him because he wants to save Nova Vallance, Threefall's newfound companion.

The very moment the two of them find out that Izzard's population consists almost exclusively of criminals, they realize that they have to escape the city – this becomes their only hope for survival, and "Nightmare Town" turns

from whodunit into suspense story. If they stay, the criminals will kill them or they will perish in the fire that seems inevitable; even the criminals of Izzard unequivocally agree that the city has reached a point at which it will have to burn before long. It's a question of survival, and the only morally correct outcome that the story could possibly offers is that a) the Protagonists escape and that b) Izzard goes up in flames, both of which happen.

Although both towns are fictional, there is one important factor that distinguishes Personville from Izzard: the latter is not only fictional, it is also fake, the whole town is a sham. Located in the middle of the desert, Izzard is an illusionary town, founded – three years before Threefall arrives there – as a pretence for criminals to illegally brew alcohol and commit insurance fraud. Personville, however, is meant to mirror a real city gone wrong: as mentioned in chapter 3.3., Joseph Shaw claimed that American readers of *Black Mask* magazine seemed to recognize both town and characters, and burning Personville to the ground would certainly not be a viable solution for the Op. Personville is thoroughly infected, disintegrating families and affecting policemen and the court (Thompson 43). Whereas the works of the detective genre “always stand in defense of the established social order” (Chernaik 104) and try to re-establish this social order by solving a crime, the established social order in *Red Harvest* is the root of the crimes.

As a consequence, at the novel's end the Op is not convinced that he has been successful at ‘curing’ Personville, he still has to refer to the city as “[his] Poisonville.” He is aware that he has to leave the city as soon as possible, and, as a consequence, uses an alias to stay undetected, even considering a trip to Honduras:

I ought to be in the clear, but I know my Poisonville too well to take any chances. [...] I'll be at the Roosevelt Hotel [in Ogden], registered as P.F. King. Stay with the job, and let me know when it's wise to either take my own name again or a trip to Honduras (*Red Harvest* 94)

Unlike “House Dick”, a whodunit that finds closure when the culprit is unmasked, and “Nightmare Town”, a suspense story that focuses on whether the main characters survive and at the same time provides punishment for the criminals, the Op's goal in *Red Harvest* is always ambiguous. Whether the reader can find solace in the Op's statement that “Personville, under martial

law, was developing into a sweet-smelling thornless bed of roses" (*Red Harvest*, 94) is questionable, especially when one takes into consideration that Elihu Willsson, the very man who gave it to the criminals in the first place, has regained control over the city.

6.2. A SIGNIFICANT OUTCOME

Thompson (37) stresses the importance of the fact that violence was already a part of Personville before the Op's arrival, "sick from the disease of violence, greed, and capitalistic extortion" (Thompson 37) that reign the city since the 40 years that Elihu Willsson is in power: "[t]here's no use taking anybody into court, no matter what you've got on them. They own the courts" (*Red Harvest* 118). The question of whether *Red Harvest* has a morally correct outcome remains problematic. Brewer (115) highlights the importance of a story's 'significant outcome' on the perceived suspense of a story, and he mentions a fictitious story in which the initiating event "was that the main character's shoelace was weak" and that "it seems unlikely that the reader would feel much suspense when they read that the character tied his shoe" (115). Although it may sound exaggerated to compare the murder of Donald Willsson with the weakness of a shoelace, this does not seem to be that far-fetched when considering that murder has become a trifle to the Op.

As argued in chapter 5., *Red Harvest* does not follow one single storyline from beginning to end, it consist of several strings as the Op's goals change after the arrest of Albury and once again after Dinah Brand is murdered. Thompson argues that Hammett avoids focusing on plot only, the plot strands always "point to larger, more informing issues, issues concerning the nature of American society, the viability of the moral and ethical hero in a fallen world, the problematic nature of reality, and the problem of identity. (200) Similarly to Donald Willsson's case, the murder of Ike Bush and the arrest of the culprit is told in a very unspectacular manner, as if it was an incidental occurrence:

A high twinkle of light caught my eye. A short silvery streak slanted down from one of the small balconies. A woman screamed. The silvery streak ended its flashing slant in the ring, with a sound that was partly a thud, partly a snap. Ike Bush took his arm out of the referee's hand and pitched down on top of Kid Cooper. *A black knife-handle stuck out of the nape of Bush's neck.*(*Red Harvest* 78, emphasis added)

The chief said, "He was," picked up one of his phones, said, "McGraw," and then: "Get hold of Peak Murry and ask him to drop in. *And have Tony Agosti picked up for that knife-throwing.*" (*Red Harvest* 99, emphasis added)

Note that this is the first and penultimate time Tony Agosti is directly mentioned in *Red Harvest* (he will be referred to at a later point when Noonan mentions that he escaped prison).

This creates a link to another characteristic of the successful suspense novel: the inclusion of "Mini Suspense and Resolution Episodes" (Brewer 116). As Brewer argues (116–117), a reader differentiates between the overall suspense of a story and its mini suspense and resolution episodes. Marling (107-108) divides the novel into four plot sections (they mirror the four separate serializations): the first section is about finding and exposing the murderer of Donald Willsson, Robert Albury. The second section focuses on the Op, Max 'Whisper' Thaler and Dinah Brand, and the Op's involvement in the manipulation of the prizefight, in which Al Kennedy is killed. The third part involves the Op and his dispute with Noonan, eventually leading to the peace-conference and the deaths of the latter. The final plot section concentrates on the showdown between Pete the Finn and Reno Starkey, and the Op's attempt to find a culprit for Dinah's death. But besides these four plot sections, *Red Harvest* consists of a number of smaller episodes.

6.3. EPISODES, SURPRISE, CURIOSITY AND SUSPENSE

To exemplify mini suspense and resolution episodes, let us shortly return to the event structure presented in chapter 4.1.:

1. Man A sits at a table, with his hands below the table. He is hiding a gun.
2. Woman A and Man B enter the room.
3. They talk and drink.
4. Man A shoots Man B.

Brewer "hypothesize[s] that surprise is produced by including critical expository or event information early in the event structure, but omitting it from the discourse structure" (111). With regards to the example provided above, this would mean that an author withheld information about the hidden gun. The sudden shooting of the gun, along with the simultaneous revelation that Man A has had a gun all along, would evoke surprise in the reader. Wenzel (187)

points out that surprise is usually not linked to suspense, unless the reader already expects to be surprised.

Curiosity on the other hand can be created in the reader by placing an advanced story element early in the discourse. Similar to suspense, curiosity is based on a discrepancy between the event and discourse level (Wenzel 187). If Man A shoots Man B at the beginning of a narrative, a reader might be curious as to why this happened. *Whodunits* often follow this structure: while moving forward on both event and discourse structure, the investigator is backtracking an event, he is searching for meaning (Cupchik 190), discourse and event structure diverge when the investigator unravels the case; curiosity thus is always backwards oriented.

Suspense relies on an initiating event in the event structure. “An *initiating event* is an event that has the potential to lead to a significant outcome (good or bad) for one of the main characters in the narrative. In addition, we hypothesize that the event structure must contain the outcome of the initiating even” (Brewer 113). With regards to the example provided above, the discourse structure would thus follow the event structure. As the reader knows that Man B is in danger of being shot by Man A, he might feel suspense until the sequence is resolved. “In order to produce the effects of surprise and curiosity, the discourse structure must diverge from the underlying event structure in the ways outlined” (Brewer 113), something that may be common, but not necessary, for suspense. Unlike curiosity, suspense is oriented towards future events on the story level.

Brewer (113) furthermore states that authors sometimes provide the reader with information that the character of a story is not aware of. “Authors of suspense texts often chose to give the reader knowledge of potential difficulties that the character does not know about in order to increase reader suspense” (Brewer 113-114). There is not one instance of this discrepancy to be found in *Red Harvest*, where the reader only has access to the knowledge the Op decides to share.

Before advancing to *Red Harvest*, let us look at the following two scenes that take place in “House Dick”:

[Orrett] had sat down with his left side turned slightly toward me, which put his right arm in not too cramped a position for straight shooting from the pocket that still held his hand. [50]

My gun was inside the waist-band of my trousers, where I could get it quickly, but his was in his hand. So I was careful to keep my own hands motionless on the edge of the table, while I widened my grin. [51]

In the first paragraph, the Op hints at his suspicion that Orrett has a gun, which puts him in danger and creates suspense. On the next page, Hammett reveals that Orrett indeed has a gun (although we do not know this for sure; the Op does not mention actually *seeing* the gun, he might still only suspect that a gun is being pointed at). Nevertheless, the reader realizes the dangerous position the Op finds himself in. The Op has a similar encounter in *Red Harvest*, when he visits Dinah Brand for the first time:

[Rolff] sat on the opposite side [of the table], leaning his thin face on a thin hand, looking at me without interest. [32]

[The Op:] "I'd like to know why you made him have the check certified."

Very casually, Dan Rolff shifted in his chair, leaning back, lowering his thin hands out of sight below the table's edge. [33]

[The Op:] "I mean the check, not the runs. Noonan's got it." She looked at Rolff, who stopped watching me long enough to nod once. [33]

The girl picked up a pencil from the table and thoughtfully scratched her cheek with it. [...] Rolff's eyes had lost their weariness. They were bright, feverish, fixed on mine. He leaned forward, but kept his hands out of sight below the table. [34]

[Dinah Brand] "Maybe he'd loosen up if he had a drink." The thin man got up and went out of the room. [35]

As shown in chapter 2.4.1.3., Hammett describes his characters in *Red Harvest* – including the narrating Op – through their actions, not through their thoughts. This makes it very hard for the reader to feel surprise or suspense. The Op *might* think or even *know* that Rolff has a gun hidden under the table, and Rolff *might* actually have a gun under the table. Hammett hints that there is an initiating event for suspense, but the reader never knows for sure. Gerrig paraphrases Hitchcock's view, that suspense requires the reader to have enough knowledge to appreciate a range of outcomes: "To create suspense, make your audience aware that there are unattractive alternatives to the one they desire – and then make that attractive outcome seem increasingly distant" (94-95). But as the Op does not share any of his knowledge or his fears with the

reader, they are left in the dark as they cannot even be sure that said “unattractive alternatives” exist in such episodes. Zillmann refers to these unattractive alternatives as “credible endangerments” (203), and argues that a gripping experience of suspense is dependent on them. So although episodes like this certainly evoke *something* in the reader, they certainly do not evoke surprise, suspense or curiosity. Hammett’s technique of hinting at something but not going into it will be discussed in chapter 7.1.

Wolfe (33) points out, that Hammett predominantly trivializes excitement and danger, which negatively affects the amount of thrill a reader might experience. Consider the following example, where the Op, coming straight from dinner, uses the slang-word “noodle” for his head:

“When I had finished eating I went up to my room, fifth floor front. I unlocked the door and went in, snapping on the light. A bullet kissed a hole in the door-frame close to my noodle. More bullets made more holes in door, door-frame and wall, but by that time I had carried my noodle into a safe corner, one out of line with the window.” (*Red Harvest* 65-66)

Although a bullet hits the door-frame just next to his head, the Op does not express fear or panic. He does not mention *how* he gets to a safe place, only *that* he reaches it. *Red Harvest* belongs to what Vorderer (238) classifies as an “action text”, focusing on the description of physical action, as opposed to an “experience text”, which centres around experiences, thoughts and emotions. Hammett’s narrative, although featuring rather detailed descriptions of action in progress, is predominantly declarative, often lacking expressive adjectives and verbs, and hardly ever providing insight into what the Op is thinking.

(Big) Nick’s attempt on the Op’s life is one of the few instances in the novel where the Op expresses genuine fear. However, the Op soon recovers, and his fear is not reflected in Hammett’s style, who chooses a rather prosaic and sober way of narrating the event:

Somebody tripped me. Fear gave me three brains and half a dozen eyes. I was in a tough spot. [...] I tumbled down, twisting around to face the door. My gun was in my hand by the time I hit the floor. Across the street, burly Nick had stepped out of a doorway to pump slugs at us with both hands. I steadied my gun-arm on the floor. Nick’s body showed over the front sight. I squeezed the gun. Nick stopped shooting. He crossed his guns on his chest and went down in a pile on the sidewalk. (*Red Harvest* 52)

At a later point in the novel, Hammett juxtaposes the brutality of a shootout with Noonan's smoking of a cigarette, trivializing it:

The machine-gun by the tree fired, haltingly, experimentally, eight or ten shots. Noonan grinned and let a smoke ring float out of his mouth. The machine-gun settled down to business, grinding out metal like the busy little death factory it was. Noonan blew another smoke ring. (*Red Harvest* 122)

Zillmann argues that “[o]nce liked protagonists and disliked antagonists are in place, the information flow must concentrate on the creation of conditions that credibly endanger the protagonists for appreciably long periods of time” (209). But Hammett’s trivialization of danger and the fact that the reader hardly ever knows what the Op thinks and feels – whether he considers himself to be in danger or not – make it hard for the reader to consider Personville, although deadly, a hazardous environment for the Op. This gets even more problematic when we consider that the Op has to break his code and his ethics in order to survive Personville: “it is always intelligible to feel suspense when we perceive the good to be imperilled” (Carroll 84). Only through the breaking of his code can the Op manipulate his environment, even when he is “officially a criminal” (*Red Harvest* 215). The good is more than just imperilled when the Op goes blood-simple.

6.4. A WORLD OF FALLING BEAMS

In *The Maltese Falcon*, Sam Spade, the protagonist of the novel, tells a story about one of his former clients, Flitcraft, a man with a good job and wife and child. Flitcraft nearly got hit by a falling beam and subsequently disappeared for years:

A beam or something fell eight or ten stories down and smacked the sidewalk alongside him. [...] He was scared stiff of course, he said, but he was more shocked than really frightened. He felt like somebody had taken the lid off life and let him look at the works. [...] The life he knew was a clean orderly sane responsible affair. Now a falling beam had shown him that life was fundamentally none of these things. He, the good citizen-husband-father, could be wiped out between office and restaurant by the accident of a falling beam. He knew then that men died at haphazard like that, and lived only while blind chance spared them. [...] What disturbed him was the discovery that in sensibly ordering his affairs he had got out of step, and not into step, with life. He said he knew before he had gone twenty feet from the fallen beam that he would never know peace again until he had adjusted himself to this new

glimpse of life. [...] Life could be ended for him at random by a falling beam: he would change his life at random by simply going away.²² [...] I don't think he even knew he had settled back naturally into the same groove he had jumped out of in Tacoma. But that's the part of it I always liked. He adjusted himself to beams falling, and then no more of them fell, and he adjusted himself to them not falling. (*Maltese Falcon* 63-64)

Thompson links the disappearance of Flitcraft's to his realization that "man lives only while blind chance spares him" (Thompson 107). If the world of Dupin and Holmes was "a world without chance" (Chernaik 104), Flitcraft's story seems to imply that life is as unpredictable as it is unstable. Hammett does not specify what exactly nearly hit Flitcraft, it was "a beam or something" that enabled him to see more of the world than before. And for a short time, Flitcraft adapts to this randomness, before adjusting himself again to beams not falling. Hammett's daughter Jo remembers what her father thought of the story: it was "as if it were a gift he had received that was just right. As a boy he had wanted to find the Ultimate Truth – how the world operated. And here it was. There was no system except blind chance. Beams falling" (qtd. in DeFino 76). Where a beam would usually signify order and structure, here it "becomes an emblem of chaos, an ideal posing as memory and fact" (ibid. 76). Hammett's characters populate a post-Einsteinian world, where "truth is merely the currency of the world" (ibid. 77). Here we find the major difference between Hammett and his predecessors. In chapter 2.2., Horsley's view on Sherlock Holmes was provided: Holmes "rejects the notion of the meaningless or accidental fact, acting instead on an underlying faith that all signs in a bounded space must be relatable" (Horsley, *Crime Fiction* 27). As exemplified in "House Dick" and "Nightmare Town", Hammett gradually distanced himself from this world-view, and throughout his work he shows us that his characters are aware of this lack of an underlying meaning:

"I'm not as dumb as you think. [...] I guess I can put two and two together."
 "Sometimes the answer's four," I said, "and sometimes it's twenty-two." (Hammett, *Thin Man* 122)

The Op says something of a similar nature in *The Dain Curse*:

²² Johnson (103, 104) points out that Hammett actually left his family after *The Maltese Falcon* was published in a similar way as Flitcraft did.

Nobody thinks clearly, no matter what they pretend. Thinking's a dizzy business, a matter of catching as many of those foggy glimpses as you can and fitting them together the best you can. [...] You're old enough to know that everybody except very crazy people and very stupid people suspect themselves now and then – or whenever they happen to think about it – of not being exactly sane. (Hammett, *Dain Curse* 368)

In a world where order has been disrupted, where beams can fall out of the sky and threaten lives at any moment, it seems impossible to be able to make accurate predictions: according to Strasen (162), to experience suspense in a detective novel, only a limited number of solutions may be available to the reader, and both reader and protagonist of the novel have to be able to make logical predictions regarding plot and storyline. To experience suspense, the possibility of an event happening has to be dependent on at least one predictable factor. Strasen argues that a game of roulette may be suspenseful when one actively participates in the game, but a person may hardly experience tension when he reads about a game of roulette (unless it is integral part of a plot). Yet would it not seem impossible for Hammett to try to make his readers experience suspense while at the same time describing this world of chaos, in which cause and effect are not necessarily related.

Hammett's world is a world in which murders seemingly happen at random, a 'world of falling beams'. The resulting paradox that we have to face is that the contingent world that Hammett tries to describe cannot be suspenseful - or can it?

6.5. ANTI-SUSPENSE IN POISONVILLE

One of the essential problems of *Red Harvest* with regards to its classification as a suspense novel is that Hammett tends to deliberately suppress suspense. In the fewest instances readers are given enough time – or information – to experience suspense, and most of the questions a reader may have are answered in the least satisfactory way: they are answered, as Strasen stresses, "*en passant*" (164), out of the blue. The following paragraph describes the Op's exposure of Robert Albury, the murderer of Donald Willsson:

At first I dressed, went up to the First National Bank, found young Albury, and asked him to certify Wilson's cheque for me. He kept me waiting a while. [...] Finally he brought it back to me, properly

scribbled on. [...] [I] went out and dropped it in the mail-box on the corner.

Then I returned to the bank and said to the boy:

"Now tell me why you killed him?" [...]

"You're an ex-boy-friend of Dinah's who was given the air. You're the only one who knew her intimately who could have known about the certified check in time to phone Mrs. Willsson and Thaler. Willsson was shot with a .32. Banks like that caliber. Maybe the gun you used wasn't a bank gun, but I think it was. [...] You talked too much, son. You were too damned anxious to make your life an open book for me. That's a way you amateur criminals have. You've always got to overdo the frank and open business. (*Red Harvest* 25, 56-58)

The casual way in which the Op confronts Albury comes as unexpected as it is hard to foresee that it was Albury who killed Willsson. Of course one may try to reproduce the Op's investigation: some of the clues are given to the reader at an earlier point, but others, like the circumstance that "banks like that caliber" are never even hinted at. Thus, the sudden revelation comes as a surprise. At no point in the novel did the Op imply that he suspects Albury, and genre conventions would require the Op to solve Willsson's case only at the end of the novel. The initiating event for the Op's investigations in Personville²³ finds closure after the first quarter of the novel. One might argue that this early confrontation can be justified with regards to the novel's serialization in four parts, which would explain the discussed idiosyncrasy, if it was not for Hammett's similar treatment of all of the novel's 28 murders. Gregory's opinion on this topic is that "the classic question – 'Who done it?' – is a moot here, for in *Red Harvest* almost everyone 'done it' (38). The extravagant number of murders almost turn the novel into a parody of the classic detective genre, the question of "Who is the *culprit*" is substituted by "Who is going to die?", which turns to "When will he or she die?" (Gregory 38). As Elihu's reign over the town has made crime the only viable profession in Personville, nearly every character in the novel is guilty for one crime or the other. Table 7 exemplifies this: with nearly every day that passes, the criminal population of Personville is gradually reduced, and with the exception of Donald Willsson, the first victim, everybody on that list is guilty of at least one crime.

²³ (not for his arrival in Personville though, as the reader never finds out why Donald Willsson called for the Op)

1		Day 1
3		
5	Donald Willsson	
7		
9		
11		Day 2
13		
15		
17		
19		
21		
23		
25		
27		
29		
31		
33		Day 3
35		
37		
39	Yakima Shorty	
41		
43		
45		
47		
49		
51	(Big) Nick	
53		
55		
57		
59		
61		
63		
65		
67		
69		Day 4
71		
73		
75		
77	Al Kennedy	
79		
81		
83		
85	Tim Noonan	
87		
89		Day 5
91		
93		
95		
97		
99		
101		
103		
105	Blond Kid	
107		
109		
111		
113		
115		Day 6
117		
119		
121	Detective	
123	4 Men	
125	Jerry Hooper	
127		
129		
131		
133		
135		
137		
139		
141		Day 7
143	Lew Yard	
145	3 bootleggers	
147		
149		
151		
153	Noonan	
155		
157		
159		
161		
163	Dina	
165		Day 8
167		
169		
171		
173	Dan	
175		
177		
179		Day 9
181	Charles P. Dawn	
183		
185		
187		
189		
191		
193	O'Marra	
195	& more	
197	Pete the Finn	Day 10
199	Fat	
201		
203		
205		
207		
209		
211	Reno	
213	Whisper	
215		6 nights in Ogden

Table 7

The Op's last encounter with one of Personville's murderers is with the dying Reno. But the uncovering of his murders hardly feels like a victory for the readers. Shortly after Reno's introduction halfway through the novel it is revealed that he is a killer (he shoots Lew Yard to take his seat at the peace conference). Gregory (38) states that at the end of *Red Harvest* there can be little suspense, because almost every character of the novel is dead by then. Furthermore, explanations for what Gregory calls the main murders of the novel have already been given at this point: Donald Willsson's murderer is exposed in chapter 7, the Op finds out in chapter 14 who killed John Noonan's brother Tim, and in chapter 19, he is able to explain the motives and guilt behind the on-going gang war.

Throughout the novel, the reader realizes more and more that none of the 'traditional labels of detective fiction' (Horsley, *Crime Fiction* 12) can be applied to *Red Harvest*: it is not analytic detective fiction, it is not a whodunit, not a mystery story or a clue-puzzlestory. How then could *Red Harvest* become successful enough to father a whole genre and Hammett himself be marketed as "a master of the detective novel"²⁴? With the help of Minsky's frame-theory, one may find an answer as to the why *Red Harvest* is read as detective fiction, even though the text lacks some of the genre's most important attributes.

²⁴ Review from the Boston Globe on the cover *Red Harvest*.

7. FRAMES

As outlined in chapter 2.4, Hammett's fiction has its roots in the traditional detective story, like his fellow writers he was influenced in one way or the other by the stories of Poe, Holmes and the authors of the Golden Age. But hard-boiled writers were not the only ones familiar with the techniques of these authors, the reading public knew them as well. Gregory states that Hammett

uses the formulaic nature of the detective story like a tuning fork. Relying on the fact that readers come to his books expecting them to be part of the collective consciousness of detective fiction, Hammett plays on the dissonances in the readers' minds between what they think they should be reading and what is actually there (13)

Sven Strasen reaches a similar conclusion when he applies Minsky's frame theory to *Red Harvest*²⁵. Paraphrasing the frame-theory, whenever one is forced to make substantial changes to one's view of a present problem or encounters a situation that one is unfamiliar with, one selects a frame from memory, a structure that helps to create meaning. A frame may be defined as a remembered framework that consists of a top level that represents ideas that are necessarily always true with regards to the frame in question, and lower levels that can be adapted to understand reality by changing smaller details (referred to as terminals or slots) as necessary. Minsky (1) provided his reader with the examples of a living room or a child's birthday party. These serve as frames in the human mind, and it is highly probable that the information contained in the top levels of these frames more or less overlaps between all humans. Attached to these frames is information: how to behave in a certain frame, what to expect next, or how to react if some of the expected information is not confirmed.

Thus a child's birthday party will always be held for a child, but the number of children participating, their age, the games that might or might not be played, these things are prone to vary. In any case, a frame's terminals "are normally already filled with 'default' assignments. Thus, a frame may contain a great many details whose supposition is not specifically warranted by the situation" (Minsky 2).

²⁵ Marvin Minsky presented his theory of frames in the text "A Framework for representing knowledge".

Minsky (16) argues that a *narrative frame* would include conventions for a narrative's protagonists, certain preferred story lines, or typical explanations for different circumstances. This is where Strasen (167) seeks the answer as to why *Red Harvest* is read as a mystery story. He asks why readers think of the mystery-frame when reading the novel, when Hammett fills certain slots that would be essential for the genre with inappropriate objects. For example, the slot 'detective' is filled with the nameless Continental Op, who – in *Red Harvest* – lacks integrity and hardly offers any means of identification for the reader.

Jackendoff (see Strasen 168) revised Minsky's frame theory in 1993, and he concluded that whenever we encounter a new situation, we fill all of the related slots with default-values, whether we are given explicit information or not. Furthermore, we work with what he calls *preference-rules*: one believes in a slot's default-value until proven wrong. When proven wrong, one believes in the next typical characteristic. To exemplify, according to Strasen (168), a reader's default value for the slot 'detective' might include such characteristics as 'moral', 'just', 'honest' and 'being a person of integrity'. Even if the Op does not act according to the default-values of the detective-frame, the reader will still consider him to be an archetypical detective, as he will forcefully convince himself that the Op has to have cogent reasons for his immoral behaviour that the reader is simply not aware of. It seems to be hard for readers to consciously accept frames as improper. Hammett's Op can break many rules until the reader will be forced to ask himself whether he has chosen the right frame for the situation or not, and, as a consequence, accepts that he has used a wrong frame throughout the reading-process. The logical result would be that the reader stopped crediting the Op with qualities that he neither possesses nor pretends to possess.

Jahn followed Jackendoff's train of thoughts (see Strasen 169) and reformulated Grice's four maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner, which aim to for a "maximally effective exchange of information" (26-28) as preference-rules:

- a. Prefer to assume that the speaker is telling you all he knows. (Maxim of quantity)
- b. Prefer to assume that the speaker believes what he intends to convey. (Maxim of quality)
- c. Prefer to assume that the speaker has only one meaning in mind.

- d. Prefer to assume that the speaker is conveying something relevant. (Maxim of relevance)
- e. Prefer to assume that the speaker is speaking literally. (Presumption of literalness) (qtd. in Strasen 169)

Unless he is convinced of the contrary, a reader tends to believe that the author follows these maxims. Because of this, as Strasen (171) argues, the first chapter of *Red Harvest* suffices for the reader to choose the detective/mystery-frame: the novel opens with shady policemen (*Red Harvest* 4) and a mysterious and beautiful "slender blonde woman of something less than thirty" (*Red Harvest* 4), first hints foretell that a crime has occurred (the stains of blood on Mrs. Willsson's slipper). As the mystery-frame activated in the reader's mind, these few frames suffice that the reader fills the remaining frames with default-values. Furthermore, Hammett never defies what Strasen (171) calls the top-levels of mystery-fiction²⁶, instead he occasionally resorts to using archetypal effects of the genre. As a consequence, the reader, although doubting that he or she is reading a mystery-story, never completely dismisses the detective/mystery-frame.

The Op's goal of cleaning Personville has been thoroughly addressed in this thesis, and Strasen (173) interprets the immense difficulty of this task as the main reason why readers sympathise with the Op. Gregory describes *Red Harvest* as a "study [...] of the individual's impotence against an overwhelming destructiveness of corruption, chaos, and death" (175). But, following a thought by Koch, there might still be a reason for the reader to side with the Op:

[A] soccer match, however interesting in itself, turns out to be really gripping only if we resolve to side with one or the other party. [...] if we are free to decide which of two unequal rivals to support, we choose – for egotistic reasons i.e. for the mere sake of suspense – the weaker party. (Koch 39-40)

This leads Strasen to the following conclusion: "Es ist hier also nicht die Identifikation, die die Spannung hervorbringt, sondern der Wunsch nach Spannung schafft Identifikation." ("It is not identification²⁷ that creates suspense, it is the wish for suspense that creates identification" [Strasen 173]).

²⁶ Wieser (169) defines Patricia Highsmith and Patricia Melo as the first ones to do so.

²⁷ Note that Strasen is familiar with Zillmann's use of the terms reader identification and empathy, and states that he purposely chose the term identification with regards to its colloquial use.

8. CONCLUSION: *RED HARVEST* – A DETECTIVE STORY

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, *Red Harvest* cannot be identified as a detective or mystery story in the narrow sense. The Op, who is everything but an archetypal detective, has to adapt to the town's circumstances, not only to survive Personville, but also to cleanse a town that overflows with crime, chaos and murder. Thus, according to Koch's theory and following Strasen's train of thought, Hammett creates a protagonist who is able to survive the chaotic and corrupt world of Personville for the price of his ethics, and – because the reader expects and wishes to feel suspense – is still able to function as a character with whom one is able to sympathise.

Reader expectations, whether fulfilled or not, play an important part as to how suspense is experienced in *Red Harvest*. Hammett's readers were familiar with the conventions of the genre, they were familiar with the protagonists of Poe, Doyle, and the Golden Age writers, and they realized that these writers shared certain stylistic features, a common code. Thompson defines four "relatively consistent patterns" in the detective stories of Poe, Doyle and the Golden Age writers:

1. First, the endings always portray an expiation of evil in the existing society;
2. Secondly, there is always an emphasis on order, an order that comes about through the unravelling of the mystery;
3. Third, to one degree or another, the detective's skill in handling his world is stressed and glorified; and
4. Lastly, the traditional novel usually concludes with a sense of the renewal of society, generally marked by a return to the everyday rhythms of life pictured – or implied – before the commission of the crime. (191-193)

Hammett never dismissed these patterns completely, instead he modulated them. As pointed out, his earlier short stories never stray too far from conventions, but they also never offer complete closure. The expiation of evil and the renewal of society do not occur because a return to order is not possible. Hammett's truth is *relative*, his world it lacks rules. An underlying logic has been substituted by collective greed. Few murderers need motives, and often their motives are based on misunderstandings (as in "House Dick" or "Night Shots", where the assumed victim is furthermore revealed to be the culprit).

Hammett's texts feature a constant re-evaluation of meaning in a time where truth has become a currency (DeFino 77). In *The Maltese Falcon*, Samuel Spade

possesses the amulet of meaning, and so controls the story. [...] Spade has reversed the entire structure of the detective story [...] Where the classic story moves towards, and lays faith in, an objective signification of value in some ideal from the past [...] the hard-boiled story moves out of the mythic signifiers of the past [...] toward a subjective meaning in the present. (DeFino 80-81)

This is exemplified in Flitcraft's story, where it is the instability, not the stability, of a beam that creates meaning: beams are falling. In *Red Harvest*'s last paragraph, the Op attempts to re-evaluate meaning, but he fails:

The Old Man will boil me in oil if he ever finds out what I've been doing. (*Red Harvest* 157)

I might just as well have saved the labor and sweat I had put into trying to make my reports harmless. They didn't fool the Old Man. He gave me merry hell. (*Red Harvest* 216)

The Op cannot fool the Old Man – a man from the 'outside world' who never even sets foot in Personville and sends his men "out to be crucified on suicidal jobs" (*Red Harvest* 116). And neither can Hammett fool the reader into believing that "Personville, under martial law, was developing into a sweet-smelling thornless bed of roses" (*Red Harvest* 216). We know that the source of the town's corruption is still operating, that the Op's next job will again be dangerous and "suicidal".

So if the Op tries to convey meaning to the Old Man in his letters, he fails to do so. Although Personville is the bounded space Horsley referred to (27), not all signs are relatable. Where in Poe and Doyle the souls of individuals can be fathomed and their trains of thoughts can be read by others, the Op cannot even express how his own "mind is running":

"Now what did you bring the ice pick in for?"

"To show you how my mind's running." [...]

"You're crazy."

"I know. That's what I've been telling you." (*Red Harvest* 157)

But whereas the Op tries to make the Old Man (and maybe himself) believe that there indeed is meaning in his actions, Hammett constantly reminds his readers of the opposite. Strasen very convincingly argues that Hammett uses frames to create an illusionary mystery story, but I would propose an opposing view: I

think that Hammett tries to tell the reader that a belief in predictability, causality and in mystery cannot be justified with regards to *life*. This does not make the Op less a detective and *Red Harvest* less a detective story, but it comes at the cost of suspense in a world where “[l]ife could be ended [...] at random by a falling beam” (Hammett, *Maltese Falcon* 64). Raymond Chandler describes Hammett as belonging to a group of writers who “wrote or tried to write realistic mystery fiction” (529). But if mystery needs suspects and motives, and suspense needs “no more than two answers, which answers stand in binary opposition” (Carrol 75), the “realness” of Hammett’s world defies this: life can be ended at random, men die at haphazard and live only by blind chance (Hammett, *Maltese Falcon* 64). At the foundations of Hammett’s writing lies Flitcraft’s “discovery that in sensibly ordering his affairs he had got out of step, and not into step, with life” (ibid.).

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9.5. FIGURES

Figure 1. Chatman, 26

GERMAN SUMMARY

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, ob Dashiell Hammetts 1929 erschienener Roman *Red Harvest* als *Suspense*-Erzählung bezeichnet werden kann. Hammett war ohne Zweifel beeinflusst von Edgar Allen Poe, dem ‚Vater‘ des *mystery*- bzw. *detective*-Genres, und Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, welcher weitgehend zur Popularisierung des Genres beigetragen hat.

Kapitel 2 dieser Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit Hammetts historischem Kontext und versucht Genre-Konventionen auf den Grund zu gehen. Inwieweit wurden die *hard-boiled* Autoren von Poe und Doyle beeinflusst? Welche Techniken wurden übernommen, gegen welche sträubten sie sich? Wie standen sie zu den Schriftstellern des sogenannten *Golden Age of crime fiction*? Die Prohibition in den Vereinigten Staaten kriminalisierte hunderttausende Bürger über Nacht und beeinflusste das Bild vom „Verbrecher“ nachhaltig. Die Urbanisation führte zu einem weiteren Ansteigen der Verbrechensrate. Wissenschaftliche Errungenschaften wie die Glühbirne, der Tonfilm und die Verbreitung des Automobils, aber auch Einsteins Relativitätstheorie und Heisenbergs Unschärferelation prägten nicht nur die Gesellschaft sondern auch etliche Autoren.

Das dritte Kapitel untersucht *story* und *discourse* in *Red Harvest*, welches erstmals in Form einer Serialisierung im amerikanischen Magazin *Black Mask* veröffentlicht wurde. Es wird ebenso auf Hammetts literarischen Stil wie auf die Struktur des Buches eingegangen.

Das Folgekapitel hinterfragt Theorien zur Leseridentifizierung mit Protagonisten und analysiert die Figur von Hammetts Continental Op. Der Op erschien bereits in den frühen Kurzgeschichten von Hammett. Der Verlust seiner Identität und seine Entfremdung werden dem allgemeinen Verlust von Identität in Personville gegenübergestellt. Hierbei wird auch auf zwei Kurzgeschichten von Hammett näher eingegangen, „House Dick“ und „Nightmare Town“. Beide werden im späteren Verlauf mit *Red Harvest* verglichen.

Mit der Überlegung, dass *Red Harvest* eine *Suspense*-Erzählung ist, stellt sich eine weitere Frage: Verfügt das Buch über ein Quest-Motiv? Während

der Quest ein inhärenter Bestandteil der Detektivliteratur zu sein scheint und sich ein *Questmodell* mehr oder weniger problemlos auf frühe Kriminalgeschichten anwenden lässt, zeigen sich hier in Bezug auf *Red Harvest* diverse Schwierigkeiten, da Hammett die Konventionen des Genres bricht.

Im Folgekapitel werden diverse Theorien zu *Mystery* und zu *Suspense* vorgestellt. Es wird versucht diese auf *Red Harvest* anzuwenden. Wie bereits mehrere Wissenschaftler festgestellt haben, stellt sich dies als problematisch dar. Strasens Anwendung von Minskys Frametheorie scheint hier jedoch eine Lösung zu bieten. Es gelingt Hammett durch sogenannte *Frames* Erwartungshaltungen im Leser hervorzurufen. So kann argumentiert werden, dass Hammetts Werk als Teil des Genres wahrgenommen wird, obwohl Genre-Konventionen gebrochen werden.

Das letzte Kapitel der Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit Strasens Argument, dass *Red Harvest* ein Spannungsgefühl im Leser weckt. Strasen argumentiert, dass sich der Leser durch einen Wunsch nach Spannung mit dem Protagonisten identifiziert, und dass sich durch eben diese Identifikation Spannung ergibt. Strasen setzt voraus, dass Hammett bewusst versucht, *Red Harvest* als Teil des Kriminalgenres darzustellen. Dagegen steht, dass *Red Harvest* zwar eine Detektivgeschichte ist – denn der Continental Op ist ohne Zweifel ein Detektiv – Hammett dem Leser jedoch immer wieder vor Augen führt, dass in „seiner Welt“ – im starken Kontrast zu Doyle und Poe – kein Platz für eine rationale Erklärung, für Kausalität ist. Der Continental Op scheitert letztlich daran, Bedeutung in den Geschehnissen zu finden. Die Frage nach *Suspense* und *Mystery* ist aufgrund der Willkürlichkeit, die Hammetts Welt regiert, obsolet.

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