Genre and Loss: The Impossibility of Restoration in 20th Century Detective Fiction

Kathryn Hendrickson

Marquette University

Follow this and additional works at: https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/905
GENRE AND LOSS: THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF RESTORATION IN 20TH CENTURY DETECTIVE FICTION

by

Kathryn Hendrickson

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, WI

May 2020
My project situates loss, rather than restoration, as the identifying trait of the detective fiction genre. I contend that instead of providing a problem-solution model that gives readers closure and reinforces simplified understandings of good and evil, detective fiction refuses to build comforting narratives that rehabilitate a corrupted world. Detective fiction, with its continual attempts to provide an unobtainable solution, ruminates on the impossibility of restoration.

Genre and Loss: The Impossibility of Restoration in 20th Century Detective Fiction divides into four chapters, each addressing a perceived subdivision of the detective fiction genre in order to illuminate the unifying connections between them. In each chapter, I pair transatlantic texts in order to highlight the genre’s cohesive, continuing orientation, across nations and time periods, around different enactments of loss. Using Chandler’s The High Window and Sayers’s Busman’s Honeymoon, I begin by contradicting an oft-replicated division drawn between the supposed comfort and security of the British cosies and the corrupt world of the American hard-boileds. Next, I argue that the protagonists of Fleming’s Casino Royale and Thompson’s The Killer Inside Me experience internal loss that prevents them from operating as authoritative producers of solutions. La Bern’s Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square and Highsmith’s The Glass Cell parallel the detective’s loss of individual authority with the inability of the protagonists to prevent the attenuation of control over their own self-identity. Then, I analyze McIvanney’s Laidlaw and Block’s The Sins of the Fathers to contend that the detectives use their vocation to acknowledge loss as an unavoidable element of life, and to embrace it by prioritizing a continual interrogation of certainty over false closure achieved through criminal convictions. Finally, I conclude the project with a brief exploration of Auster’s City of Glass and Miéville’s The City and The City. These more recent texts highlight the necessity of engaging in ongoing interpretation rather than the possibility of locating a stable answer. Even as the genre of detective fiction develops further, its trajectory continues to trace, and retrace, the steps around the same central theme, the inability to find closure, or an endpoint of restoration.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kathryn Hendrickson

Ray Bradbury once said that “We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out.” Throughout this process, I have been incredibly blessed, surrounded by people who quietly and lovingly helped fill me — academically, mentally, and emotionally. I am immensely grateful for you all.

First, it is only right to thank the people who have supported me my entire life — my family, those who loved and supported me no matter whether they understood what I was doing, or why I was doing it. My mother, who taught me how to read and stocked our shelves with detective fiction. My father, whose insistence on regular essay-writing served as my first introduction to academic writing. To my myriad siblings. I’ve just grouped you up, but you are each special and unique, and have supported me in your own individual ways. Naomi, Jo, Caeli, Iva — your artistic expressions of love are all over my apartment, and they cheer me whenever I see them. Thank you for pretending to care about detectives even when you didn’t feel like it. Toby, I’m not convinced you know what a dissertation is yet, but yes, this means I will take care of our books when they’re sick. The A-squared crowd — Zeke, Lydia, and Kristi — what would I have done without you all? You have cheered me, fed me, sheltered me, and you even visited me in the depths of Milwaukee winters. Thank you.

This would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of my dissertation committee. Thank you for your advice, and for your patience with my propensity to skim right along the edges of every deadline. Dr. Amy Blair, my gracious director whose guidance, advice, and wisdom made this whole project possible. You helped me find the shape for my ideas; read and commented on multiple drafts of varying levels of coherence; and, perhaps most importantly, forced me to stop reading and start writing. Dr. Gerry Canavan, your breadth of knowledge helped me on numerous occasions, and I appreciate your openness and incisiveness that helped me figure out how to say what I wanted to say. Dr. James South, you crossed department lines to be a part of this committee, based on very little knowledge of me and what I wanted to do. Thank you for being so open and willing to be a part of this project. You all taught me so much not just about how to write a dissertation, but about how to talk about my research.

Writing a dissertation is incredibly isolating, and I appreciate all the friends who refused to let me slip away. Amanda, you have supported my writing for years; thank you for your cheery confidence in me. The cohort of graduate students at Marquette University (and now beyond) formed a core element of my time here, and, even without the dissertation, your friendships make these past years precious to me. Anna, Blue, Burch —
you helped keep me sane. I can’t describe everything you’ve added that has enriched my life, but I will say that, at the very least, my apartment décor will certainly never be the same. Brady — our relationship had a rocky start, but one of the real gifts of this PhD program has been your friendship. Brian Kenna, thank you for reminding me to have fun. Andy Hoffmann, Liam Drislane, Alex Frissell, Heather Noble, Sarah Crompton: you all, and so many others, offered support, academic chats, encouragement, editing help, and so much more.

There are numerous other people deserving of thanks, so here is to you (in no particular order). Dill and Atticus Brick — thank you for your generosity, grace, supportive words, train-track building, and coloring pages (you can decide which of you gets credit for which things). Dr. John Curran, your continual generosity inspires me. Dr. Sarah Wadsworth, you have taught me so much about grace and professionalism with kindness in academia. Sheri Hochtritt, you reminded me to write; gave me space and time in which to write; and have been a beacon of encouragement. Dr. Jenn Fishman, you got me started on genre theory and taught me so much about how to function in an academic environment. LIBRARIANS! Where would any student be without librarians? Sad, forlorn, and lost in the depths of murky databases, probably. Many thanks to all of the librarians who were part of my graduate experience: Elizabeth Gibes, Heather James, Mary Fremm, Molly Larkin, Nia Schudson, Valerie Beech and all the rest of the wonderful people at Raynor.

And to close, Brick. I can’t not thank you. And I can’t thank you enough. We met within a week of me arriving in Milwaukee and we’ve spent the intervening years reading, writing, debating, teaching, collaborating … we’ve spent the years together. Any label I try to apply to our friendship feels inadequate, limiting, or mawkish. So instead of trying to find a label, or to hammer words onto a framework that will only be defeated by their refusal to conform, I will say this: to have a friendship that works, even on the days when it feels broken, when I feel broken, has been an incredible, wonderful gift. You astound me and challenge me in all the very best of ways. To end with another nod to Bradbury, we have our hands in each other’s clay, and you have-shaped me to be more, and not less.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Uniting the Cosies and the Hard-boileds</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Destabilizing the Detective’s Moral Center</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Criminalization of Innocence</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Dangers of Closure to Detection</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

At its core, this project is about genre fiction. However, invoking genre even in this apparently straightforward way carries complications with it. The term “genre fiction” indicates a category of fiction generally considered as distinct from “serious” or “literary” fiction. While this division is certainly less true than in the past, it continues to be perpetuated — both in literary scholarship and in more public reviews — and creates a hierarchy which elevates literary fiction above genre fiction, a hierarchy that persists despite ongoing resistance to the use of genre categories as organizational schemas. This deployment of the term “genre” bases itself in formalist conceptions of genre that use the construction and textual elements of a work to label it as belonging to a specific genre category. Issues arise, however, when a work fails to fit neatly into one category or another, or when individuals disagree about the correct label. At that point, the category is stretched or adapted to suit one perspective or another, revealing that while value judgments based on genre classifications might seem to rely on rigid boundaries, those categories are actually flexible. People can manipulate the inclusion and exclusion of texts from categories based on their own priorities. Hans R. Jauss argues that genres exist relationally and are thus impossible to define. Genres are not self-defining; their form is not automatically evident and consistent. Nor are they self-contained, but relational. We can understand a genre as defined against or among others, not in isolation. In Bakhtinian terms, genre is inherently dialogic; there is no unmediated understanding. John Frow argues that genres are “performative structures that shape the world in the very process of putting it into speech” (1633). Genres function more like interpretive frames than categories. Readers do not blindly inherit the frames, but are involved in the ongoing
construction of interpretive frames and in their choice, as reader, of which frames to use in approaching the interpretation of a text. Genre labels are empty terms that can offer no genuine, consistent data about the texts they schematize. Using the labels to distinguish between genre fiction and literary fiction reflects personal judgments or aesthetic valuations rather than a real gap between types of texts. The categories have no independent existences, but are used relationally to build definitions. A work of literary fiction can be recognized as such because it is not genre fiction; there is no neutral or independent instantiation, but a dialogic interchange that creates distinctions and reinforces hierarchies.

Hierarchies are often used to argue about what should or should not be studied and what should or should not be read. In “Reading as Poaching,” Michel de Certeau grounds his debate in the idea of consumption as passive, pointing out that “the elite upset about the "low level" of journalism or television always assumes that the public is moulded by the products imposed on it” (166). De Certeau resists this view of reading, arguing that the act of reading is in fact an interpretive action. Readers do not only receive texts, but actively engage in the interpretation of them. He argues that “the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control. It becomes a text only in its relation to the exteriority of the reader” (170). Through the process of being read, the text gains an identity. I see this engaged interpretation extending to genre as well. The strain between expressive and instrumental ideas of genre reflects the tension between active and passive reading. Passive reading assumes a quiescent audience, content to absorb what they are given. Instrumental approaches to genre — genre as form-based labeling that
communicates information about the texts to which they are applied — assume the same, but with static categories as opposed to static texts.

Genre, like language, functions socially. The ways in which genre is conceptualized, applied, and negotiated are as important as the utilitarian benefits of implementing a system of categorization. My work acknowledges an instrumental use of genre, but also pushes beyond that to seeing genre as expressive; it is not merely an instrument to accomplish a task, but also carries meaning. Genres express interpretive ways of seeing. Moving toward an understanding of the expressive function of genre enables an interrogation of cultural hierarchies that otherwise feel bred-in-bone. It allows for a distinction between the ways the term “popular” is implemented in regard to genre fiction — parsing the dissimilitude between genre fiction as fiction that is popular, enjoyed by a large and varied number of people, and genre fiction, with its popularity, dismissed as an inferior kind of writing. Detective fiction is an enduringly popular genre, enthusiastically read by broad audiences since its inception. It is also a popular genre fiction, cast as disposable literature incapable of reaching the higher echelons of literary excellence, never able to escape its association with the pulps, inexpensive magazines published on low-quality, pulpable paper. Shifting away from the instrumental approach to genre resists its use as a label generator signifying hierarchical values. This project reads detective fiction as a genre that invites the participation of the reader, arguing against a passive acceptance of the genre based on traditional interpretations that cast it merely as a disposable, or escapist, form of literature, and instead investigates the shifting facets of the genre, pushing against the boundaries of those interpretations and asking how, and why, they were erected and maintained. My goal is not to replicate the
interpretations of the past and the ways in which they focused on providing a monolithic narrative of the detective fiction genre’s development, but to avoid a false sense of closure and develop space for further, more nuanced, explorations.

The genre of detective fiction has extensive, cross-cultural roots that make it difficult to provide a comprehensive history, but a standardized history filters throughout the scholarship. French publishers printed Eugene Francois Vidocq’s *Memoirs* in 1834. Vidocq’s *Memoirs* claimed to be the autobiography of the first real detective and narrated Vidocq’s daring exploits as a member of the police force. Edgar Allen Poe, in America, refined detective fiction, publishing the short story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in 1841. This story encapsulates many of the formal elements associated with the genre such as the genius detective (in this story C. Auguste Dupin), the tracing of clues, and the emphasis on rationality as the path to solution. The next important entry in the standard chronology appears, decades later in the 1880s, with the introduction of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. Holmes as detective serves as archetype for understanding the detective figure. Julian Symons, in *Bloody Murder*, admits to the plethora of other fictional detectives contemporary to Holmes but says that their “metal is nine carat quality where the best of the Holmes stories are almost pure gold.” Similarly, Charles Brownson prioritizes Holmes in his study of the detective figure, arguing that “[w]ith Holmes all of the elements that define the genre come together” (7). Moving into the early twentieth century, histories of the genre tend to establish a nationalistic split, a division between American hard-boileds and British cosies. This early split then serves as the foundation for an ongoing splintering into myriad subgenres such as police procedurals, crime fiction, and noir.
The selectiveness of the genre’s canonized chronology supports continued interpretations of detective fiction as a limited genre. Preventing alternative texts or authors from entering the timeline maintains the accepted boundaries of the genre as a closed category. In maintaining this standardized history of the genre’s development, authors and critics are able to argue that it is a fixed genre that, in orbiting around the detective and the detective’s search for a solution, reinforces a consistent narrative that reinforces and stabilizes the boundaries of society. The “true” detective fiction, British detective fiction, flourished during what is known as a Golden Age, ruled over by female Queens of Crime like Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, and Margery Allingham. These cosies were characterized by a focus on the eccentric, typically private, detective in a cozy, country setting. The poet and critic W. H. Auden loved detective fiction and it is his understanding of what it should be — as laid out in his essay “The Guilty Vicarage” — that serves as a central pillar of the theorization of the British cosies. He situates the detective as a stabilizing force who is able to replace the scenes of corruption — as represented by the murder, and murdered body, corrupting the idyllic setting — with the proper narrative of ‘what actually happened’ in order for justice to be served and proper social order to be maintained. Subgenres such as the cosies, hard-boileds, thrillers, spy fiction, and police procedurals do not mesh neatly with the belief in the detective solely as the restorer of order. Instead, they present alternatives - some detectives do uphold societal boundaries, working to erase the stain on society manifested through the presence of the bloody corpse, but others question the boundaries, or break the lines that have been drawn. This inconsistency in the function of the detective
character runs counter to a claim that the genre can be defined by the presence of the figure of the detective operating as a stabilizing force.

While my progression through texts is a chronological one, the intention is not to tie the changes in genre to a specific point in time and claim that point as the reason for the genre flex, but to show continual commonality both across the decades and between nations. While noted scholar Stephen Knight, among others, has argued for a “standard” progression in the development of detective fiction, that type of argument serves to reinforce the rigid boundaries of genre as understood through conformity to a specific set of rules. The widespread sanctioning of a reductive history of the detective fiction genre, with its selectiveness about which texts and authors deserve to be remembered, results in the constriction of the genre down to this single interpretation; who we remember shapes how we remember what really happened. For example, forgetting detectives like Andrew Forrester’s Mrs. Gladden (1864) or Emmunska Orczy’s Lady Molly of Scotland Yard (1910) enables a default view of the archetypical detective as male. Also unacknowledged is the failure of even the canonized archetypes to live up to Auden’s conception. Not only is Sherlock Holmes himself inconsistent in relying only on a distant rationality, frequently invoking the importance of imagination to detection (“Silver Blaze,” “The Adventure of the Norwood Builder”), but he also frequently fails to either solve the case or protect his clients (“The Dancing Men” “The Five Pips”).

Unexpectedly, these foundational moments in the genre of detective fiction resist the establishment of categorizing boundaries. They contain failures and losses that undermine conceptualizing the genre, even across the standard canon, as essentially a genre of recovery, restoration, or even reassurance.
This project resists a separatist approach to the detective fiction genre. Instead of emphasizing points of potential division, like geographic origin or stylistic approaches, I want to focus on connections. In order to do so, I urge a departure from the use of formal rules to define detective fiction as a rigid category that is implemented as a heuristic for evaluating texts and where they belong. I counter the traditional narratives of the development of detective fiction, with its promulgation of nationalistic divides, through the use of a purposefully transnational approach. Past approaches have focused very deliberately on reading British and American detective fiction traditions as separate, and that separation, while producing instructive analyses of the separate styles in relation to culture, has prevented them from being understood as companion parts of a whole. Resisting this isolationist urge is not meant to echo the same kind of practices of inclusion and exclusion, writ on a larger scale, but to point out that divergences within the genre have been interpreted as departures from the genre, setting the different branches in opposition to one another. In bringing these traditions together for analysis, I aim to highlight and counter this trend.

Rather than establishing my interpretation of the genre around either cosy or hard-boiled strains, I bring in examples of subgenres of detective fiction and examine the ways in which they, despite differences in style, point to an overall focus in detective fiction not on the restoration of stability, but on loss and a lack of stability. I break with the tradition of tracing the roots of detective fiction back to the nineteenth century and begin in the 1930s, when the genre is already well-established in both Britain and America. I also argue that neither the American hard-boiled style nor the British domestic/cosy style is actually restricted to the nation with which it is associated. Additionally, the authors
were not writing in isolation from each other, but read the works produced on the other side of the ocean. In order to resist that entrenched division, I pair one American and one British text in each chapter. By putting a British and an American text into direct conversation with each other, this project opens up space to understand new unities/coherences within the genre. Beginning in the 1930s also points the study away from questions of how and why the genre began, and towards an understanding of the common threads between the family of texts as they develop over the following decades. Instead of providing a problem-solution model that gives closure and reinforces boundaries, detective fiction fails to provide narratives with closure, or even to admit that total resolution is possible. My approach does not embrace a deeply chronological and historical approach that enables a tracing of the development of the genre, but focuses instead on the consistent thematics of the genre, consistency revealed in similarities between texts usually treated as points of divergence.

Any attempt to pin down a single, solid definition of genre — especially a definition that suits all of the functions for which the words is used — ends in failure; the term contains too many polyphonic echoes of itself. But using an understanding of genre as expressive pries open new possibilities for interpretations of genre fiction. In departing from attempts to view detective fiction as a genre of social stability, my goal is to deepen the recognition of the ability of detective fictions to comment on and interact with culture and audience. Ultimately, I argue for a relocation of the intercession point of the genre, what Jacques Derrida might call the “trait that marks membership.” While Derrida’s work with the relationships among genres does highlight that any genre mark is not only inclusive but exclusive, and that categorizing or assigning distinguishing genre features
requires a recognition that the genres will always remain open and interrelated, locating a shared trait allows a movement towards a more developed understanding of the detective genre as a whole. My intent is to re-evaluate detective fiction not based on preconceptions of differences caused by geographic divisions, but through a different lens that will allow a deeper understanding of the texts themselves, as well as the readings they provoke. Instead of constructing a different category of genre, a new instrumental application that simply uses different criteria with which to include or exclude texts, I want to discover what meanings are expressed through the readings those texts provoke. Previous interpretations of the genre’s identity build around prohibitions, utilizing rules of exclusion as instruments for building boundaries. These constructed boundaries, somewhat ironically, created a closed, unevolvable genre in order to argue that the expressive trait of that genre is closure. Resisting these constructions reveals detective fiction as built around narratives of loss and attempted — though not successful — recovery. By placing the focus on a generic maintenance of nonclosure, detective fiction becomes not a story of restoration and perpetuation of a cultural balance, but a story of what cannot be refound.

In the first chapter, I work against an early division in the genre, the split between British cosies and American hard-boileds. I use Chandler’s *The High Window* (1942) and Sayers’s *Busman’s Honeymoon* (1937) as representative texts within each strand of the genre in order to highlight their shared recognition of the detective’s inability to restore the world to an uncorrupted state. In both books, the final scenes reject the possibility of locating closure within complete renewal and instead focus on the lingering consequences of the crimes. The structural momentum of the novels build to the moment
of revelation when the questions of guilt are answered, but moves beyond those moments to indicate the ongoing effects that the detective’s work cannot counter. I note that while Philip Marlowe, Chandler’s secretly sentimental knight-errant, and Lord Peter Wimsey, Sayers’s aristocratic detective, do end their investigations successfully, those successes are tempered by a pervasive awareness of absence. Marlowe finds satisfaction in rescuing the emotionally abused Merle from a dangerous situation and returning her to her family, but that reunion cannot undo her mental trauma. Wimsey’s gratification in knowing that an innocent person will not be condemned as a murderer is tempered by his understanding that, by identifying the real murderer, he implicates himself in that man’s death sentence. In neither case does the identification of a criminal offer a restorative endpoint; the loss created by murder cannot be recouped.

The second chapter addresses the divorce between detective fiction and thrillers, using Ian Fleming’s *Casino Royale* (1953) and Jim Thompson’s *The Killer Inside Me* (1952). I argue that in this initial iteration of the character, James Bond continues, rather than diverges from, the narratives of detection and loss. He does not provide a single, stable narrative that defines what has happened, but instead prepares for a multiplicity of possible narrative turns. His detection centers the story, propelling it forward, but his centrality is responsive, not dictatorial. Bond’s failure to predict Vesper’s betrayal displays the human limitations of his character and leads to an existential questioning of both his profession and his allegiance. Similarly, Thompson’s Lou Ford, the protagonist and sheriff’s deputy, manifests ever-shifting responses to the uncontrollable nature of the world in which he lives. Like Bond, Ford questions holding to any allegiance outside of himself. Unlike Bond, Ford chooses to abandon his loyalties and is slowly revealed to the
reader as a serial killer. His public persona, the official police officer, is a pretense to a wholeness that does not actually exist and for the loss of which no explanation is ever provided. There is no solution to the problem of Ford, or Ford’s violent, homicidal desires. Both characters experience internal loss, an erosion of their beliefs in the possibility of a stable milieu. Within these novels, detectives are not depicted as authoritative producers of solution; the centralizing figure fails to provide answers that lead to the stabilizing restoration of safety and becomes implicated as part of the ontological quandary.

In the third chapter, I examine novels that have been classified as crime novels because of their minimization of detective figures. This minimization exposes detection as a complicit, even instrumental, element of social and judicial mechanisms of control. The work of detection transforms accused individuals into criminals, confining them to social roles laden with expectations for correct behavior. The authoritative detective figure functions merely as a corporate cog, and is thus unable to provide reassurance to themselves or others. I argue that in Arthur La Bern’s *Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square* (1966) and Patricia Highsmith’s *The Glass Cell* (1964), the detective’s loss of authority parallels with the inability of the protagonists to maintain control over their own self-identity. Knowing themselves to be innocent and yet labeled as guilty, the protagonists, Richard Blamey and Philip Carter, face societal expectations of behavior to which they have no desire to conform, but are forced to due to the assemblage of social pressures brought to bear. Their assurance of their own innocence crumbles under the weight of the identities imposed on them by the legal system. As opposed to Lou Ford’s journey in the previous chapter, in which the reality of guilt overwhelmed his constructed
innocence, situating an objective reality as dominant, the reality of Carter and Blamey’s
innocence cannot resist the externally imposed identities of guilt. By the end of their
respective novels, Blamey and Carter become murderers, completely subsumed into the
system’s assigning of identity. The authority of the system prioritizes the result of the
investigation — the punishment of a criminal, any criminalized person — over correctly
locating the guilty party. Neither the detective nor the accused citizens have the necessary
power to dictate solution or to avoid the proscriptions of the legal system.

In the final chapter, I argue that the detectives use their vocation to resist the
reification inherent in the legal system by prioritizing a continual questioning, an ongoing
interrogation of the world, over false closure achieved through criminal convictions. This
casts loss not only as an unavoidable element of life, but as beneficial, since closure is a
false reality, a façade covering over the complexities of life in order to uphold the status
quo. William McIlvanney’s Laidlaw (1977) and Lawrence Block’s The Sins of the
Fathers (1976) contain detectives operating within an authoritarian system that
demonstrates its own worth through the quick conclusion of criminal cases. The
detectives, however, actively work to resist the dehumanizing effects of that system by
refusing to equate the legal termination of a case with genuine closure. Block’s detective,
Matthew Scudder accidentally shoots a child while preventing a robbery and receives a
commendation from the police force. He realizes that working for the police means
supporting a system that views people as fuel for its own maintenance. Scudder quits his
job with the police and spends his time investigating cases that the police consider closed.
Jack Laidlaw, McIlvanney’s eponymous police detective, pushes against the boundaries
of the legal system by refusing to condemn murderers as monsters. He illuminates the
cultural influences surrounding the scene of the crime and urges others to acknowledge
the connections between the individual and their environment. Both Laidlaw and Scudder
recognize the dehumanization undergirding the social mechanisms of control exerted by
the legal system. In order to counter that dehumanization, the detectives look beyond the
closure achieved by criminal convictions and embrace a continual questioning, an
interrogation of the cultural assumptions that undergird conceptions of criminality and
humanity. In their embrasure of certainty as an act of resistance, the detectives
demonstrate that not only is it impossible to provide a complete solution, but ascribing to
any absolute answer is harmful.

My project situates loss, rather than restoration, as the identifying trait of the
detective fiction genre. I resist both traditional and more recent interpretations of
detective fiction categorize the genre as a limited one, providing only reassuring fictions
that serve to stabilize the boundaries of society by continually orbiting around the
detective’s quest for a solution. I contend that rather than providing a problem-solution
model that gives readers closure through solution and identification — and in so doing
reinforces simplified understandings of good and evil — detective fiction refuses to build
comforting narratives that rehabilitate a corrupted world. While the detective has
frequently been seen as the agent of recovery, this project brings into discussion the
effects caused by the loss of a central, steadying figure, and the ways in which that
central figure has been corrupted, changed, or misplaced within different subgenres —
revealing that the detective can be lost and can also work as an agent contributing to loss.
Crime, especially murder, irrevocably alters whatever it touches. Detective fiction, with its continual attempts to provide an unobtainable solution, ruminates on the impossibility of restoration.
UNITING THE COSIES AND THE HARD-BOILEDs

One of the strongest, and earliest, divisions drawn in the detective fiction genre lies between the English, or British, classic mysteries, and the American hard-boiled novels.¹ Within the canonical timeline of the detective fiction genre, Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes establishes the detective archetype in the late nineteenth century. Then, in that standard progression, the claim is that British and the American authors begin to diverge in their approach to detective fiction in the early twentieth century. Colin Watson identifies this division as the establishment of detective fiction’s “twin limbs, the tale of detection and the felony-based adventure story” (41). These twin limbs formed a not-insignificant bulk of texts supporting the reading taking place in both Britain and the United States, especially by the 1920s. The 1870 Education Act in England formally required children to attend school. Individual states in the United States began enacting compulsory education laws as early as 1852 (Massachusetts), with Mississippi being the last state to do so, in 1918. Widespread schooling led to widespread literacy, greatly increasing the number of readers in the nations and creating a market for more popular writing. Paper was cheap, and publishing boomed, feeding the market not only a steady supply of novels, but also newspapers, pamphlets, and other periodicals. Watson estimated that a British “buyer or borrower of books in the 1920s and 1930s could choose from between 180 and 210 brand new titles every week” (29). Similarly,

¹ Terms are disputed, but for this chapter I will be using “English classic” to refer to the traditional British mystery — also sometimes referred to as the British classic, the pastoral mystery, or simply mystery. For the hard-boiled style, I have made a similar choice, though other scholars use terms such as ‘pulps,’ “noir,” or ‘private eye.’ These decisions were made based on 1) the frequency with which these terms are applied to these strains of the genre; 2) the connections between the title of the strain and the traits for which it is best known.
Erin A. Smith points out that the “pulp-magazine business boomed between the wars” (19). For both nations, popular fiction assumed a central cultural role, and detective fiction played a large part in that — both with the huge rise in popularity of the American pulps such as *Black Mask* and *Dime Detective*, and with England’s enjoyment of what has since been coined as “The Golden Age of Detective Fiction.” The separate identifications of these strains of detective fiction developed nearly simultaneously and distinguishing between them is a commonplace in scholarship on detective fiction. This division maintains the subgenres as presenting different views of the world, with the pulps showing grim, dark view of the world — in which loss is prevalent — but Golden Age texts showing a sanitized world in which any loss is recuperated or erased through the process of detection. However, reading the texts themselves reveals the similarities between the texts, uncovering a consistent view of the detective as unable to restore the world to an uncorrupted state.

**Chandler and Murder as a Simple Art**

Raymond Chandler’s famous essay “The Simple Art of Murder” is frequently cited as providing the definitive exposition of the differences between the English classics and the American hard-boileds. He states that hard-boiled pulps focus on developing realism, as all good fiction should, while the English classics are unable to tell stories that are anything more than artificial puzzles. Chandler argues that all fiction is meant to be realistic, and that the level of reality achieved in any text correlates directly with the quality of that text.\(^2\) Good fiction is realistic. Because quality and realism have

---

\(^2\) *The Simple Art of Murder* as quoted in this chapter is not the original 1944 version, but the later version originally printed in Howard Haycraft’s *The Art of the Mystery Story* (1946). This later version, notably, begins with a discussion of realism and its value to the mystery — a discussion missing from the original,
this relationship of correspondence, the any author striving to write something of merit is also striving to write something realistic. However, within detective fiction, reaching that goal is difficult since successfully balancing the demands of careful, incisive plotting with the need to create compelling, charismatic characters — both essential to realistic fiction, according to Chandler — is an onerous task for any single author to accomplish. These difficulties become compounded by the English classic style, a style which Chandler dismisses in the 1946 version of the essay with the proposition that there “is a very simple statement to be made about all these stories: they do not really come off intellectually as problems, and they do not come off artistically as fiction. They are too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world.” English classics do not meet Chandler’s standards for first class literature as he sees them as too artificial and unable, because of their genre, to achieve the necessary level of reality. Detective fiction scholarship relies heavily on this essay; it is nearly impossible to find a scholar who fails to at least reference the text in their investigations of the genre. Chandler sets the foundation for the discussion that followed — a foundation made apparent by the ways in which his views are echoed by the now-standard, accepted definitions.

Standard interpretations of the English classic replicate Chandler’s perspective, casting it as conservative in ideology, but also in execution — bound by rules that limit what can structurally take place within the text. The textual emphasis falls on the puzzle-to-solution elements and the establishment of rules of fair play between the readers and the writers. Multiple attempts to codify those rules exist, with one of the most famous being the ten rules laid out by Ronald Knox in his “Introduction” to *The Best Detective*
Stories of 1928. These rules were supported, a decade later, by S. S. Van Dine’s twenty rules. Both of these well-known authors of detective fiction endeavored to pin down not only what made a detective story work, but what was permissible for a detective story to contain. Both sets emphasize the competitive relationship between author and reader. Knox’s rules prohibit the author from using “cheap tricks” like unknown twins, Chinamen, and the detective as criminal, emphasizing that the information necessary to solve the mystery must be available to the readers, not hidden by the author (or the author’s proxy, the detective). Van Dine summarizes the fair play perspective, stating, “[t]he detective story is a game. It is more - it is a sporting event. And the author must play fair with the reader. He can no more resort to trickeries and deceptions and still retain his honesty than if he cheated in a bridge game” (“Art of Suspense” 219). As Dove states, “detective fiction is structurally a conservative genre, and its conservativism is that of the game. Its rules are not mere constraints but are necessary to permit the game to be played” (Dove 41). Within the typically closed setting of the classic, the clues are scattered, to be reassembled in a race between the fictional detective and the real-life reader, with the winner of the game the first to solve the puzzle. The invocation of the game as metaphor is consistent. Each text becomes a board, across which the writer challenges the reader to a duel of wits, moving the plot pieces and characters in permissible patterns, while trying to combine familiar elements into something unfamiliar, unguessable, defeating the reader by creating an opaque endgame. Structurally, the English classic becomes classified as a game, and a game may model reality, but not be mistaken for it, a conclusion in agreement with Chandler’s claims.

The English classic’s purported conservativism has also been seen as appearing in
the perspective provided by the text to the reader, casting it as a genre that reinforces a view of the world as essentially stable and unchanging. Carl Malmgren summarizes this view: “An essential difference between the worlds of mystery and detective fiction [British classic and American hard-boiled] can be expressed in the notion of centeredness: mystery fiction presupposes a centered world; detective fiction, a decentered world” (Malmgren 119). This centered world, as Monica Lott points out, potentially serves to reassure readers: “it brought a sense of comfort to readers, reassuring them that within the confines of several hundred pages someone was keeping order and making sure justice was administered and a peaceful equilibrium restored by the last page.” (Lott 104). In this world, murder exists as a violence upsetting an orderly world, “the formula constrains an author to present a momentary, individualized disruption of an otherwise perfect world” (Winston and Mellerski *The Public Eye* 612). The corpse sprawled across the flowered carpet of the drawing room is a stain needing to be expunged in order for the world to return to normal, to what W. H. Auden refers to as “a state of innocence” (“Guilty Vicarage” 412). G. K. Chesterton makes a similar argument, pointing to crime as an encroaching darkness that must be eradicated; the “fundamental principle [of the English classic], as of every other story and every other mystery, is not darkness but light” (qtd. in Malmgren 228). Restoring the light and banishing the dark matches Julian Symons’ alliance between detective fiction and fairy tales; he argues that the magical lies the genre tells are the lies of stability and security.

The English classic is, however, only one side of the binary discussed by Chandler. Chandler presents Dashiell Hammett as the progenitor of a new kind of detective fiction, the hard-boiled. Hammett is framed as an innovator, transporting the
mystery story from the “arid” formula of the English classic to the more “realistic”
American style. Chandler’s emphasis is on his perception of the clear superiority of the
American style with its ability to achieve realism — the standard of quality he established
as the one to which all fiction aspires. Of Hammett, he says, “He put these people down
on paper as they are, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily
used for these purposes.” Hammett’s characters are real people who speak a real language
and who exist in a real world, “a hostile urban environment [that] was accompanied by an
abrupt shift from the artificial gentility of the classical detective story” (Scaggs 56). In
contrast with the stable, conservativism of the English classic, the American hard-boiled
emphasizes a world of danger, but a dangerous world that was also familiar to readers.
Van Dover argues that American detective fiction’s popularity was predicated on that
very ordinariness, that it thrived by proving that ordinary people committing crimes for
ordinary motives and by ordinary means could be as interesting (and perhaps a great deal
more meaningful) as any over-thought homicide committed by a barrister with
Polynesian dagger in a locked room in a vicarage” (Van Dover American 18). Chandler’s
viewpoint of the American hard-boiled, again, is widely accepted and disseminated. The
real-world status of the hard-boiled becomes the focus.

The hard-boiled novels are seen as operating within a more realistic world, a
world with shades of grey in which no one is truly innocent, so there is no stable state to
which to return. In Sean McCann’s Gumshoe America he claims that detective fiction is
“centrally concerned with a fundamental premise of liberal theory — the rule of law —
and with the tensions fundamental to democratic societies that constantly threw that
principle into doubt” (6). The constant demonstration of failure creates what James
Sandoe describes as “a sense of imminent violence, of a lurking of evil often overlapping another such premonition and blurring the picture” (qtd. in Ball 114). The world of the hard-boiled novel is not a world waiting for redemption, for restoration to a state of grace. As Van Dover states, “[t]here is here no paradise to be regained” (Van Dover American 17).

This binaric division between American hard-boiled detective fiction and English classic detective fiction as theorized by Chandler has grown to be so widely accepted in the scholarship of the genre as to be a commonplace. As mentioned earlier, it is rare to find a scholar who fails to invoke this division, let alone disagree with it. The polemicism of “The Simple Art of Murder” makes it eminently useful for perpetuating an equally polemic view of the detective fiction genre. Chandler’s theorization of detective fiction is key to this acceptance of the division. Because of this, interrogating the validity of his theories, and the amount of self-interest and self-promotion his words contain, is vital. Avoiding the traditional scholarly perpetuation of Chandler’s assertions enables an investigation into the underlying motivations of the division; prevents a replication of his problematic conclusions based on personal, economic and nationalistic motivations; and reveals the meta-narrative of the genre as itself a site of cultural contestation.

Chandler arrived in the world of pulps relatively late in life. Born in the United States, he moved to Britain at a young age where he was educated in the English public school system. After fighting in World War I, he returned to California and successfully entered into the booming oil industry. During this time, because of his need for entertainment, Chandler turned to the inexpensive pulps. He found them inspiring. “[I]t struck me that some of the writing was pretty forceful and honest, even though it had its
crude aspect. I decided that this might be a good way to try to learn to write fiction and get paid a small amount of money at the same time” (Chandler “Speaking” 26). His studies of the pulps and their style paid off; his stories were readily accepted at *Black Mask*, frequently without revisions, and he quickly began to publish novels as well (Hiney). *The Big Sleep* was famously finished in three months, plot and characters having been cannibalized (his term) from his earlier published stories.

Reading this summary of Chandler’s beginnings as a writer, the temptation is to dismiss him as a dabbler, or as someone who viewed writing as a fall-back, not a genuine career to be pursued. That temptation must be resisted. Though he developed as an author in middle-age, his fervent focus on writing can be seen in his deep, almost desperate desire to prove his own worth. “His letters bristle with self-conscious references to literary detection. A writer of mysteries, he feared, could never rival serious mainstream novelists; by working in a suspect, if not despised, subgenre, the mystery writer either confirms his own triteness or goes slumming artistically” (Wolfe 2). Stuffing his letters with references to his future plans, Chandler hoped to write something better, something of a higher quality than he had written before — something that would earn him recognition as a great writer.

Accompanying his desire to demonstrate worth was a generous dollop of writerly ego. In his letters, though he often critiques himself and his work, he also clearly viewed himself as an artist capable of great literature, more than a hack mass-producing trash to be disposed of in the pulps. Running through his letters is a clear thread of self-definition that frames himself as a more-than-competent writer. Even when being self-disparaging, his explanations are framed in terms that highlight his strengths, not his weaknesses. For
instance, though he acknowledges his lack of plotting abilities, he pairs that acknowledgment with his praise of writing that creates strong characters and a claim that writers cannot expect to be masters at crafting both of these major elements. He says, “The coolheaded constructionist does not also come across with lively characters, sharp dialogue, a sense of pace, and an acute use of observed detail” (Chandler “Simple Art” 5). Chandler then points out the superiority of the writing that creates vivid characters, moving the focus away from plotting (his weakness) and into an area in which he thrives.

In his biography of Chandler, Jerry Speir says, “For Chandler, stories (or plots), particularly as developed in detective novels [English classics], were little more than an artificial puzzle . . . His own intent was considerably less formulaic” (117). Chandler viewed detailed plots as contrived, with that sense of contrivance distancing the work from reality, lowering the quality of the text. When Chandler criticizes others’ work, his criticism frequently involves what he views as an incorrect focus on plot. He declares angrily that “the only writers left who have anything to say are those who write about practically nothing and monkey around with odd ways of doing it” (Chandler Letters 59). Chandler claimed that form and plot mattered little to him. “How could I possibly care a button about the detective story as a form? All I’m looking for is an excuse for certain experiments in dramatic dialogue. To justify them I have to have plot and situation; but fundamentally I care almost nothing about either” (Chandler and MacShane 114).

Reviews of Chandler’s works underscore his consistent ability to meet that stated goal. Early reviews of both Playback (1959) and The High Window (1942) mention his “vivid characters” (The Age) and his “characters drawn with considerable skill” (Montreal Gazette). Ray Gould, in his review of The Lady in the Lake (1943), stated that “[a]ll of
the author’s characters are tremendously realistic in portrayal.” Chandler’s prioritization of characters, then, is not restricted to his critical work, but is a consistent perspective demonstrated through his own writing in the genre. He believes that the best writer are those who share his own motivations and priorities. My critique of this position, his assumption that his strengths are the ideals toward which writers should aspire, is not meant to imply that Chandler was not a great writer or that he does not deservedly reap appropriate praise. Rather, I want to illuminate the ways in which Chandler himself benefits from the rhetorical framework he establishes. If a writer cannot craft both plot and characters expertly, and too much attention to a plot only serves to weaken to work, then a focus on character — and an accompanying deficiency in plot construction — is not a sign of a weak writer, but of a strong one who strives to write works of the highest quality. Chandler’s claims about what makes detective fiction great should be read with an awareness of Chandler as a skilled writer intent on demonstrating his own worth.

Sayers and the English Classic

Of course, no matter how influential, a single person and their views do not dominate on their own with no other support. Among the first women to receive a degree from Oxford, Dorothy L. Sayers wrote, and supported herself through her writing, throughout her life. The burgeoning market of detective fiction afforded her the opportunity to maintain financial independence, and she freely admitted that she turned to the genre in order to make money: “There is no exciting mystery about my life . . .
Neither is there any mystery about why I “turned” – or rather “returned” – from writing detective fiction to writing books of a different kind. The reason was purely financial. I began writing detective fiction in the hope of making enough money to live on” (Sayers
“Letter to Milano”). Financial motivations and lofty ideals of ‘high art’ rarely walk hand in hand, however, writing for profit does not mean that an author focuses on a mindless production of low-quality work. Sayers frequently expressed a fondness for the genre and a recognition of its unique challenges. In a 1952 letter she offers her opinion of a recently published novel, “The author can write, and might one day write a good detective story, if she will take the form seriously, but I doubt if she really wants to – I think she just thinks the detective story the easiest modern form to play with, which it isn't really” (Sayers “Miss Fildes”). For many years, Sayers was a member of the Detection Club in London, a club consisting of well-known authors of detective fiction.³ During some of these years, she served as president of the Club, and is sometimes credited with authorship of the oath of membership, a snippet of which reads: “Do you promise that your detectives shall well and truly detect the crimes presented to them, using those wits which it may please you to bestow upon them and not placing reliance on, nor making use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo-Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence or the Act of God?”

Sayers’ expertise and knowledge of writing and detective fiction was well-acknowledged during her lifetime. She spent several years reviewing detective fiction for The Sunday Times and was often asked to deliver lectures on the subject. Like Chandler, Sayers had the opportunity to express her theories about the genre. She wrote two different introductions for The Omnibus of Crime, one in 1928 and the second in 1932. The first sketches out her understanding of the history and development of detective fiction, placing detective fiction proper firmly within the purview of games, a form which, she claims, has been pursued because of the desires of the reading public:

³ The Detection Club and its focus on “fair play” between authors and writers aligns with the earlier discussion on genre codification — unsurprising since the aforementioned Ronald Knox was a member.
“connoisseurs have come, more and more, to call for a story which puts them on an equal footing with the detective himself, as regards all clues and discoveries” (Sayers “Omnibus 1928”). For Sayers, the form as it has developed possesses a kind of perfection that other, less rigid, formulas can never achieve — though, still, it cannot ever be true literature. By 1932, Sayers focuses less on the formulaic nature of the English classic, and more on the issues of characters within the stories, decrying the way in which character is sacrificed for plot: “the great difficulty of being plausible makes itself felt. If the work is scamped at this point, there will be nasty gaps in the continuity of the story, which can only be filled up by wresting something out of shape. That something, I am sorry to say, is usually the psychology of the characters” (Sayers “Omnibus 1932” 4).

Sayers does not dismiss her earlier focus on the puzzle-game of the genre, but certainly modifies it. She quotes Anthony Berkeley, another English writer, as saying, “the days of the old crime-puzzle pure and simple, relying entirely upon plot and without any added attractions of character . . . are, if not numbered, at any rate in the hands of the auditors . . . The puzzle element will no doubt remain, but it will become a puzzle of character rather than a puzzle of time, place, motive and opportunity” (qtd. in Sayers “Omnibus 1932” 7). Just as Chandler does, Sayers seeks to distinguish one strain of crime fiction from another in a hierarchical way. Her hierarchy, though, is the opposite of Chandler’s; he denigrates the English classic strain and she elevates it above those written in his hard-boiled style.

Despite their apparent opposition, the theorizations of the genre made by Chandler and Sayers build a bridge between the different strains and highlight ways in which they are connected. Both authors desire to elevate their own style, but they are also desire the same things — mainly strong, realistic characters. Sayers explains “if we
[readers of fiction] don't believe in the characters, then we shall not care two pins whether
the things that happen to them are “true to life” or not” (Sayers “Popkiss”). Chandler
builds the idea of reality in fiction around the idea of character, specifically the character
of the detective. For Chandler, the detective provides the quality of redemption necessary
to make the fiction art, and the beginning of his description of that detective has become
remarkably well-known. “Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself
mean” (Chandler “Simple Art). But beyond the inner qualities of the detective, Chandler
points to the outer world of the detective, the place the detective must inhabit. “He talks
as the man of his age talks . . . He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it
belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in” (Chandler “Simple
Art”). The reality of the world and the reality of the character are interconnected, and the
separate encapsulations of detective fiction by Sayers and Chandler — both oft-cited
experts — together agree on priorities of the genre and the ways in which it is able to
connect with readers, by showing them a real world that requires investment.

Resisting the Artificial Divide

Since the division between hard-boiled and English classic strains of detective
fiction is neither so stark, nor so complete as many believe it to be, its existence and
maintenance deserves further resistance. The significance of separation, of categorizing
the strains as separate genres, lies in the significance of genres as open and mediated
categories. John Frow emphasizes the dynamic nature of genre, saying, “Genres are
neither self-identical nor self-contained. Each genre’s form is relative to those of all other
genres in the same synchronic system, and it changes as that system evolves” (Frow
1629). The hard-boiled and the English classic have been placed relative to one another
in a diametrically opposed binary. Exploding that binary places them in a different relationship which changes not only the two strains themselves, but a change in the system which they inhabit, a change in the conception of what detective fiction is. Genre works dynamically within its network both as a receptor and a creator of meaning; genres belong to, and help create, networks of meaning, “[G]enres create effects of reality and truth that are central to the way the world is understood” (Frow 1632). Similarly, Daniel Chandler claims that “[g]enres are not simply features of texts, but are mediating frameworks between texts, makers, and interpreters” (D. Chandler 8). Texts that inhabit, or spring from, those genres inevitably find homes in those same frameworks — themselves operated on by author, reader, critic, and culture. A formation of genre, then, is an interactive, interpolative process that can never definitively be fixed, but is always being engaged and re-engaged in each new interaction (by reader and/or interpreter) with the text. The application of a label to a text becomes part of the meaning-making of that text as it signals to the other readers/interpreters what expectations and framework to bring with them into their own reading. Reading is creating meaning and, as de Certeau points out, takes place at intersections between text, influences, and readers (172). With reading as a participatory process in which the reader engages with the work to produce meaning, then critical scholarship must be even more participatory as the scholar works to not just produce meaning for themselves, but for others. The critical consensus within scholarship therefore equals a kind of meaning-production. The desires of the critics shape the ways in which the works take on meaning, and then that meaning is disseminated to others. Separating The High Window and Busman’s Honeymoon using a constructed categorical line reinforces oppositional readings.
Adopting that oppositional framework contributes to divisions not just between the strains, but also between nations. Reasons for building this division are far less explored than the reasons justifying it though even Chandler himself felt “The Simple Art of Murder” presented his thoughts in too absolute of terms. He wrote to a friend, “You must not take a polemic piece of writing like my own article from the Atlantic too literally. I could have written a piece of propaganda in favor of the English detective story just as easily. All polemic writing is overstated” (Chandler *Speaking* 52). Unsurprisingly, money plays a factor in dividing the two strains. Smith points out that in the United States the American hard-boileds directly competed with detective novels being imported from Britain. Chandler’s antagonistic polemic transforms in this framework into an act of aggression attempting to carve out control of the economic market for detective fiction. Though Sayers does not explicitly attack the hard-boileds, she does exclude them from her theorization of detective fiction, silencing their influence through exclusion. And while the rule-making regarding what can and cannot be done in detective fiction were treated with a certain amount of levity, embraced with a tongue-in-cheek attitude by the members of the Detection Club, those rules and other attempts at codifying the genre make clear that Chandler was not alone in wanting to establish protective boundaries for his chosen genre. The authors of the British classics, according to detective fiction scholar Gill Plain, “were keen that the psuedo-intellectual appeal of the detective story should not be contaminated by association with the truly mass-market popularity of the thriller,” and it is for this reason that the rules and codifications were invented (“Embracing” 4). The existence of the rules — the ways in which they persevere, are preserved, and are continually resuscitated in critical scholarship —
underscores that, as much as there was an American desire to frame the hard-boileds and the British classics — the British authors were equally invested in maintaining that separation.

National identity plays a prevalent role in establishing the binary as well. In *Making the Detective Story American*, J. K. Van Dover theorizes that some of the tension between the British and the American detective stories is the tension of empire. “The westward course of empire now applied even in the pre-eminent genre of popular literature” (12). The rejection of the British standard for detective fiction then becomes an assertion of independence, a claim that the essence of the world is different than that dictated by the British. What Chandler does, then, is re-enact the struggle of the American man, pitting him against the restrictive, feminized, strictures of the British-style mystery in order to demonstrate the inherent (masculine) superiority of the hard-boiled. Chandler’s essay, besides promoting his own work, also manifests a desire to cling to a masculinized identity. Smith’s exploration of Chandler’s positioning of the hard-boileds focuses on the “heavily gendered terms” he uses as he links “the otherwise familiar gender- and class-boundary work with issues of nationalism . . . The “Americanness” that . . . constituted literary excellence was inevitably embodied by a man, a rugged individual who struggled to maintain his autonomy in the face of an entrapping society and a wilderness to be conquered, both cast in unmistakably feminine terms” (Smith 39). The mythologizing of American identity gets co-opted into the mythologizing of hard-boiled fiction.

The American identity as a determinedly masculine one is widely accepted, and the conceptualization of hard-boiled fiction follows similar lines. Chandler locates his
distrust of “unreal” (or Anglicized) writing in questions of gender. He declared, “I had a conviction that the superficial neatness of slick writing was only natural when it was feminine” (Chandler and McShane 87). Positioning his writing in opposition to slick, feminine writing, enters into the binarization of gender and casts his work as masculine. “Hard-boiled writing culture created an all-male imagined community that included writers, readers, and the he-manly heroes of this fiction. For some, reading pulp fiction was also a refusal to read slick magazines, which trafficked in genteel, feminine fare” (Smith 32). This emphasis on the hard-boileds’ connections with masculinity is not unique. Glover claims that “The rise of the hard-boiled detective was a refurbishing of already existing masculine forms, drawing imperialist credentials from the North American prairies” (Glover “Dreams” 74). In drawing on these forms and traditions of masculinity, a hard-boiled community centered on constructing and maintaining specifically Americanized forms of masculinity. An American masculine identity is one formed in opposition to femininity.

Britain possesses a different gendering of nation, making divisions between the hard-boileds and the English classics not as simple as casting America as male and England as female, even though Britain had recently emerged from the lengthy reign of Queen Victoria, and Britannia, the symbolic embodiment of the nation, was female. Paul Ward suggests that “the centrality of a female figure encourages men to her defense” (Ward 38). Britain’s history of empire certainly supports that type of gendered duality in which colonization was undertaken by real British men, while Britain itself maintained an identity as the mother country. Men acted as the public extension of the country, while women were the private anchors, motivating public action. After all, what made war
worth the struggle? As seen through war propaganda, Graham Dawson explains, the value was the protection of women, children and the home hearth. “Within nationalist discourse, martial masculinity was complemented by a vision of domestic femininity, at home with the children and requiring protection. The nation itself came to be conceived as a gendered entity” (2). Post-war Britain maintained that heavily gendered identity. Undergoing a period of domestication, national focus looked to the sheltering and security of the private sphere. Ward suggests this focus is deliberately restorative in a nation recovering from the trauma of World War I. “It may at first seem contradictory to associate the reconstruction of masculinity with the location of the nation within the home. Yet these were complementary projects. Masculinity and femininity were ‘restored’ in harmony within the home, in turn aiding national unity” (51). In building a national identity for Britain, unlike the masculine/feminine opposition of America, both genders are present, but perform different roles. The presence of the feminine identity as part of the gendering of the British nation allows scholars like Chandler to use it as part of the divide between strains of detective fiction.

Erasure is part of any broad generalization. In discussing national character, what gets erased is generally the experiences, dreams, fears, and desires of minorities — along with the role minorities played in enabling, adapting, or defracting the broader ‘hegemony’ of national identity and what it meant to be American (very different for Chester Himes than for Raymond Chandler) or to be British (very different for James Hadley Chase than for Dorothy L. Sayers). Nationalism and identity is not a solid object,

---

4 In discussing Britishness and British identity, there are a lot of nuances that should be acknowledged — not least of which is the fact that Britishness is a singular term that covers a multiplicity of others — Irishness, Welshness, Scottishness, Englishness, etc. — Ina Habermann highlights the ‘covering’ aspect of the term Britishness and the way it obscures other terms in Myth, Memory, and the Middlebrow: Priestley,
but an edifice that is continually under (shifting) construction. Britishness or
Americanness is always forming and reforming. “Cultural imaginaries are not unified
phenomena but conflictive, their forms being contested and refashioned by social
movements pursuing interests . . . A continual process of exclusion, incorporation and
exchange is at work, in which imaginative connections and splits are reconfirmed or
modified” (Dawson 61-62). The mythologizing of Britishness and Americanness is a
process, and the elisions established by that process work to defend the formation of the
myth against corrupting outside influences.

The Figure of the Detective

By now, an argument claiming that popular culture artifacts reflect the culture in
which they are produced is widespread, as is the accompanying claim that reading those
artifacts allows them to also operate on the culture in which they are read. Popular
fiction’s interaction with a mass reading public places its artifacts as sites of cultural
contestation. Sites of cultural contestation involve what David Glover and Scott
McCracken refer to as a “dialectic between the comfort of familiarity and the possibilities
of the new” (12). Cementing conceptions of detective fiction, standing at the core of the
genre, is the figure of the detective. The detective navigates the twists and turns of the
narrative, fighting to emerge triumphant with the solution, the answers. Because of its
centrality to the genre, the detective transforms into a site of contestation, not just
culturally but also critically. Just as battles wage over the definitional boundaries of the
detective fiction genre, so too are lines drawn in the struggle to explain the role of the
detective in the text and the necessary actions and understandings the figure must inhabit.

Du Maurier and the Symbolic Form of Englishness.
These questions assume more significance as the detective is acknowledged as a figure who operates on and within culture. As a site of contestation, questions about the detective’s identity and role are also questions about the genre’s identity and role. The familiar and the possible become locked in a debate about what the detective can do, and what those possibilities mean for genre and the readers.

Ideas of the protagonist are heavily relied upon in conceptualizing the detective fiction genre. The detective’s role, frequently, is used to highlight splits in interpretive structures and to justify generic divisions. However, any single construction of the detective figure is limiting and problematic. The detective figure does not possess a singular identity, purpose, function, or role across detective fictions, even those purportedly within the same subgenres. In his book *The Figure of the Detective*, Charles Brownson explores the nuances of the paradigmatic figure and the ways in which he sees that figure acting and re-acting within cultural contexts. He argues that the job of the detective is to get and deploy knowledge; the detective does not simply unearth already-existing knowledge — a neutral uncovering of an absolute reality — but implements it in a fashion that is a cultural decision for either good or evil (6). Though Brownson couches his understanding of the detective figure within a dialectic distinction between warm and cool knowledge — a distinction that reinforces a (problematic) dissociation between emotion and rationality — his emphasis on knowledge’s primacy in the detective’s relationship to the world enables further exploration into the similarities between the hard-boileds and the English classics.

The stereotypical hard-boiled detective lives in the city, navigating, coming to know, the liminal places of the corrupted urban space. Known for his individuality and
his solitary nature, he traces his literary lineage from the audacious, aggressive frontier heroes of the American West. Transplanted from the wilderness of the frontier into the dark alleys of the city, the private eye explores and exposes the new American wilderness, the dangerous, mysterious, and incomprehensible metropolis. The hard-boiled detective is a tough, masculine, hard-talking, hard-drinking, and solitary man. He, like the style of writing that spawned him, was grimly realistic. Fredric Jameson, in his exploration of the American detective, relates him to the picaresque figure who links different elements, or scenes, together without fully inhabiting any of them. “In doing this the detective in a sense once again fulfills the demands of the function of knowledge rather than of lived experience: through him we are able to see, to know, the society as a whole, but he does not really stand for any genuine experience of it” (7). For Jameson, the detective functions as knowledge, but not experiential knowledge that is able to be transferred. In other words, the detective absorbs their knowledge through their own experience, but all that can be shared is that knowledge, not the experience. The detective’s knowledge is a learned one, predicated on a perspective that is semi-detached from the environment; the detective engages with the world around him, but never really belongs to it. The mental work of detection is frequently masked by a display of violence — in the form of guns, fisticuffs, and words — through which the detective shows dominance over criminality. “The detective’s often overwhelming task was to lay the hidden places open to light and, ultimately, through mortal combat, to bring a savage world under control” (McCann 44). It is the detective who must know, and conquer, the world, a broken world with wholeness only provided by the detective’s knowledge. Each of the detective’s experiences forms a separate vignette, each one only anchored to the
next through the detective’s presence. Without the detective, there is no sense of a cohesive, non-fragmented whole. Finally, though not least importantly, the hard-boiled detective is a detective. The work of detection is his work, his employment, and he treats it with due gravity.

Philip Marlowe, Raymond Chandler’s famous detective, is perhaps the archetype of the hard-boiled private eye. Scholars consistently link him to Chandler’s own description of what a detective should be — the man “who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid” (Chandler “Simple Art”). Supporting the interpretation of Marlowe as that heroic figure are claims that he descends from the figure of the romantic knight-errant or the sentimental hero. E. M. Beekman places Marlowe firmly as a knight-figure. He says, “If Marlowe were an archetype he would be a somber knight on a never finished quest, recharging his faith by adversity” (166). Occupying this position of heroism, Marlowe inhabits what it means to be a hard-boiled hero — to be a hard man, unafraid, who dedicates himself to rooting out the savage meanness of the city streets.

Moving to the English classic, conceptualizing the detective story as a game is also to cast the detective as a player in the game. The author pushes the reader to construct the wrong story in order for the detective to enter and, not so easily led astray by the red herrings strewn across the path, isolate the correct story and present it not only to the other characters within the text, but also to the adrift reader outside of the text. “The Detective’s power consists not only in rescuing reality from illusion but in convincing everyone that the newly uncovered state of affairs is the truth” (Brownson 56-57). Most often he is an aristocratic figure descended directly from the upper-class Sherlock Holmes, sharing many of the same (often unlikeable) characteristics including a
sense of superiority and a dismissive attitude towards things he considers inconsequential. He is often seen as an under-developed character, lacking the emotional depth necessary to be seen as more than an embodied brain, understandable if the only purpose he is meant to serve is that of pursuing answers and bringing to light the correct solution. To combat the sense of blankness his lack of depth might produce, he frequently has eccentric traits and mannerisms like Hercule Poirot’s mustaches and fondness for vegetable marrows. An amateur detective, the English classic detective may have familial or fraternal links to official law enforcement, but detection is not his paid vocation. Rather, detection functions as a hobby or a distraction. Even with those traces of dilettantism, he is an authoritative figure with the ability to navigate, and resolve, what Auden calls the dialectic between innocence and guilt. Detection is an act of rationality, a mental exercise maintained through careful observation and logical reasoning. His world is one that is stable and unchanging; the rules of the world are reliable, accessible, and interpretable. His world is “an essentially static world, in which neither social order nor human nature is subject to radical change” (Malmgren 119). In this conception, the detective exists to uncover and reveal the knowledge that already exists. In a way, the detective is a humanized mechanism, tasked with a duty which, if properly carried out, can only have a single result. Knowledge, like the world, is seen as static. It exists. All that must be done is a collection and processing — the detective sieves through the mass of information and extracts the kernels that, when weighed together, equal a solution to the mystery and an identification of the culprit.

The archetype for the English classic examined in this chapter is Dorothy L. Sayers’ character Lord Peter. Edmund Wilson, an outspoken detractor of detective
fiction, dismisses him as “a dreadful conventional English nobleman of the casual and
debonair kind, with the embarrassing name of Lord Peter Wimsey” (392). Auden, despite
his confessed appreciation for the English classic style, describes him as a as a “priggish
superman.” Scaggs aligns Wimsey with the other major detectives of the style: “In the
British school, the detectives of Dorothy Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh, and
Michael Innes are all upper-class establishment figures, and they are all deeply
implicated in the social order that they work to protect; indeed, Sayers’s Lord Peter
Wimsey is even a member of the peerage” (49). All of these assessments of Wimsey link
him tightly to the English classic tradition — his aristocracy, his breadth of knowledge,
and his tendency to always be correct. From his first appearance in *Whose Body?* (1923),
Wimsey demonstrates an investment in detection and keen attention to detail that
contrasts with his foppish appearance and attitude. As an investigator, Wimsey possesses
the ability to read the trivialities of the world and translate them into a harmonious and
understandable whole.

Even these brief sketches of the two archetypes in their broadest outlines reveals
the ease with which they assume positions in opposition to one another: the grim, hard-
boiled detective versus the gentlemanly intellectual; a violent struggle for solution versus
an intellectual quest for answers. Lord Peter Wimsey and Philip Marlowe are oft-cited
examples of each style, and their individual characteristics are used to shore up the
binarization of detective fiction. The temptation is to let each define itself against what it
is not, rather than what it is, a troubling proposition when the figures take center stage in
discussions of what detective fiction is and what it can do. The easy slide into this binaric
opposition, while enticing — especially as an entry-point into genre categorizations —
feeds directly into the oversimplification of these figures — and by extension the genre — which I am trying to resist. And it is an oversimplification, one easily illustrated by acknowledging the female detectives, of whom there were several early figures who remain mostly unacknowledged by the standard timeline of detective fiction’s development. In Britain, *The Female Detective* (1864) by Andrew Forrester and *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864) by Stephen Williams Hayward were early serializations to feature female detectives, and clearly pre-dated Sherlock Holmes. A similarly early work, one of the first novels about a female detective is Leonard Merrick’s *Mr Bazalgette’s Agent* (1888). Baronness Emmunska Orczy, today best known for *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, wrote and published *Lady Mary Of Scotland Yard* in 1910. Famously, Agatha Christie’s most popular female detective is the elderly, yet intelligent, Jane Marple, introduced in the 1920s and continuing to appear in novels through the 1970s. The U.S. has a similarly lengthy tradition of female detectives. HP Halsey published a dime novel titled *The Lady Detective* in 1880. Albert Aiken wrote *The Actress Detective*. Mary Roberts Reinhart launched her series about investigating nurse Hilda Adams with *The Buckled Bag* (1914). In the late 1930s, Erle Stanley Gardner — the famous Black Mask writer — created Bertha Cool. And none of this mentions perhaps the most famous female detective of all, Nancy Drew, created by the Stratemeyer syndicate in 1930 and still being republished, rewritten, and revisited.\(^5\) Breaking down

the perceived binaric structure opens up space for stronger, more thorough investigations into the different nuances of detective fiction. Marlowe’s city-dwelling, gritty lifestyle clearly differs from Lord Peter’s luxurious interactions with rare port and recherché manuscript within the cozy confines of No. 10 Piccadilly. Interrogating the boundaries of the accepted division between the two figures, and beginning to break them down, requires a recognition of their similarities — in narrative role, use of knowledge, and perspectives on the world.

The High Window (1942) is Chandler’s third novel featuring Marlowe. He is far better known for Farewell, My Lovely (1940) or The Long Goodbye (1953). In his recent book Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality, Jameson asks, “why do we not feel its shape nearly as strongly and sharply as the other novels; why is it more of a failure, formally, than the unsuccessful Little Sister; above all, how can we make judgments like these when The High Window also contains some of the most remarkable and archetypal episodes in Chandler?” (44). Much of Jameson’s focus is on collapsing the gap between character and setting, proposing space as a character that can be mapped as part of an imagined, or imaginable, totality. While spatiality and mapping hold special significance within detective fiction, and I hope to explore them further in a later chapter, for now the focus is Jameson’s assessment of The High Window. He claims that it is the lack of Nature — a world that exists beyond where character or author can explore — that causes The High Window to be viewed as a lesser work (81). Whatever the reason for it, The High Window’s lack of critical acclaim benefits my project. Some scholarship on

---

Chandler demonstrates an eagerness to exempt him — or at least certain of his novels — from the detective fiction genre. Working with a text that has notably *not* been cast as exceptional avoids those arguments that seek to disconnect it from the genre in which it exists and acknowledges the importance of studying texts as part of the system to which they belong, not as exempted from it.

*The High Window* is a difficult novel to summarize. Marlowe moves through a series of vignettes that appear at first to be connected only by his presence and the most tenuous of causal threads, most of which rely on hypothesis. He is hired by Mrs. Elizabeth Bright Murdock to retrieve the stolen Brasher Doubloon, which she informs him has been stolen by her missing daughter-in-law. Leslie Murdock, Mrs. Murdock’s son and husband of the missing daughter-in-law, attempts to bribe Marlowe for information about why he’s been hired, releasing, in the process, the information that his wife isn’t really missing; she has left him. Marlowe discovers he is being tailed by a young man who claims to also be a private eye. In trying to learn the history of the Brasher Doubloon, Marlowe finds a body. Throughout the rest of the novel, there are blackmailing plots, another body, a counterfeiting ring, more blackmail, and another — years old — murder. All of these disparate elements, characters, and circumstances are known and understood through Marlowe’s investigation, his quest for the truth.

Pairing *The High Window* with Dorothy L. Sayers’s *Busman’s Honeymoon* takes advantage of a similar critical attitude towards the novel. *Gaudy Night* (1935) is perhaps

---

7 Generally, this is due to a question of quality and the argument presented is that Chandler’s work is of such a high quality, that it cannot be detective fiction. Notably, Edmund Wilson’s famous teardown of the detective genre — “Who Cares Who Killed Roger Aykroyd” — exempts Chandler, saying that he “does not really belong to this school . . . What he writes is a novel of adventure.” With critics’ derisive calls echoing throughout cultural criticism, it is small wonder that there is a desire to isolate what is felt to be extraordinary from a condemned morass of texts. However, this desire must be resisted.
the most lauded of Sayers’s detective novels and immediately precedes *Busman’s Honeymoon* in the series. *Busman’s Honeymoon* (1937) is the eleventh, and final, novel written by Dorothy L. Sayers featuring her detective, Lord Peter Wimsey.8 It is the fourth to feature Wimsey and his romantic interest, Harriet Vane. In this novel, Peter and Harriet finally marry and embark on their honeymoon, heading to Harriet’s childhood dreamhouse, purchased for her (by Wimsey) as a wedding present. The first third of the novel builds slowly, focusing on the interactions of the characters; the travel difficulties; and the complications of attempting to settle into their new home when the prior inhabitant has disappeared without informing anyone of the existence of the house’s new owners. The remaining two-thirds are spent investigating an unexpected body while also negotiating the new demands of partnership entailed by their marriage.

**Marlowe, Authority, and Detection**

Both Marlowe and Wimsey treat detection as more than a job, or a hobby. Isolating their motivations within a question of professional/unprofessional ignores the way the desire to detect, to solve, extends beyond professional interest or personal curiosity. Both sublimate the other elements of their lives and prioritize detection. Marlowe wonders how it would feel if hunting for a murderer was only a job: “I sat there holding the neck of the cool bottle and wondering how it would feel to be a homicide dick and find bodies lying around and not mind at all, not have to sneak out wiping door-knobs, not have to ponder how much I could tell without hurting a client and how little I could tell without too badly hurting myself. I decided I wouldn’t like it” (Chandler THW

---

8 Sayers did begin drafting another novel, finished and published posthumously by Jill Walsh as *Thrones, Dominions* in 1998.
If detection became merely a job for Marlowe, he would lose his own integrity and sense of self.

Throughout *The High Window* Marlowe builds his identity around his vocation as a detective. He sees detection as more than simply a job to be completed for a wage, though he charges what he believes to be a fair price, twenty-five dollars a day plus expenses. “Of course, you can get detective work done at any price — just like legal work. Or dental work. I’m not an organization. I’m just one man and I work at just one case at a time. I take risks” (Chandler *THW* 9). His regard for money, for anything beyond utilitarian survival, is negligible. Bribe money flows out from Marlowe, useful for its power of persuasion over others. However, when offered a bribe by his client’s son, Marlowe shrugs off the suggestion with a reminder that an easily bribable man would not be a reliable private eye. He says, “If a man in my line of work is handed a job, does he go around answering questions about it to anyone that gets curious?” Marlowe’s immediate instinct uses his role as a detective to shield himself from corrupting influences. Paid to investigate the theft of the Brasher doubloon, Marlowe’s focus is on finishing that job, not on working for his own benefit. Throughout the negotiation between Mrs. Bright-Murdock as she decides whether or not to employ him, Marlow makes clear that his priority will be to find a solution to the mystery, not to work blindly toward accomplishing her ends: “If you hire me, you’ll get all the delicacy I have. I don’t have enough delicacy, maybe you’d better not hire me. For instance, I take it you don’t want your daughter-in-law framed. I’m not delicate enough for that” (Chandler *THW* 15). His single focus on a case, completed to his satisfaction, not only to his client’s, is his normal mode of existence, not an extraordinary occasion.
Marlowe subsumes himself to the demands of detection because he sees his work as necessary, especially given his skeptical attitude toward the law and the law’s official representatives, the police. He says, “The law, whatever it is, is a matter of give-and-take, Mrs. Murdock. Like most other things” (Chandler THW 164). He sees the law as essentially limited in its purview, not able to reach “beyond the green lights of the precinct station” (Chandler THW 182). In his hunt for Mrs. Murdock’s stolen Brasher Doubloon, Marlowe has discovered the bodies of two murdered men. He reports them anonymously, then communicates to his client that he will have to give information to the police about the investigation she has asked him to complete. She responds by attempting to bribe him. He refuses, and also refuses her claim that her status as his client legally allows him to protect her. “Even if I had the legal right to stay clammed up — refuse to talk — and got away with it once, that would be the end of my business. I’d be a guy marked for trouble” (Chandler THW 164). Marlowe knows the law, and his choice is whether or not to share the uncovered information, just as it was his choice whether or not to report the murdered bodies he stumbled over. His obligations to his client mandate that he speak to her before he shares information, but speaking to her is a consideration, not a consultation about the correct way to proceed. He already knows the right path. His ethical code forms a foundation for his vocation. He tells the police, “Until you guys own your own souls you don’t own mine. Until you guys can be trusted every time and always, in all times and conditions, to seek the truth out and find it and let the chips fall where they may — until that time comes, I have a right to listen to my conscience and protect my client the best way I can. Until I’m sure you won’t do him more harm than you’ll do the truth good” (Chandler THW 123).
Marlowe’s lived existence, down to the amount and quality of possessions, revolves around his position as private eye. Visitors walking into Marlowe’s reception find a place “empty of everything but the smell of dust” that leads to a bare bones office filled with the “same stuff I had had last year, and the year before that” (Chandler *THW* 23). Belongings fulfill their purposes; no extra ornamentation needed. This flashiness-free decorating scheme continues in Marlowe’s home. Home, a supposedly softer, domestic space, is not revealed as a place of rest or respite. Few glimpses, in this novel or in others, are provided of his private space, and those that are provide no sense of a life beyond his existence as a private eye. Instead, these glimpses accompany literalizations of Marlowe taking his work home with him. In *The High Window*, Marlowe returns to his apartment after reporting two murders. He arrives at his apartment to relax with “a pipe in [his] mouth, a drink at [his] elbow and nothing on [his] mind except two murders” and is instead interrupted by two police officers who want to question him concerning his knowledge of those two murders. The subsequent verbal sparring between Marlowe and the officers illustrates not only the invasion of Marlowe’s public work into his private life, but the erasure of that private life. Even the moment of hope for relaxation is swept aside by the official demands of detection.

**Wimsey, Authority, and Detection**

In *Busman’s Honeymoon*, the police are not presented as completely incompetent, though they are immediately, and literally, suspect. Joe Sellon, a police officer, becomes one of the main suspects shortly after the investigation is officially launched. Police authority within the novel is only maintained through the acquiescence of Wimsey to that authority; if he chose to counter it, there is no doubt that he would be able to do so. At
one point, Wimsey’s real position as the authority is revealed when he, through his wife, is given damning information about a suspect’s potential motives. Harriet pleads with him to not report to the police what she has discovered; she sympathizes with the suspect; she doesn’t want to see the suspect ridiculed or mocked; and she doesn’t believe that Miss Twitterton could really have committed murder. Wimsey refuses to suppress the evidence, standing firm in the face of Harriet’s pleas to consider the feelings of the living. He says, “I’m thinking of the living. Till we get at the truth, every soul in this village is suspect . . . It’s evidence. We can’t pick and choose. Whoever suffers, we must have the truth. Nothing else matters a damn” (Sayers BH 307). Nowhere in Wimsey’s response is a reference to police authority; the concern is not that it is illegal to suppress evidence. The concern remains ethical, not legal.

Just as the police invade Marlowe’s private domain, so too is Wimsey’s privacy overrun once the corpse is discovered. The quiet country house, the stereotypical representation of peaceful country life, has that peace shattered, thoroughly, from the bottom up, as the body is brought up from the cellar; police and suspects wander in and out of the different rooms throughout the house, on top of the house, and around the grounds; one suspect even temporarily takes shelter in his bedroom. There is no sacred corner of the domestic space left unexplored. The kitchen transforms into an interview space into which the suspects must cross, one-by-one, and offer their information to be processed. Everything bows to the need to search for answers, to try to make the house speak, to make the people speak, and to uncover the story of what actually happened.

Though Lord Peter and Marlowe share a certain off-handedness in their attitudes towards money, Lord Peter’s financial situation differs entirely from Marlowe’s. The
second son of a duke, Lord Peter is not due to inherit a family estate and the restrictions and political obligations that would accompany that inheritance, but still possesses an extensive private fortune of his own. His extensive finances and the individual freedom to disperse those funds completely at his own discretion remove any monetary motivations from his drive to detect. His motivations are far more idiosyncratic. *Whose Body?* (1923), the first appearance of Lord Peter, explains that it is because of his shellshock that he occupies the role of detective. He explains that he “took up these cases as a sort of distraction.” (Sayers *Whose Body* 207). Lord Peter served in the trenches as part of the Great War effort and returned with a classic case of shellshock. Detection’s distraction was meant to help him avoid the memories, the “dread of German mines, responsibility for the lives of your men, strained attention and the inability to distinguish small sounds through the overpowering noise of guns” and the way “[t]he vile, raw fog tore your throat and ravaged your lungs. You could not see your feet. You stumbled in your walk over poor men's graves” (Sayers *Whose Body* 209, 213). The necessity of mental diversion impels Lord Peter to return again and again to detective work.

Shellshock and the need for mental gymnastics are not Lord Peter’s only inducements for dedicating himself to solving crime. In *Busman’s Honeymoon*, Wimsey is meant to be honeymooning, vacationing from the normal demands of everyday life. However, the romantic honeymoon is disrupted when the body of the former owner of the house is found in the cellar. Wimsey, however unenthusiastically, accepts the interruption and takes it as read that he will investigate the crime: “damn! Back to the old grind. Rigor mortis and who-saw-him-last, blood-prints, fingerprints, foot-prints,

---

9 A ‘busman’s holiday’ is a holiday in which someone engages in activities very similar to one’s work—for instance, if a bus driver took a bus excursion.
information received and it-is-my-dooty-to-warn-you” (Sayers BH 119). His private desires for peace, for romantic respite, immediately give way to public demands on his expertise. Harriet, his new wife, needs more convincing. She resists the idea that Lord Peter must be involved. She asks, “need you investigate this? It’s rather rotten for you . . . They can’t expect you surely!” (Sayers BH 130). Wimsey’s response to Harriet also responds to criticism leveled at the English classic detective — that he is a busybody, a dilettante, or an aristocrat temporarily amusing himself by slumming among the lower classes. Wimsey responds, “perhaps I’d better not justify that view of myself. What do such fellows as I, crawling between heaven and earth? I can’t wash my hands of a thing, merely because it’s inconvenient to my lordship . . . I hate violence! I loathe wars and slaughter, and men quarreling and fighting like beasts! Don’t say it isn’t my business. It’s everybody’s business” (Sayers BH 131). Wimsey’s engagement in detection does not battle only his personal weakness, as shellshock was culturally seen, but also is an attack on a societal apathy towards the prevalence of violence. As Wimsey puts it, inconvenience to his private life is far less significant than giving way to the insidious view that the wrongs in the world are somebody else’s problem.

The detective’s integrity matters, as detection inherently involves morality, questions of right and wrong. Interpretations of both the hard-boiled detective and the English classic detective give the detective the responsibility of seeking, finding, and providing the solution to the mystery. The detectives are centering authorities over the narrative, and it is to their interpretations and insights that other characters defer. The detective tells the story of what really happened, grounding the novel and providing the lens through which information is filtered and understood. It is not the law or the justice
system that dictate what is right, either on a factual or a moral level. The incompetence of police crops up repeatedly across detective fiction, and multiple explanations proposed. The persistent trope reinforces the detective figure’s authority by demonstrating the incompetence of others charged with completing the same task.

**Women in Detection**

The female characters in each of these novels illustrate the ways in which cracks can never be closed. Their interactions with the detective underscore what has been lost and can never be recovered; questions are asked that cannot be answered via the authoritative exercise of individual detection. Often, reading women in a hard-boiled text describes the ways in which they are presented as dangerous or evil. As scholar John Cawelti states, “The function of the woman in the hard-boiled formula then is not simply that of appropriate sexual consort to the dashing-hero; she also poses certain basic challenges to the detective’s physical and psychological security” (154). However, placing *The High Window* together in the same genre with *Busman’s Honeymoon* allows for a context of meaning-making that explores the nuances of female roles as they relate to the figure of the detective and the worldview of the novels. While the detectives do serve as moral authorities over the process of detection, women are points of loss that highlight the detectives’ abilities to ever truly re-solve the world.

In *Busman’s Honeymoon* the main female character is Lord Peter’s new wife, Harriet Vane. Acknowledged by scholars as a feminizing and humanizing influence on the snobbish Lord Peter, the importance of her actions within the text is sometimes

---

underestimated in favor of dedicated readings of Vane as a fictional stand-in for Sayers, undervaluing her detective ability, and participation in the process of detection. Even Brownson, who hints at Vane’s importance in bringing a different influence into Lord Peter’s detection specifically denies her a status as detective and focuses instead on her gender, saying, “Vane anticipates the way women have since been used to humanize police procedurals, cop stories, and all tales of cool (male) knowledge” (65). His denial is a vital moment of division for his argument, as allowing Vane to be an active participant in detection as detective also allows warm knowledge to intrude into what he is casting as the cool, rational world of the English classic. In her analysis of the novel and its relationship to war and memory, Gill Plain offhandedly assigns Vane the role of “detective of Peter’s story” (Women’s Fiction 51). This aside is an intriguing, and somewhat contradictory, statement as it allows Vane to take on the role of detective, but only within the limited playing field of Peter’s life. Her identity is caught up in the uncovering of Peter’s identity; in some ways her existence is for the purpose of illuminating Wimsey’s existence.\footnote{11} That restrained framework provides an easy justification for dismissing Vane’s contributions to the murder investigation.

But what if Harriet is a detective? Though she has no formal license or training, neither does Lord Peter. Looking at the two of them, Vane may actually be the better prepared character due to her background as a writer of detective fiction. It is this very association that makes her so plausible as a murderer in Strong Poison (1930); she has the knowledge to carry out the crime. Vane also displays an investment in detection. In

\footnote{11} I do not mean to suggest that Plain’s intention was to limit Vane in this fashion, or that this statement intended to encapsulate the character of Vane. However, it does — when read alongside other critical engagements with the figure of Vane — illustrate how easily it is to dismiss or marginalize Harriet’s abilities as investigator of crimes.
Have His Carcase (1932), she throws herself into the investigation of the mysterious corpse that has washed up on the beach. Not motivated her by self-preservation, as in Strong Poison, Vane enjoys the work of detection. Her experience as a suspect also aligns her empathetically with those accused of a crime, giving her a strong motivation for pursuing justice — keeping others from being falsely condemned, as she nearly was. Joel Armstrong summarizes the detection-relationship between Vane and Lord Peter at this point as a successful partnership. “Side by side, they [Wimsey and Vane] solve the murder, both offering invaluable evidence and deduction” (Armstrong 117). Gaudy Night (1935) is the third book in the quartet and sees Vane returning to Oxford and becoming one of the targets of a poison-pen crusade. Feeling that she is emotionally too close to the situation to solve it on her own, Vane asks Wimsey to investigate. It is at the end of this novel that Vane finally accepts Wimsey’s proposal of marriage that leads to Busman’s Honeymoon (1937), the final book in the quartet.

Much of the novel is, indeed, spent developing the relationship between Vane and Wimsey. However, that relationship is noteworthy for its negotiations aimed towards equality and partnership. From the early pages Vane struggles with what it means to marry, to give up her complete independence and become a collaborator with another individual. To transform from Harriet Vane to Harriet Wimsey (Lady Peter), she journeys back to her childhood roots, taking Wimsey with her, beginning her new married life in the same countryside where she began her independent life. Busman’s Honeymoon tells not only the story of a crime and its investigation, but also the story of Vane investigating herself, developing her own identity and authority within her new context. Though she participated previously in an investigative partnership with Wimsey, she fears that will
not survive through the relationship transformation signaled by the wedding ceremony.\footnote{Multiple feminist readings of Harriet/Sayers exist. Though Sayers herself despised the term “feminist,” that was due to her belief that people should all be treated, whatever their gender, as part of the category of “human.” She resisted any attempt to be pushed into a “feminist” role, but also wrote scathingly about the lack of rights accorded to women. She rejected the terms of feminism because they continued to support what she saw as an inherently problematic binary that divided men from women. “a woman’s place is wherever her work, heart, and whimsy take her . . . just as any fully realized human being’s existence is” (Kenney “Remarkable Case” 127). In my reading of Harriet, I have not addressed the issues of inequality and power historically and culturally associated with marriage in England at this time. My focus is instead on Harriet’s goals as a character, which align with Sayers’s described problematizing of the men/women binary. Harriet wants to support Peter; she has chosen that path — with her heart, whimsy, and now work.}

As Wimsey throws himself into the investigation, Vane worries about being shut out:

“she faltered a moment, as another devastating matrimonial possibility loomed up like a nightmare — “whatever you do, you’ll let me take a hand, won’t you?” (Sayers \textit{BH} 131).

To her relief, much as Wimsey had taken his involvement for granted, so too he had taken hers. As investigative partners, in practice if not in name, Vane and Wimsey work towards the same ends, finding the murderer. They share information and theories of investigation with each other and use one another as sounding boards on which to test different hypotheses.

Without Harriet, Wimsey would not have solved the murder. It’s a bold statement, but one that bears up under examination. It is Harriet who is able to uncover, as mentioned earlier, motivations and relationships that Wimsey does not. Harriet also participates in the reconstruction of the finals clues that allow the story of the crime to form a cohesive narrative. Wimsey appeals to her memories of the way the room looked when they first arrived. Vane closes her eyes, “once more seeing the room as it had been on that strange morning . . . “He pulled the cabinet forward to bring it centrally under the pot. I was sitting quite close to him at the end of the settle — that’s why I noticed” (Sayers \textit{BH} 350). When the reconstruction is questioned, Harriet solves the dilemma of
why there were no traces of blood or hair found on the pot. “It was wiped . . . Last Wednesday morning The day before yesterday . . . On Wednesday morning, under our very eyes, while we all sat around and watched. That’s How” (Sayers BH 358). Wimsey is unable, alone, to tell the story of the crime, but relies on Harriet to fill the missing spaces where things have been lost; he cannot narrate with solitary authority.

Through Harriet, the cracks in Wimsey and the narrative become magnified. Not only is he unable to perform detection alone, the isolated authority, but the inevitable consequences of detection chip away at that brokenness. He is aware of the fault lines buried within himself, and the way his pursuit of detection does not refine those faults; they cannot disappear. Detection may be bound up with justice, but that does not mean the agent of justice is cleansed of guilt. Wimsey admits his awareness of the consequences to Harriet, looking at his hands, “These hangman’s hands . . . You knew that, though, didn’t you?” (Sayers BH 307). As the police escort the prisoner out of the house, Peter invokes hands again. “Come and hold my hand . . . This part of the business always gets me down” (Sayers BH 362). Detection is not a restorative act. Noakes is still dead, and Wimsey has provided another body, a gift for the hangman. His keen awareness of his complicity in another death compels him to find an accomplished solicitor to lead the defense. Wimsey’s mother, the Dowager Duchess, links Wimsey’s turmoil back to the question of shellshock, relating that when he returned from the War, “he [didn’t] like responsibility . . . he couldn’t give an order . . . I suppose if you’ve been giving orders for nearly four years to people to go and get blown to pieces it gives you a — what does one call it nowadays? — an inhibition” (Sayers BH 385). Shellshock, the physical manifestation of Lord Peter’s brokenness recurs under the pressures of
successfully uncovering the truth. The truth cannot heal. In those moments, again, it is to Harriet that Wimsey turns. His individual authority, his detective ability fail to be sufficient and he looks outside of himself, though Harriet also cannot make him whole. The final moments of the novel dwell on their relationship as the hour of the execution draws near. The focus follows Wimsey’s brokenness and Harriet’s inability to provide an answer to it even as she tries to shield him. “The light grew stronger as they waited. Quite suddenly, he said, “Oh, damn!” and began to cry — in an awkward unpracticed way at first, and then more easily. So she held him, crouched at her knees, against her breast, huddling his head in her arms that he might not hear eight o’clock strike” (Sayers BH 402-403).

Marlowe, unlike Wimsey, does not have a recurring female character that provides a throughline across the multiple novels. There are a few, though only a few, female characters scattered throughout The High Window. None of them rise to a level of partnership with Marlowe, nor do any of them seriously attempt to provide that level of involvement. This, of course, means that Marlowe’s brokenness manifests very differently than Wimsey’s. Not a shellshock sufferer, Marlowe also shows no remorse about his role in bringing criminals to justice. Of course, conveniently one of the murderers is himself murdered, which limits the number of people who can be condemned for their crimes. He also chooses who to report and who not to. Leslie Murdock murdered Vannier, but Vannier was a blackmailing counterfeiter, and Marlowe justifies his silence by pointing to the ways in which speaking would be harmful to the living. “I don’t like you. I don’t like this house. I didn’t particularly like your wife. But I like Merle . . . And I know what has been done to her in this damn family for the past
eight years” (Chandler *THW* 260). He also explains the dangers of false legal convictions in terms of how they affect the living: “Did you ever stop to think . . . that Cassidy’s secretary might have had a mother or a sister or a sweetheart — or all three? That they had their pride and their faith and their love for a kid who was made out to be a drunken paranoiac because his boss’s father had a hundred million dollars” (Chandler *THW* 122). He focuses not on the punishment of the wicked, but the redemption of the innocent and the revelatory power of the truth. Heroic as that sounds, Marlowe is unable to demonstrate that idea of redemption bound up in truth, showing instead that truth sometimes is only an explanation of what is lost, not a path to healing.

His failure to demonstrate that the truth can heal incarnates in the figure of Merle Davis, the retiring, lovelorn secretary who works for Marlowe’s client. From the first moment Marlowe meets Merle, her dependence and lack of self-sufficiency is clearly demonstrated. She asks Marlowe for references because Mrs. Murdock “wanted me to ask you” (5), and emphasizes her lack of agency by saying “I’m only doing what I’m told” as a defense against Marlowe’s perceived mockery when he sardonically provides an extensive list of references and finishes with “You think that would be enough?” (6). She flinches away from physical touch and her attempts to present a professional appearance are erased by her emotional responses to Marlowe and his discovery of her crying at her desk. The overall effect of Merle’s appearance and actions communicates instability, an interpretation underscored by the ways in which she is infantilized by her employer, Mrs. Murdock, and Marlowe himself, who repeatedly describes her as “the little girl.” Even Leslie Murdock, the man whom she loves unrequited, fails to see her as an adult agent, describing her as a “little garden worm, a simple garden worm, often
trodden on but still somehow surviving” (Chandler *THW* 25). Merle’s psychological instability is apparent to everyone who meets her.

Despite her instability, Merle’s information points Marlowe in the direction of the original murder, the one that no one had ever discovered. Mrs. Murdock’s husband died years before; the circumstances were not suspicious; it seemed clear that he had flung himself out of a window. No one thought it needed to be investigated, not even Marlowe. It is not until a hysterical Merle visits his office that Marlowe grasps the seriousness of the situation in which she has been living and the way it has broken her.

Except for her face she would have looked all right. In the first place her eyes were quite mad. There was white showing all around the iris and they had a sort of fixed look. When they moved the movement was so stiff you could almost hear something creak . . . In addition to this there was something wrong with her neck, so that very slowly her head was drawn around to the left about forty-five degrees. It would stop there, her neck would twitch, and her head would slide back the way it had come (Chandler *THW* 203).

She confesses to murdering Vannier, the playboy who had been blackmailing her employer. Marlowe immediately leaps into action to try to save her — he calls a doctor, not the police; he drives out to the scene of the crime and examines the evidence. It is in Vannier’s home that Marlowe finds the picture of Mr. Bright — Mrs. Murdock’s first husband. The picture “showed a man leaning out of a window with his mouth open yelling. His hands were on the brick edges of the window-frame. There was a woman’s face behind his shoulder” (Chandler *THW* 221). Much as the remembrance of the moved
cabinet allowed the pieces of the mystery in *Busman’s Honeymoon* to fall into place, Chandler’s examination of the picture inspires the realization — the man is not leaning out of the window, but falling — that leads to his reconstruction of the past. He is able to solve all three murders, the theft of the Brasher Doubloon, and break apart a counterfeiting ring because Merle shared her knowledge with him.

Still, the uncovering and knowledge of what crimes took place and who was responsible for them cannot bring Merle back to a state of mental health. The best Marlowe can do is take her home to her parents. As he drives away, leaving her with her loving parents, he feels a sense of loss. Though he solved the case, none of the murderers were brought to justice. Though he returned Merle home to her parents who will care for her, there is no guarantee that she will ever live a normal life again. Though he has followed his personal code of ethics and worked to improve the lives of others, his lack of any real life outside of detection remains, underscoring the inevitability of incompleteness. He reflects, “I had a funny feeling as I saw the house disappear, as though I had written a poem and it was very good and I had lost it and would never remember it again” (Chandler *THW* 269). Back in his empty, silent home, he plays a Capablanca chess game against himself.

It went fifty-nine moves. Beautiful, cold, remorseless chess, almost creepy in its silent implacability. When it was done I listened at the open window for a while and smelled the night. Then I carried my glass out to the kitchen and rinsed it and filled it with ice water and stood at the sink sipping it and looking at my face in the mirror. ‘You and Capablanca,’ I said (Chandler *THW* 271).
Marlowe and Wimsey end their investigations successfully, but that success is tempered by the pervasive awareness of absence. The final scenes of both novels reject complete narrative closure. A successful solution accomplishes an uncovering of knowledge; they, and others in the text, know more about the crime and the criminal than when the investigation began. However, possessing that knowledge is not enough to reunite the fractures uncovered by that murder. Lord Peter and Harriet find satisfaction in knowing that an innocent person hasn’t been convicted, and that no one is left under a cloud of suspicion. Marlowe finds satisfaction in returning Merle to her family. In both cases their satisfaction is insufficient; the structural momentum of the novel has built to the moment of revelation when all questions are answered, but accompanying that moment is always also a gesture beyond that revelation, an indication of a disintegration beyond or behind that cannot be recuperated.

**Unified in The Lack of Restoration**

As writers, both Sayers and Chandler worked to be gatekeepers of their genre forms, conceptualizing their genres around what they, as authors, wanted to achieve, and expanding that to what meaning the genre could provide about the world in which they lived. Recognizing their interventions as part of a structure invested in hierarchy enables the interrogation of that hierarchy, the reasons for its existence. As one of the earliest points of genre division in the debate about detective fiction, the binarization between hard-boileds and English classics manifests as part of a meaning-making process for the genre. Scott McCracken asserts that “we need to ask about the kinds of values a particular audience has a vested interest in creating or sustaining . . . The critic’s interests in disrupting or confirming a regime of value need to be analysed as part of the discussion
of popular culture” (5). Critics and scholars operate within their environment and have been part of maintaining the hierarchies not only of literary canonicity with its tensions between highbrow and lowbrow literature, but within and among genres as well. Deliberately breaking away from an approach so focused on maintaining a distinction between hard-boileds and English classics, reveals that approach as rooted in a desire for gendered nationality and authorial competitiveness, as well as dueling values about the way the world and knowledge can be interpreted.

Rather than the English classic detective fiction providing a view of a stable, ordered world and the hard-boiled a splintered, disunified world, both show a world in which the ability of the individual to provide satisfactory answers is lost. Locating the site of instability within the hard-boiled novel may be an easier proposition; attempts to hide the veniality of life are rare, as are efforts to demonstrate that reality either is, or could be, better. Still, the English classic world possesses the same types of fractures. Attempts to demonstrate otherwise dead end at the corpses. Stacy Gillis, in her study of Dorothy Sayers, highlights the inescapable lingering of loss within the English classic strain. She says:

The security of the solution — the who, what, when and where of the whodunit — provides a consolation of sorts. But the solution . . . is not the one and only answer to a problem; it is only one rereading, by the detective of the narrative trajectory. Moreover, the uncertainties provoked by the mystery remain — the question of why, when answered, is never adequate to compensate for the loss (Gillis 194).

In both strains, the bodies of the dead lie silent, with no one to speak for them unless the
detective will, and in both cases, the solutions found are temporary, individual ones. There is no hope that the individual will be able to enact real healing on the individuals affected by the death, or upon the world at large. There may be some belief in a better world, but it is a belief that is neither fulfilled nor validated. The best the individual can do is to maintain their moral code, to refuse to forget the loss. As Wimsey reflects, “It’s a pity the dead are so quiet; it makes us ready to forget them” (Sayers BH 306).
DESTABILIZING THE DETECTIVE’S MORAL CENTER

In an interview between Raymond Chandler and Ian Fleming, the pair discuss at length each other’s writing, heroes, and relationship to the thriller and private eye traditions. Fleming, although slightly noncommittal, says that the elements of a thriller are that it “should have pace; it should start on the first page and carry you right through. And I think you’ve got to have violence, I think you’ve gotten to have a certain amount of sex, you’ve got to have a basic plot, people have got to want to know what’s going to happen by the end of it.” Chandler responds, “Yes, I agree, there has to be an element of mystery, in fact there has to be a mysterious situation” (Chandler and Fleming 33).

As with the hard-boiled and English classics in the previous chapters, the thriller has traditionally been interpreted as a generic break from detective fiction, though it should not be. Edmund Wilson, in his explanation of the two separate generic limbs — detective fiction and thrillers — claims that the genres exist and are maintained by a preservation of their “own characteristics, modified only by changes in technology and fashion” (41). In his history of the detective fiction genre, Julian Symons claims that “detective stories and crime novels are of a different strain from spy stories and thrillers. The lines of demarcation are vague but everybody recognizes their existence” (230). Symons never concretizes the differences for which he argues, but explores facets of thrillers without providing a definitional basis for his ability to do so. Symon’s inability to establish a firm definitional boundary for thrillers is a common one. R. Austin Freeman positions detective fiction as being grounded in the motivation of uncovering the mystery, while thrillers are merely sensationalist. Consistent with others writing about thrillers, Wilson fails to lay out the specifics of what those characteristics must be. Jerry
Palmer, in his structuralist examination of the thriller claims that “[i]t is the formula of the thriller — what all thrillers have in common — that is the source of pleasure for the addict, and (probably) for the reader too” (Palmer 2). Common narrative elements emerge when boiling down the different attempts at defining the formula of the thriller. These elements are 1) a crime connected to 2) a mystery integral to the plot, and 3) a quest to uncover the motivations behind that crime. However, these narrative elements are also shared by detective fiction, making it difficult to enforce any true division between detective fiction and the thriller. Palmer, in his analysis, provides pieces of what he views as the formula of the thriller — heroes, villains, conspiracies — but none of the provided pieces truly distinguishes the thriller from detective fiction.

A common suggestion for the distinguishing feature of the thriller is that of suspense. John Scaggs traces the lineage of crime fiction from Gothic roots — with the Gothic itself rooted in sensationalism — to Donald Glover’s assessment that “the thriller was and still is to a large extent marked by the way in which it persistently seeks to raise the stakes of the narrative, heightening or exaggerating the experience of events by transforming them into a rising curve of danger, violence or shock” (Glover qtd. in Scaggs 107). Through his linkage of sensationalism and the thriller, Scaggs establishes the thriller as a continuation of a search for a certain kind of addictive reading experience, one based on sensationalism and emotion, not the cool logic of deduction and induction. This claim loops the argument back around to the divisions drawn by Chandler and Sayers, as exemplified by Sayers’ claim that thrillers are nonsense, while the detective story depends on sense (Sayers “Introduction” 1929). Or, in other words, the detective story is one of distanced rationality, while the thriller thrives on illogical emotion.
However, even this emphasis on the suspenseful nature of the thriller relies on vagueness, since ‘suspense’ is neither easily defined, identified, nor located, nor is it a feature unique only to thrillers.

Overgeneralizing patterns in either classical conceptions of detective fiction or the thriller ignores the similarities lurking behind the assumptions of division. Raymond Chandler established Dashiell Hammett as the prime example of the American/hard-boiled pattern of detective fiction. However, Glover highlights (with a nod to Žižek) Dashiell Hammett’s contribution to the thriller (142). If the thriller and the detective novel are two separate genres, then Hammett’s position as an archetype of both is uncertain, and needs to be more clearly explained. If, however, the genres are really the same genre, then Hammett’s centrality is understandable, as it is the flavor of the movement forward from his work that is different, and that is not a difference that divides, but perhaps simply a difference in the perceptions or expectations of the reader; thrillers and detective fictions are the same stories dressed in different garments. The classical British detective fiction wears a subdued dove-grey jacket suitable for dining with the duchess, while the thriller flaunts neon lights running off of a battery packet in the left-hand pocket (next to the Glock). In the critical engagements, there is an assumption that the word ‘thriller’ has a solid signification that signals a certain genre, but that definition is never established. Throughout the different critical explorations of the genre, one is left with the sense that any exclusionary definition of the thriller-genre as an actual category is impossible to articulate. The unsayable nature of the category’s definition calls into question not only the usefulness of thriller as a category, but its actuality. Recognizing the thriller designation as a label for a style, a certain elevation of
suspense, not for a change in the essence of what the text is, or the story it is trying to tell, erases the generic division between thrillers and detective fiction.

This chapter examines the thrillers13 *Casino Royale* (1953) by Ian Fleming and *The Killer Inside Me* (1952) by Jim Thompson. By bringing in these works often identified as thrillers, I want to, as in the last chapter, demonstrate the coherence between the supposed subgenre and the larger field of detective fiction. Revealed in that coherence is another facet of the genre’s focus on loss. While Sayers and Chandler share a world in which the detective figure attempts to provide the story of what really happens, and are able to make this attempt because of their adherence to their inner self and moral code, the protagonists of Fleming and Thompson do not provide the same coherence of self. These two novels both feature strong, authoritative protagonists entangled in a crime that forms the cornerstone of the plot, along with the search for the causes behind that crime. James Bond and Lou Ford are part of the narratives before the crimes take place, enabling them to share the story of their experiences rather than reconstructing a story of what happened before they arrived at the scene of the crime. This framework simultaneously promotes the reliance on the individual as an authority while also undermining the belief in a complete or objective truth. Peter Hühn argues that “the history of the detective genre is marked . . . by growing doubts about the possibility of telling the story” (451). These protagonists, and the texts in which they dwell, highlight the impossibility of being able to tell, or perhaps even know, the story of the truth. And, as participants subsumed in the action of the narrative, Bond and Ford’s direct experience implicates them as part of the corruption within their worlds.

---

13 Although Anthony Boucher in his *NYT* review of *Casino Royale* asserted that it belonged “pretty much to the private eye school,” an observation underscoring the muddle of subgenres and the inability to accurately negotiate their purported boundaries.
Questioning Bond

Throughout *Casino Royale*, an examination of the narrative role occupied by the protagonist, James Bond, and the function he fulfills in the text confirms the position of “The Hero [as] the ground and center of the thriller as the Detective is of the mystery” (Brownson 119). However, Charles Brownson, in his exploration of the figure of the detective, outright rejects the idea that spies can serve the same function as detectives, though he acknowledges, oddly, that detectives can be spies. Brownson goes on to argue that the Hero of the thriller is no detective, and in fact serves a different function “locating and neutralizing the threat posed by the antagonist” (Brownson 122). However, this is not at its core a different function since, as discussed earlier, the function of the classic detective was to locate and neutralize the threat. The type of threat may be taking a different form – apprehending a larger-scale threat to the country as opposed to a thief or a murderer lurking in the midst of a peaceful society – but the function is the same. Founding his rejection of their similarity on the scope of the thriller/detective authority, Brownson sees detectives as domestic, while “the spy works for the commonweal” (112). This attempt at drawing a distinction is, however, an inherently problematic one, as it places vague definitional restrictions that cannot be upheld consistently. What is the scale? Is it international travel that distinguishes the spy? If so, Hercule Poirot becomes disqualified. Is it a governmental mandate? That would eliminate any detective (like Ngaio Marsh’s Roderick Alleyn) who is a member of the police force.¹⁴ Is it the ability to take actions that impact entire countries? Sherlock Holmes, the archetype himself, is

---

¹⁴ Ngaio Marsh is widely recognized, along with Dorothy L. Sayers, Agatha Christie, and Margery Allingham, as one of the Queens of Crime, reigning over the Golden Age of detective fiction.
suddenly disqualified as well. Scope alone cannot therefore be the factor that divides spies and detectives. The similarity between those functions calls into question the reality of the generic line drawn between detective fiction and thrillers. Spies and detectives function narratively in similar fashions. The detective has the responsibility of navigating through the provided clues, determining which of them are genuine clues, and disentangling the true narrative. In the same way, the spy has the responsibility of identifying the truth from falsehood, uncovering what is hidden, and determining the correct path forward. Attempting to enforce a division between the protagonists of the thriller — spy or otherwise — and the “true detective” ignores the fact that Bond serves the same function, operating as the centralizing figure driving the narrative forward, assembling the disparate shards of evidence into a cohesive whole, and then taking action based upon that interpretation.

James Bond, one of the most recognizable fictional characters of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, first appeared in Ian Fleming’s novel *Casino Royale* in 1953. Since that initial publication, the cultural cachet of Bond has frustrated bartenders everywhere with requests for martinis to be shaken, not stirred. The Bond film industry, beginning in 1962 with *Dr. No* starring Sean Connery and still ongoing with the 2015 release of *Spectre* and the upcoming *No Time to Die* (2020), both starring Daniel Craig, served to intensify Bond’s continuing cultural relevance.¹⁵ The dominance of Bond as a

---
¹⁵ This relevance is not merely British, but cross-cultural. In “The American Superhero Genes of James Bond” John Shelton Lawrence argues that the Bond existing in the films conforms to American expectations of superhero behavior and actions. He points to the opening sequence of the 2006 film version of *Casino Royale* and argues that the features shown in that sequence “are the features of a more American Bond” (345). Robert P. Arnett also highlights a similar crossover, saying that “Craig’s Bond shares more character traits with Christian Bale’s Batman, Hugh Jackman’s Wolverine, and Edward Norton’s Bruce Banner/Hulk that he does with the previous James Bond actors.”
character ensures that the majority of those familiar with popular culture, even those who are unable to name Bond’s creator, Ian Fleming, recognize with either a thrill or a resigned sigh the famous words, “The name’s Bond. James Bond” (Casino Royale 2006). Bond’s legend makes him a natural locus of study, but the proliferation of the Bond figure throughout the years and mediums of existence and interpretation complicate any attempt to build a coherent analysis of the “real” James Bond. The James Bond who appears in the films is far different from the Fleming-penned novel versions though some argue that the later books show that Fleming is influenced by the knowledge that Bond is being reincarnated on film by Sean Connery. Whatever the impulses, the cultural imagining of James Bond departs significantly from the Bond living in the pages of Fleming’s works. As James South points out, “Fleming’s Bond isn’t so confident or suave . . . He is frail, flawed, depressed, arguably an alcoholic and takes speed to help him perform his fantastic feats, that is, he is very, very human” (xiv). Bond’s superhero status is a result of later incarnations of the character. The Bond established by Fleming exists as a weaker and more vulnerable individual. Restricting the examination of Bond to his genesis in Casino Royale provides the opportunity to explore the archetype’s moment of formation and the ways in which the encapsulation of the Bond figure in that moment continues, rather than diverging from, the narratives of detection and loss.

The first of the fourteen books Fleming wrote about James Bond, Casino Royale tells the story of the confrontation between Le Chiffre (The Number) and James Bond, Britain’s 007 agent. SMERSH is a Soviet counterintelligence agency dedicated to the

---

16 There is some irony to being unable to form a complete picture of a character who is, after all, meant to operate in secrecy.
eradication of its enemies, among whom is the nation of Britain. SMERSH’s paymaster is the criminal mastermind, Le Chiffre, who is currently in a vulnerable financial position, having embezzled SMERSH funds by using them to invest in a chain of brothels. If Le Chiffre fails to conceal the lack of funds from his employers — a concealment he hopes to accomplish by winning the money he needs at the baccarat table — SMERSH will execute him, eradicating the treachery and weakness in its own ranks. Because Le Chiffre’s death will ultimately benefit England, removing a threat, Bond — a Double-O agent who is also an excellent gambler — eagerly accepts the assignment to break Le Chiffre at the table, ensuring Le Chiffre’s accountability to SMERSH.

Bond is joined in France by fellow British agent Vesper Lynd, French contact Someone Mathis, and also meets American FBI agent Felix Leiter. Though unhappy at having to work with others, particularly Vesper, who Bond views as a liability due to her gender, Bond survives multiple assassination attempts and a run of bad luck at the baccarat table and successfully bankrupts Le Chiffre. Le Chiffre retaliates by kidnapping Bond and torturing him. Le Chiffre plans eventually to kill Bond, but this fate is avoided through the timely intervention of a SMERSH assassin who kills Le Chiffre, but leaves Bond alive. Bond spends his lengthy recovery time healing from his physical wounds and falling in love with Vesper Lynd. He plans to marry her and leave the Secret Service. It is not until Vesper commits suicide, leaving behind a written confession of her role as a double agent, that Bond recommits to his career as an agent of the British government.

Bond’s character owes clear debts to multiple lines of influence. Fleming was not the first, by any stretch of the imagination, to write a spy narrative, or to center his novel on the figure of the spy. David Seed in his overview of spy fiction gives Fenimore
Cooper's *The Spy* (1821) credit for being the first novel centered around espionage.\(^{17}\) Other important influences came from both fictional and real-life detection. Fleming famously spent time in the Secret Service of Britain, though the facts of what he actually did are debated. In his biography of Fleming, Andrew Lycett emphasizes the distance between the fictional Bond and the real-life administrative duties of Fleming. Despite that distance, Fleming did at least have some experience with undercover operations to draw from. LeJeune points out that Fleming also pulled ideas directly from detective-related sources. He relates, “When Bond tracked the villain's car, using a “homer” device, the idea so intrigued Allen Dulles, then head of the CIA, that he asked Fleming where he'd got it. ‘From a book called *How to be a Detective* that I picked up for ten cents at Penn Station’” (54). Fleming, in addition to admitting detective influences, was also actively on the lookout for those sources – whether for his own entertainment or specifically for research and inspiration. Allen Dulles became a devoted fan of Fleming’s, and the they developed a friendship in which “the two men exchanged anecdotes about the great game of espionage and speculated about the future of intelligence” (Moran 211). Instead of over-emphasizing the significance of Fleming’s wartime experience to Bond’s exploits, other influences need to be acknowledged.

Fleming read widely. He was a fan of Raymond Chandler’s work, telling him, “you write a better book than I do” (Chandler and Fleming 32). His exposure to Chandler’s writing, and the private-eye tradition of Philip Marlowe heavily influenced his works about Bond. Muller claims:

\(^{17}\) This timeline raises further questions regarding why spy fiction is generally cast as a subgenre of detective fiction, given the traditional timeline of detective fiction beginning with Vidoq’s *Memoirs*, originally published in 1828.
For plot structure and especially for characterization . . . these films draw on two classic paradigms of detective fiction: the British gentleman detective who emerged in the 'Golden Age' novels of the 1920s-30s and the hard-boiled American 'private eye' made famous by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Both paradigms have been a consistent influence throughout the series (Muller 181).

While Muller specifically references the films in this assessment, the same indications were seen in Fleming's novels as well. In his 1954 *NYT* review of *Casino Royale*, Anthony Boucher says, “Ian Fleming's James Bond is British Secret Service Operative 007, but his adventure . . . belongs pretty much to the private-eye school.” Bond may be a spy, a secret agent, but he is also the hard-boiled private-eye who prefers to operate alone, who knows the patterns of the streets, and who bears the responsibility of finding out the truth behind the veneer. To this, Fleming adds his own style in order to build the character, thrills, and style that he desires: “There aren’t enough good thrillers. For me, I like reading them in aeroplanes and trains. I find they’re wonderful kinds of books” (Chandler and Fleming 33). Bond works within a broader geographic range is simply another claim about scope. And if it is not scope, but function within that scope, then setting similarly does not serve as a qualifier or disqualifier of generic belonging. Brownson himself says that “detective stories are in face enhanced by exotic locales, outré characters, and unusual villains” (Brownson 5). There could scarcely be a more succinct description of the settings for the James Bond novels. The locales range from the

---

18 Umberto Eco links Bond directly to Mickey Spillane. Spillane’s protagonist, Mike Hammer, embodies the stereotype of the hard-boiled detective carrying out justice.
French Riviera, to the shores of Jamaica; outré characters are the norm, not the exception; and the villains are marked by their unusual natures and appearances.

Bond begins the novel as a confident operative, ready to defeat any challenges. He is confident enough in his capabilities that he is satisfied with having limited supervision, and wants to dismiss his assigned backup. Having earned his license to kill, Bond has become “tough” 007, a man who “was used to oblique control, and rather liked it” (Fleming 5) and who — like the private-eyes — “preferred to work alone” (Fleming 20). Part of the reason Bond desires to work alone is because it allows him to maintain control; he is the one with the authority able to dictate his own actions, actions that allow him to survive. “He was a secret agent, and still alive thanks to his exact attention to the detail of his profession” (Fleming 7). This isolated authority is not, however, the isolated authority of the private-eye detective who is confident in his decisions and actions; Bond’s isolation is not one of inner certainty in a world of uncertainty; he is not revealed as the lone man with the confidence of his own inner moral code, but as a man without the confidence of a moral code. As the story continues, the veneer of Bond’s confidence is revealed as a facade, a potentially surprising realization for those used to the brash swagger of the filmic Bond. “Fleming’s Bond fears; suffers; has doubts, dark thoughts. He acknowledges, at least to himself, his foibles and hypocrisies” (O’Sullivan 21). Even with those moments of questioning, however, Bond’s competence is clear.

It is his capabilities and his attention to detail — a necessary trait for a detective — that enable Bond’s success. On each return to his hotel room, Bond investigates the conditions of the room to make sure nothing has been disturbed, “inspecting these minute burglar alarms” (Fleming 7) that he has set up. He diligently pays attention to his
surroundings, the conditions, and his own preparation: “In these moments of observation and preparation, Bond recalls aspects of Edgar Allan Poe’s detective creation C. August Dupin who deploys his powers of deduction and ratiocination to solve seemingly impossible riddles and occurrences” (McGowan 388). In a critical moment in *Casino Royale*, all of the groundwork and preparation has been completed, and Bond returns to his hotel room.

There remained an hour in which to rest and compose his thoughts before he met the girl in the Splendide bar, an hour to examine minutely the details of his plans for the game, and for after the game, in all the various circumstances of victory or defeat. He had to plan the attendant roles of Mathis, Leiter, and the girl and visualize the reactions of the enemy in various contingencies. He closed his eyes and his thoughts pursued his imagination through a series of carefully constructed scenes as if he was watching the tumbling chips of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope. At twenty minutes to nine he had exhausted all the permutations which might result from his duel with Le Chiffre. He rose and dressed, dismissing the future completely from his mind (50).

Throughout this scene, Bond uses the clues available to him — his knowledge of Le Chiffre, the rules of baccarat, the layout of the casino, the characters and capabilities of those involved — not to figure out the best course of action, but to imagine all of the permutations of possibilities. Through this imagining, Bond is able to anticipate interpretations in a way that demonstrates not that he is congealing into a whole an
understanding of what has happened, but is developing a predictive knowledge of potential futures.

When examining *Casino Royale*, the action — the story of Bond’s adventures and the narrative of enacting justice over Le Chiffre — is completed well before the end of the novel. In fact, Boucher recommended in his *New York Times* review that the reader put down the book and not bother reading the rest. The murder mystery concludes with the solution in the naming of the enemy, but Bond’s solution is not to name, but to neutralize. The rest of the book is spent on Bond’s recuperation and romantic escapades with Vesper (and her eventual betrayal). The closure at the level of expectations has been resolved, along with the question of who will triumph. So why does the book continue? It continues because the question in need of an answer is different than whodunit. Bond must work through the *how* of triumph, not the *who*. Bond is not detecting the clues left in the past to form an interpretation of the past, but in order to figure out the story of what might come to be. A murder mystery provides a solution in the naming of the enemy; Bond’s enemy already has a name, and the solution is to defeat that enemy, not to expose him. He does not — like Marlowe or Wimsey — provide a stable narrative that defines what has happened, but instead attempts to prepare for a multiplicity of possible narratives. His detection is still centering the action, providing the narrative with momentum, but his centrality is responsive, not dictatorial.

While the classical conception of the detective novel relies heavily on puzzle elements that require the detective to assemble the solution to the murder, revealing the criminal’s identity. *Casino Royale* contains far fewer puzzle elements; it is not as much a quest to answer the question of who the criminal is, but about discovering the answers to
different questions. The closure of the narrative does not solely involve a focus on identifying and stopping criminals. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, H. Porter Abbott identifies different types of closure, and argues that closure in narratives takes place on two different levels: the level of expectations and the level of questions. The expectations are set up by the type of narrative a reader sees as being involved in their encounter with the text. In a mystery story, or a crime novel, the expectation is that the criminal will be uncovered and that future crimes will be prevented.19 “If at the level of expectation we anticipate what will happen, at the level of questions we anticipate enlightenment” (Abbott 56). For mysteries, the narrative is providing a series of moments that work to meet expectations, abut also work to provide answers to questions. Readers expect that an investigation into a crime will result in the identification of the criminal. “But at the level of questions, we want to know who did it. This is another kind of suspense in narrative. That level of questions is also a level of answers” (Abbott 57). Questions, and their accompanying answers, are not always found at the end of the narrative; closure involves more than the closing scene.

Cold War Britain was a Britain slowly losing its grip on empire. This once-dominant world power was greatly reduced by the world wars. “Britain had entered the war in 1939 as a world power; it emerged, severely shaken, six years later, confronted by its decreasing status in the world” (Berberich 13). With a movement into the Atomic age, “[t]he race to power, and the struggle to maintain it, was firmly implanted in the public consciousness, and with Fleming’s penning of *Casino Royale*, in the popular literature of

---

19 Abbott does point out that there can be no guarantee in a crime novel: “the key to suspense is the possibility, at least, that things could turn out differently” (55).
the day” (Miller xiv). One role of popular literature (as explored by people like Porter) is to provide a reflection of the culture and context from which it emerges. In the character of Bond, Fleming creates a man who represents Britain’s past, but also pushes towards the future. “In this way the novels comment not only on the state of Britain overall but help create a new notion of Britishness that continues to advocate British dominance over the rest of the world” (Berberich 24).

The type of threat apparent in *Casino Royale* is an international one. Bond is a British spy/agent, but the majority of the novel takes place within the confines of a casino located in Royale-les-Eaux, a fictional town in northern France. Le Chiffre is an embodiment of international threat. As paymaster for SMERSH, a Soviet counterintelligence agency, Le Chiffre’s racial background remains unknown, though Fleming describes his heritage as mixed: “Racially, subject is probably a mixture of Mediterranean with Prussian or Polish strains” (14). The menace embodied in Le Chiffre threatens the British nation, not a subsection or individual. This contrasts with the scope approached by the authors in the last chapter who operated in a more restricted locations – Chandler's Marlowe prowled the city streets, while Sayers' Wimsey trotted about Tallboys and the nearby village. It was not the death of an individual Bond needed to protect against, but the death of a nation. Removing Le Chiffre from the board will benefit Britain (and also NATO) by embarrassing and undermining the “potential fifth column, with a strength of 50,000, capable in time of war of controlling a wide sector of France's northern frontier” (Fleming 12). Bond's ability to defeat Le Chiffre is Britain's ability to defeat its enemies.
A central question of the novel is James Bond himself — his future, who he is, and who he will choose to be. Bond does not clearly exist as a defined individual separate from his job; the label 007 has become synonymous with his actual given name. “Readers of Fleming sense that Bond has no real identity beyond his job, beyond his status as 007” (O’Sullivan 22). In some ways, it is this lack of identity beyond the job that allows him to be the representative of Britain. A secret agent is given his identity, or a series of false identities, by the country which he serves. In the case of James Bond, in particular, he has been seen as a fictional stand-in for conceptions of Britishness and Britain. Berberich argues that Fleming provides, through the Bond novels, “a kaleidoscope of social, cultural, and political developments that, ultimately, reflect the confusion of a time of widespread and rapid change” (Berberich 14). Within this kaleidoscope, Bond is the hero who stands in for Britain — strong, independent, and capable of defeating evil, a hero very attractive to a Britain in turmoil.

In the classical formation of the detective story, it is the incompetence of the police that allows the detective to provide the reconstruction of the correct narrative. This reconstruction is seen as enabling the reinforcing of social norms. In Peter Hühn’s article “The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction,” he suggests that the crime that cannot be solved by the police is, beyond its disruption of social boundaries because of its existence as a crime, a destabilizing event. That event and the police inability to respond successfully, according to Hühn, discredits the systems of regulations within a community. “In other words, the narrative incapability on the part of society's official agents, their inability to discover and tell the story of the crime, thus threatens the validity of the established order (452). Bond's position as a government
authority could therefore be seen as an inherent reinforcing of the social norms, since he is the official agent of society. His official position justifies his actions as he has been granted (licensure, again) dominion over a state-supported justice; he is the individual who holds the power of judgment, punishment, and erasure. He operates within the jurisdiction of the government — extending its jurisdiction — not operating outside of it as a vigilante. The positives and negatives of that position depend on one’s interpretation of his actions, whether they can or cannot be justified. “At his best, Bond was the avenging angel of the free world; at his worst, he was an instrument of state-sponsored terrorism, killing on command to insure the interests of a singular political agenda” (C. Miller xiv). Even Fleming himself had difficulty viewing Bond as a hero: “I never intended my leading character, James Bond, to be a hero. I intended him to be a sort of blunt instrument wielded by a government department who would get into bizarre and fantastic situations and more or less shoot his way out of them, or get out of them one way or another. But of course he’s always referred to as my hero. I don’t see him as a hero myself. On the whole I think he’s a rather unattractive man” (Chandler and Fleming 31). However, Bond is clearly framed as the hero of the novel, occupying the centering role of detection/controller of the narration as discussed earlier. Bond does work within a network of other agents — the American Felix Leiter, the French René Mathis, and British Vesper Lynd. However, it is up to Bond to engage in the duel with Le Chiffre, the British representative facing down the dangerous foreign influence and destroying it, not just for the good of England, but for the good of all civilized nations.

Bond has been given authority within the novel to carry out the plans of the British government, but the manner in which he performs his tasks reveals that he is —
though not incompetent — unable to fully construct the correct narrative. Even though he has carefully considered potential outcomes of his confrontation with Le Chiffre, he fails to predict the possibility of his subsequent kidnapping and torture. Le Chiffre continues to view Bond as his enemy. In the attacks carried out by Le Chiffre, it is Bond who is the target, the one who is seen as being a threat. Le Chiffre, or rather, a middleman operating for Le Chiffre, hires three Bulgarians to bomb Bond. “They were to get two million francs for killing you” (Fleming 56). The other agents were not targeted with the bomb, nor were they seen as threats during the baccarat game at the Casino. It is Bond who “felt something hard press into the base of his spine” and heard the explanation “This is a gun, monsieur. It is absolutely silent. It can blow the base of your spine off without a sound.” (Fleming 81). Finally, it is Bond alone who is punished by Le Chiffre, bound and tortured for having “stumbled by mischance into a game for grown-ups” (Fleming 113). Despite Mathis’ protection of Bond and Leiter’s necessary provision of cash for gambling stakes, Bond is the one clearly seen as bearing the responsibility for defeating Le Chiffre. He is the holder of Le Chiffre’s losses, both on a symbolic level, and on a physical level as he alone knows the location (more control) of the money that will keep Le Chiffre from being killed by SMERSH. However, no matter Le Chiffre’s positioning of Bond, it cannot be ignored that Bond is unable to interpret the narrative of the past correctly, or to exert his control over the story that is unfolding.

Bond’s failure to control the narrative is centered on the person of Vesper. Vesper Lynd is a significant figure in Casino Royale. Though introduced at first as little more than arm candy for Bond, she exerts significant influence over Bond and his actions. Though he initially rails against having Vesper as a partner in the plot, he is attracted to
her, from the moment they met “he had found her desirable” (141) and eventually falls in
love with her. His appreciation of Vesper leads him to decide “[t]hat day he would ask
Vesper to marry him. He was quite certain. It was only a question of choosing the right
moment” (Fleming 164). Interestingly, Vesper fulfills Bond’s own prophecy that she
would be a hindrance to him — both as a traitor to Britain and as a romantic
entanglement. It is because of Vesper’s involvement in the crisis with Le Chiffre that
Bond loses control. When she appears to be kidnapped, he abandons his habits of caution
and thoughtfulness in favor of a headlong pursuit. “Bond leapt for the Bentley . . . With
the choke full out, the engine answered at once to the starter and the roar drowned the
faltering words of the comissionaire who jumped aside as the rear wheels whipped gravel
at his piped trouser-legs” (Fleming 98). By moving away from his contemplative pre-
response mode (make that better) as exemplified by his earlier careful consideration of all
potential outcomes, Bond is now reacting to the forces around him, not cultivating an
awareness of the undercurrents and the ways in which they can be manipulated.

Because Bond is reacting instead of interpreting, he is unable to save himself, or
even to save others. Bond is not able to prevent his own capture and subsequent torture.
The confrontation between hero and villain is not one which takes place with the hero in
the secure position of triumph — this is no parlor reveal of evil, but rather a standoff in
which one cannot be quite certain of Bond’s eventual victory. Nor does Bond fulfill any
kind of romantic convention and rescue Vesper. It is SMERSH who destroys Le Chiffre
and, through an oversight, leave Bond to survive. It is through the mistakes of his
enemies that Bond lives to die another day. “I have no orders to kill you . . . But you can
tell your organization that SMERSH is only merciful by chance or by mistake. In your
case you were saved first by chance and now by mistake, for I should have had orders to
kill any foreign spies who were hanging round this traitor like flies round a dog’s mess”
(Fleming 123). Although he defeated Le Chiffre in the casino, Bond is not able through
his own exertions or deductions to extract himself from danger; his inability to maintain
control of the situation leads him to question his role with MI6.

When Bond questions his position as an agent, he explicitly frames his doubts in
terms of narrative. He is bothered by Le Chiffre’s categorization of him: “Before Le
Chiffre began, he used a phrase which stuck in my mind . . . ‘Playing Red Indians.’ He
said that’s what I had been doing. Well, I suddenly thought he might be right” (Fleming
133). Bond feels stuck in a game in which the heroes and villains no longer fit neatly into
the childishly delineated slots. “[W]hen one’s young it seems very easy to distinguish
between right and wrong, but as one gets older it becomes more difficult” (Fleming 133-
4). Bond explains that the heroes and the villains have grown more muddled, dependent
for their position not on a solid standard, but instead their identity is determined by
perspective. During Bond’s inner turmoil, his questioning of his duty, he points to loyalty
to his country as the way in which he has understood his life and work. “Patriotism
comes along and makes it seem fairly all right, but this country-right-or-wrong business
is getting a little out-of-date . . . History is moving pretty quickly these days and the
heroes and the villains keep on changing parts” (Fleming 135). Bond’s narrative control
has slipped; he’s no longer viewing himself as the narrator, but as a component in the
story, an element that could fit into multiple roles.

In his relationship with Vesper, he is apparently being offered a different future
than the one he always envisioned. While he had “thought they would sleep together for a
few days . . . [t]hen would come the inevitable disengagement” (158), Bond moves quickly to a decision: “That day he would ask Vesper to marry him. He was quite certain” (Fleming 164). The hardened loner has been captured, beaten, and tortured, and those traumatic experiences give him a new perspective from which he questions the assumptions under which he has previously existed. He explains to Mathis, “When one’s young, it seems very easy to distinguish between right and wrong, but as one gets older it becomes more difficult. At school it’s easy to pick out one’s own villains and heroes and one grows up wanting to be a hero and kill the villains” (Fleming 133-134). Considering his past, Bond reflects on the villains he has killed and the reputation those killings earned him. Then, he questions the labels that have been assigned to the different players in his life narrative, reversing the roles of the heroes and the villains, using that reversal as a basis for questioning his own identity. “when the hero Le Chiffre starts to kill the villain Bond and the villain Bond knows he isn’t a villain at all, you see the other side of the medal. The villains and heroes get all mixed up” (Fleming 135). Bond’s ability to explore possibilities of different narratives here works to destabilize his basic identity; he is able to push past the assigned title of ‘hero’ and interrogate the ethics of his actions.

Mathis does not tolerate Bond’s philosophical musings. He dismisses Bond scornfully, calling his dilemma a “little problem” and patiently explaining that, even if Bond is not confident that he know “good men from bad men and villains from heroes” (138) that he can rely on personal experience and his superiors to make the concrete distinctions between the abstract categories. Mathis assures Bond that his uncertainty will disappear once he gets back to London and is made aware of the other Le Chiffre-types threatening his country. “M will tell you about them. And now that you have seen a really
evil man, you will know how evil they can be and you will go after them to destroy them in order to protect yourself and the people you love” (Fleming 138-139). Mathis is prioritizing a different sort of narrative, maintaining that there is a distinction between hero and villain, and that the distinctions, though based on perspective, can be kept separate because there is a right perspective and a wrong one. “You may want to be certain that the target really is black, but there are plenty of really black targets around. There’s still plenty for you to do. And you’ll do it” (Fleming 139). Mathis resituates Bond at the center of the action. “Surround yourself with human beings, my dear James. They are easier to fight for than principles . . . But don’t let me down and become human yourself. We would lose such a wonderful machine” (Fleming 139).

Although Bond questions the use of patriotism as a justification for violent actions, his return to his work at the end of the novel indicates an acceptance of it, and a push for an embracing of service to the nation as an ethical justification for behavior. Throughout the rest of the novels, Bond continues to inhabit the identity of 007 and service to the Crown. “Bond’s position in the novels is that of a self-reliant servant of the crown who carries into each mission with which he is tasked both the conventions of his upbringing and the burdens of his vocation” “McGowan 390). When he is betrayed by Vesper, it is to the service of his country to which Bond returns. That return to Britain’s service is perhaps enabled by the connection between Vesper as personal betrayer and Vesper as betrayer of Britain. “He saw her now only as a spy . . . he could only think of her treachery to the Service and to her country and of the damage it had done. His professional mind was completely absorbed with consequences — the covers which must have been blown over the ears, the codes which the enemy must have broken, the secrets
which must have leaked from the centre of the very section devoted to penetrating the Soviet Union” (Fleming 180). The betrayal of Bond by Vesper is an attack against Britain. As Berberich claims, “Vesper’s betrayal of Bond is ultimately a betrayal of her country . . . Bond’s ultimate victory over his emotional attachment to the treacherous Vesper and his defeat of Le Chiffre is presented not just as a moral victory but also as an ideological one” (Berberich 23). Bond retreats from his emotional existence and, in so doing, cements his alignment with the nation and government as the correct guide for action.

With Vesper revealed as the enemy, Bond is able to once again become the authoritative center of the narrative. He is able to look back at the clues of the past and correctly assemble the story of what really took place. “He calmly reviewed the facts of Vesper’s letter. They all fitted. The little shadows and question-marks of the past four weeks, which his instinct had noted but his mind rejected, all stood out now like signposts” (Fleming 180). The role of detective-spy — to identify and neutralize — is finally completed as Vesper’s status as the true enemy is uncovered. The ‘whodunnit’ of the novel has not been about Le Chiffre, but about Vesper. It is not the threat of the foreign outsider that has to be uncovered (that threat was clearly known from the start) but the threat of betrayal from inside the ranks of those who were believed to be trustworthy.

Fleming, through his creation of Bond, provides a hero whose rationality is not replaced by emotion, or abandoned merely for the sake of thrills. Bond is a flawed hero, one who attempts to predict and control the situations in which he finds himself, but whose ability to do so is deeply compromised by his humanity. Knowledge is presented
as something that cannot be totally understood or controlled. No matter how meticulous Bond is, he is restricted to the knowledge which he is able to absorb, and even then, his use of it is entirely dependent on whether or not he has interpreted correctly. This relationship to knowledge is similar to that seen in the hard-boiled and classical strains, as earlier represented by Chandler and Sayers. Their detectives were unable to hold or understand all of the information, just as Bond is. The new step, or divergence, lies in the attempts to use and control knowledge. Information is no longer a neutral force that provides an objective picture of reality, but is something that can be manipulated, and will be. The struggle is not to uncover a real, existing truth, but to use the available knowledge to shape the story that is being told.

**Identifying the Killer Inside**

The malleability of information is even more clear in Jim Thompson’s *The Killer Inside Me* (1952). Though not as well-known as the British Ian Fleming, the American Jim Thompson was an author familiar to many readers of thrillers in the 1950s and 1960s. Thompson grew up in Depression-era America and, perhaps unsurprisingly given that cultural context, composed works focused on the darker elements of humanity. Across the ocean from Britain, the United States were also embroiled in a Cold War. After the second World War, the main characteristic of the culture was anxiety, an anxiety with no clear belief in a hopeful future. In *The Post-Utopian Imagination* Keith M. Booker summarizes this cultural atmosphere by saying, “[h]owever wealthy it might

---

20 Thomson’s critical success during his lifetime, as pointed out by Max Collins, encompassed not only his novels, but also co-writing, with Stanley Kubrick, screenplays for *The Killing* (1956) and *Paths of Glory* (1957).
have appeared to be, America at the time was beset with a panoply of anxieties, arising from a set of social, economic, and political problems the increasing complexity of which rendered them more and more intractable” (2). Even in the midst of an economic boom, financial security did not translate into the pacification or remediation of cultural fears. Anxiety itself became a cultural concern, with both acknowledged and unacknowledged fears forming the nexus of what Frederick Whiting refers to as “a nation concerned to stabilize the consensus account of its ideals and institutions in the face of an uncertain new world order” (Whiting 149). The result of this nexus is a what Booker refers to as the collapsing of the American utopian imagination in the 1950s. American culture could no longer imagine a perfect society, or even a progression towards a perfect society, as the prevalent assessment of the world was the world as a space of unknown danger. It’s true that Thompson’s work fits neatly in a noir niche; the world presented is a dark one. “His best books are unpleasant” (Collins 38) and frequently contain an awareness of a loss of trustworthy, inner morality.

The Thompsonian protagonist generally appears at first to be nothing more than a typical small-town American male, but is gradually revealed to be a disturbing figure whose “often quiet, but all-pervasive madness . . . is unrelenting once it’s sneaked up on you” (Collins 39). Prioritizing this inner madness further serves to destabilize the thriller-hero and implicate him in the loss of narrative control/truth. Published in 1952, Thompson’s novel *The Thriller Inside Me* exemplifies his grim view of the world and delivers a protagonist whose inner self wars with what is perceived as external reality. Lou Ford is a sheriff’s deputy working in the small oil-boom town of Central City where he has spent his entire life. He appears to be kind, considerate of others, and a
conscientious police officer who executes his myriad duties to the best of his abilities. This appearance, however, is revealed to be nothing more than a carefully crafted facade meant to conceal his crimes. Not only is Ford the hero of the piece, he is also the villain, responsible for multiple murders over the course of the novel. The book is a difficult one to summarize; much of the novel’s complexity lies not on the movement of the plot, but in the exploration of Ford’s character. The book follows Ford’s progression, through his first-person narrative, deeper and deeper into madness, and ultimately exposure and destruction.

Ford’s role as a sheriff’s deputy bestows on him an automatic authority. This bestowing is naturally accompanied by a certain level of trust, a level undergirded by the cultivation of his public appearance, fulfilling and exceeding expectations. Through his actions, Ford earns the trust of the sheriff, Bob Maples, and the townspeople. As the narrator, Ford continually draws attention to his own gentleness in the execution of his duty. He explains that he never, unlike so many of the other police officers, mistreated the prisoners. He offers as an example an instance of him dealing directly with a pugnacious prisoner, saying, “I never slugged him or kicked him. I never let him struggle hard enough to hurt himself. I just wore him down . . . I’d never hurt a prisoner” (Thompson 31). Ford implies here that he is unwilling to abuse his position of power — and indeed uses it to protect those over whom he has authority — in order to harm those around him.

At first, the public persona of the affable deputy succeeds. Ford’s competent considerateness is so convincing that Sheriff Maples calls him in for special duties that require careful handling, duties like shepherding home the payday drunks or deciding
how to manage the situation with a new prostitute who has recently moved to the edge of town. Trusting in a combination of Ford’s gentleness and good judgment, Maples sends him to deal with the prostitute, Joyce Lakeland, saying, “make your own decision. I know you’ll be gentle, as gentle and pleasant as you can be. An’ I know you can be firm if you have to . . . I’ll back you up in whatever you do” (Thompson 5). Maples’ confidence, however, is severely misplaced. Ford drives to Lakeland’s house, is greeted as a customer, and then when she discovers he is a police officer and rages at him, finally “slapped me [Ford] so hard that my ears rang, first on one side and then the other . . . she slammed her knee under my chin” (Thompson 8). Lakeland’s assault on Ford receives a response grounded not in gentleness, but in extreme violence and the desire to inflict pain. He beats her nearly to death. “‘No, baby’ — my lips drew back from my teeth. ‘I’m not going to hurt you. I wouldn’t think of hurting you. I’m just going to beat the ass plumb off of you.’ I said it, and I meant it and I damned near did” (Thompson 9). Ford beats her until she is nearly unconscious, revealing that his demonstrated gentleness is just that, a demonstration meant for display, not an inner trait. The physical act of violence breaks through the public pose and he acts not as a deputy, but as a violent person. The consequences of Ford being sent to deal with Lakeland are severe, and reveal how thin is the veneer of gentleness spread over the inner reality.

In choosing life as a deputy and encouraging others to view him as little more than an affable fool, Ford is engaging in a narrative of self-construction that pretends that the self he is showing to the world is his complete self. However, this construction is quickly revealed to be a lie. He is caught between his public role as the sheriff’s deputy — the public enforcer of societal norms — and his private role as a serial killer — the
violator of social norms. The apparently stable identity presented to the world is actually much more of a blurred figure who, enmeshed in his own fragmentation, cannot maintain coherency but eventually disintegrates.

Ford’s self-construction is deliberate and is meant to shield him from responsibility for his actions. His father was the town doctor, and had originally wanted his son to follow in his footsteps. But when he discovered Ford molesting a three-year old girl, Doctor Ford realized that his son could never have a high-profile job like a doctor. Avoiding notice would be essential in order to keep Ford from going to jail; he would need to blend in. “If Dad could have swung anything else that paid a living, I wouldn’t even have been as much as a deputy sheriff” (Thompson 23). Instead, he ‘becomes a low ranking police officer, presenting an appearance of serving justice, while hiding a violent history’ (Anshen 411). Ford has deliberately chosen a life that allows him to blend in, concealing his true nature. Lurking behind the illusion of the innocuous officer is a sharply intelligent individual bent on self-preservation. His true abilities far exceed what he shows the public. He seeks out intellectual challenge, reading dense books on philosophy and psychology, and casually completing calculus problems as a form of entertainment. “Ford pretends to be rather simple-minded, cliché-spouting hick, the sort of dopey bore anybody hates to be cornered by; but Ford is actually a cunning, complex, even brilliant psycho who is playing cat-and-mouse with the world” (Collins 40). The appearance of mediocrity masks his true abilities and enables him to enact his private desires.

Behind closed doors, removed from the public role of deputy, Ford’s behavior shifts from gentleness to violence, and clearly unjustified violence. When a beggar
approaches him asking for change, Ford pretends to be finding some to give. “I took the
cigar out of my mouth with one hand and made like I was reaching into my pocket with
the other. Then, I grabbed his wrist and ground the cigar butt into his palm” (Thompson
12). With no provocation, Ford burns the man. This physical act of violence is far from
alone, but provides a clear example of the way in which Ford not only acts violently, but
delights in his cruelty.

Lou Ford serves as the narrative center of the novel. It is his perspective that the
reader is given, and all of the “facts” are filtered by what he is willing to share. With Ford
as the first-person narrator, the reader is never given a break from what Barthes describes
as the personal system of narration in which everything happens within the sphere of the
individual and is communicated through that same sphere. “[B]y confining the entire
narrative to the mere instance of the discourse, or one might say to the act of locution, it
is the very content of the person which is threatened: the psychological person
(referential order) has no relation with the linguistic person, never defined by
arrangements, intentions, or features, but only by (coded) place within the discourse”
(Introduction 125). Because our access to Ford is only through Ford’s personal narrative,
then, there is no true access to the “content” of who Ford is — rather, the content of his
self is removed from any solid relationship with anything that exists outside of the self he
has created for display.

Ford’s desire to harm others is most frequently apparent as it is funneled through
his use of language. His disguise is that he pretends to be like everyone else, and an
essential part of that disguise are his words and the way in which he speaks to people.
Anshen argues that Ford can only preserve his disguise by “engaging in a common
pretense that he is speaking as everyone does, in a harmless way” (Anshen 409).

However, his words are far from harmless. He uses an abundance of clichés to bolster an idea of himself as one of the crowd, speaking in commonplaces so as to seem as though he is one of the common public. But his clichés are unrelenting, packed together in incessant layers that give the hearers no moment of cessation, or chance to relax/recover. “The way I see it is, if at first you don’t succeed . . . Where there’s a will, there’s a way” (Thompson 12). While Anshen’s focus on the power of the cliché as providing insight into the ways their deployment may possibly provide space for social critique, he does not fully acknowledge the deliberateness with which Ford invokes those clichés. Ford does not simply fall into clichés, but wields them like weapons. His use of words is intended to be a display of his power over others. The bland, cliched, repetitious language employed by Ford is a weapon. He muses, “[s]triking at people that way [through words] is almost as good as the other, the real way” (Thompson 3). He forces those around him to listen to his endless banalities, enduring his verbal aggressions disguised as polite conversation. “The chatter is both an act of aggression and a way of concealing his inner nature as a psychopath, aware of the criminal truth of the social order and filled with rage and potential violence” (Anshen 410). The use of language is also noted by Clark: “he is a self-conscious creator, deceiving through the use of too-familiar language and imagery. He uses the language to deflect attention from himself; but, also, and most significantly he intentionally bores his neighbors as an act of veiled violence: language is a weapon of his” (Clark 53). Ford’s violent use of language not only a replacement form of violence, but also part of his disguise.
Throughout the course of the novel, that disguise disintegrates. His identity is wrapped up in his use of language. He’s been warned that his use of clichés is too obvious, that it reveals what it is meant to conceal. But he cannot stop. “I was supposed to be over that stuff. Rothman had warned me about it . . . But — Well, why shouldn’t I, if I wanted to? If it helped to take the tension out of me? It was in character. It fitted in with that dull good-natured guy who couldn’t do anything bad if he tried” (Thompson 81). Ford is unable to avoid the betraying use of antagonistic clichés because his words are serving multiple purposes. Not only are they meant to conceal, but as discussed before, they are weapons. When Ford fails to contain his use of clichés, it is not just a failure of disguise. It is a refusal to stop inflicting violence. While his talk was, as Ford says, “a big part of me — part of the guy that had thrown ‘em all off the trail” (Thompson 81), its usefulness, or apparent uselessness as a disguise is not its only function. “As the novel progresses, Ford’s language eventually comes to completely parallel his personal defeat — eventually he loses control of his language both as a narrator and as a character” (Anshen 417). Ford’s loss of language shows his loss of self and loss of control. As he spirals further and further away from any kind of moral center, the language he uses becomes more and more unrelentingly violent and unable to fill in the gaps of the narrative.

The words with which Ford chooses to speak are highly important, as they are a way to control perceptions, people, and situations. This control, because of the first-person narrative, is exerted in multiple directions. As already discussed, his violent language is used to strike out at those around him as it simultaneously functions as a disguise. Additionally, the narrative reaches outside of itself and controls what the reader
is able to see. One of the clearest gaps in the narrative is the answer to “why?” he is a killer. Ford encourages placing the blame on the women in his life, especially Lakeland. “I knew she was making me worse” (Thompson 10). Ford claims in his narrative that it is because of Joyce Lakeland that he begins to strike out at those around him, that “the sickness” awakens once more. After he beats her, they begin a passionate relationship. In Ford’s words, “it was like wind had been turned on a dying fire” (Thompson 10). He goes on to say, “I knew she was making me worse; I knew that if I didn’t stop soon I’d never be able to. I’d wind up in a cage or the electric chair” (Thompson 10). While Ford attempts to shift blame onto Lakeland for this “sickness” that he has, the inner drive to strike out and hurt others, it is ultimately not persuasive. The sickness appeared in his life well before Lakeland did. It is the (indirect) reason for his adopted brother’s death as his brother Mike takes the blame for Ford’s actions — child molestation — and is murdered by a union boss because of it. Growing up, Ford’s father saw him as a highly intelligent individual and wanted his son to be a doctor. “It used to irritate him, knowing what I had in my head, to hear me talking and acting like any other rube around town” (Thompson 22). He grew up as an intelligent, yet twisted individual — having committed dreadful perversions. The split in Ford was established long before he met Joyce Lakeland.

The question of blame is not an insignificant one, as it points to the conflicts and disintegration of the novel. As the narrator, Ford possesses the ability to manipulate the reader, nudging them into his own perspective. And he does this very successfully. He encourages placing the blame for his actions — as mentioned above — on the women in his life, especially Joyce Lakeland. Frederick Whiting buys into this perspective. He claims that the “sadomasochistic relationship instigated by Joyce Lakeland” is what
breaks Ford’s successful containment strategy through which he has been restraining himself and keeping himself from hurting others. He goes on to say that Ford’s “fear of the reemergence of the sickness [because of Lakeland] also leads him to kill his girlfriend Amy, who in the course of the novel reveals her own sexual masochism and further incites his sexual sadism. In the process of covering his tracks, he is forced to kill three other local citizens” (Whiting 167). Here, Whiting has shifted responsibility from Ford to Lakeland and Amy Stanton, the two women with whom Ford has a sexual relationship. It is their behavior that leads to him being “forced” to kill. Whiting’s agreement with Ford’s perspective, locating responsibility on the outside as belonging to forces exerting pressure that drives him to do what he would not otherwise do, is troubling. As an interpretation, it fails to acknowledge the untrustworthy nature of Ford and the unreliability of his narration. In a way, it’s a clear picture of the ways in which Ford is able to provide an image which, although it does not necessarily reflect reality, is both persuasive and believable.

Ford offers other possible answers for the motivating forces behind his violence, an offering that undermines the possibilities it pretends to present — the possibility that there is an answer. The reader is ultimately left with choices and questions, not answers. Psychoanalysis is a second option clearly provided. Psychoanalysis blossomed in popularity after World War II — when this novel was written — serving as “an enlightened, rational approach to understanding aberrant human behavior” (Clark 54). Freud’s theories explained that “destructive adult behavior was caused by traumatic, unresolved sexual and aggressive experiences in childhood” (Goldberg qtd. in Clark 54). Throughout his narration, Ford scatters references to early childhood trauma. In the early
pages we see that the shelves of his childhood home are “endless files of psychiatric literature, the bulky volumes of morbid psychology . . . Kraft-Eing, Jung, Freud” (Thompson 22). Ford’s familiarity with the contents of the books make him able to appeal to others familiar with those authors and their theories. His psychoanalytical references are eventually concretized in the revelation of his abuse at the hands of his childhood housekeeper.

Mine had started back with the housekeeper . . . I had a burden of fear and shame put on me that I could never get shed of. She was gone, and I couldn’t strike back at her, yes, kill her, for what I’d been made to feel she’d done to me. But that was all right. She was the first woman I’d ever known; she was woman to me; and all womankind bore her face. So I could strike back at any of them, any female, the ones it would be safest to strike at, and it would be the same as striking her. And I did that (Thompson 195).

Here Ford lays out a classic example of transference in which Ford moves the feelings inspired by the trauma of his childhood relationship with the housekeeper into his present contexts and relationships. This transferred trauma provides the appearance of a motivation for his violent killings, except that it is not only women who he kills or harms. While the first violent attack is against female Lakeland, the second is his burning of the stranger in the parking lot, “a young fellow, about my age” (Thompson 12). The stranger is neither female, nor involved in a sexual relationship with Ford, so fails to shore up a psychological interpretation. While there is a lot of violence enacted against women, the
lack of consistency undermines the psychological foundation for motivation, even though it is clearly provided for the readers.

Mental illness is a third, though related, possibility offered as an explanation for Ford’s violence. But, like each of the others, is similarly undermined and insufficient. Clark points out that Ford, when he thinks the psychological explanation may be weak, eagerly offers a more psychiatric interpretation. Much as he does with the scattered mentions of childhood trauma, Ford clearly references diseases like schizophrenia that might explain his behavior. As he describes schizophrenia and its symptoms in an individual, Ford references his reading of Emil Kraepelin. Kraepelin was a psychiatrist who was perhaps best known for his work connecting pathogenesis, the biological origin of a disease, with psychiatric disorders like schizophrenia and depression (Ebert and Bar). It’s tempting, when Ford lays out the symptoms of schizophrenia — “there are rarely if ever any surface signs of . . . disturbance. On the contrary, his behavior appears to be entirely logical. He reasons soundly, even shrewdly. He is completely aware of what he does and how he does it” (Thompson 198) — to match those symptoms with Ford’s described behaviors and make a diagnosis. Payne identifies Ford as a schizophrenic, but also acknowledges the potential problems with that: “In spite of his own clear-cut self-diagnosis, it seems to me that Lou Ford wiggles free from easy categorization” (“Killers” 260).

Multiple answers fit the question of Lou Ford and his desire for violence, pain, and death, but no answer is satisfactorily complete. The discrepancies of the plot undermine a psychological approach by highlighting the ways in which Ford acts inconsistently with his self-described trauma. Similarly, inconsistencies plague using
mental illness as an explanation. Evil disguised as good is a problem for which there is no solution. By not providing a complete answer for the problem of Ford, Thompson removes any sense of stability or even of hope. With no potential solution, all that is left is alienation from society, accompanied by a fragmenting of self that leaches out into a fragmenting society.

The lack of answers is reflected in the lack of coherence Ford is able to maintain within himself. As his world unravels, so does his certainty in himself. He explains, “you know your life doesn’t depend on anything that makes sense, and you wonder where in the hell you got the idea it did, and you begin to get sore” (Thompson 216). Apparent rationality is insufficient to stand within a world that no longer makes rational sense, that can no longer be brought under his control. The binarized identity of deputy sheriff/murderer disintegrates. The private killer increasingly controls and dictates actions, even though the lack of control is dangerously exposing the public facade as false. The destruction of the binary identity is a destruction of the illusion of safety. Though true safety has never existed, it is the collapsing of Ford’s character that reveals that lack of safety. The deputy, the upholder of law, is also the destroyer of law. There is no longer a clear division between safe authority and dangerous individuality.

The final scenes of the novel demonstrate the disintegration of self that reveals the utter lack of security, a lack that is demonstrated through the form of the narrative and its content. “Lou, like the evil he ostensibly is trying to explain, keeps disappearing behind his explanations and in the end disappears into the ellipsis of the text — a textual black hole — a fitting end for an impossible narrative” (Clark 52). Ford brings attempts at interpretation to an explosive close as he sets off a bomb in his home — maintaining
control over his future and asserting control over those with whom he comes into contact. With his dying breath, he glories in the explosive blast as he slides the blade of his knife between Joyce Lakeland’s ribs. Then, he breaks the rules of the narrative and continues to speak from beyond the grave. Even death is not enough to silence him.

The disintegration of Ford and the lack of a satisfactory explanation prohibits any relaxation into the narrative; it denies any sense of assurance for the reader. Ford breaks the distinctions between the public exercise of authority in the pursuit of justice and the personal exercise of violence for individual satisfaction. He vacillates between roles, effectively fulfilling the demands of neither and blurring the boundaries between them. The terror brought about by that blurring intensifies as everything is subsumed into Ford’s continuum of desire until it is finally destroyed, he is finally destroyed, by his act of violent immolation. Sean McCann argues that the success of Thompson’s novel depends on the shattering of the illusions and the loss of security. He says, “[t]he calculation, the brutality, the perverse fatefulness, and above all the loneliness . . . depend for their effect on the frisson we may experience when we discover that sympathy is really manipulation, that protestations of disinterest conceal selfish calculation, that all people are predatory and, most importantly, that as a consequence, public action is pointless” (218). The community cannot be safe, because the individuals who inhabit it are not safe.

The rational community interest, or even self-interest, of the stereotype of the hard-boiled detective disappears in Ford, into a rapacious self-interest that consumes everything outside of it, and cannot provide any sense of stability since it can neither be solved nor satisfied. Abandoning any depiction of the detective as the producer of
solutions, the centralizing figure becomes not a provider of answers, but complicit in the production of problems, part of the evil danger that runs through society. Ford’s moral code remains, like the hard-boiled investigator, very much his own — self-determining actions. But that self-code is no longer reassuring. Susanna Lee argues that Thompson’s work includes an element of “the deliberate subversion of the individual as the center of ethics and of narratorial coherence” (44) and “[d]ismantles the notion of the transcendent and redemptive individual” (47). The individual authority, even invested with public/governmental authority, is not the defender of society, but is lost within it. The world is acknowledged as dangerous, humanity as corrupt, and shows the insinuating and overriding terror of unsatisfiable desire and consumption that leaves only uncertainty.

**No Restoration and No Reassurance**

Both Fleming and Thompson offer views of heroes, but their heroes have failed. Neither are able to control the narrative around them, or to offer solutions to the problems that arise. Bond and Ford have similar characteristics, views of the world, and understandings of their place within the world. They also demonstrate a new relationship to the idea of knowledge, an understanding that information is controllable. In the endings of the two novels, we see the last attempts to regain control, to fill in the missing holes with an assertion of all of the authority they can muster. Bond returns to his patriotism, to his service of his nation and rejects all history with Vesper. Amacker and Moore explain it as, “He [Bond] relegates everything he has just experienced to simply part of the mission, the job, and by stripping Vesper of her identity, making her the bitch, he pushes away any feelings or experiences that might threaten his hyper masculinity” (147). But it is not just about Vesper and her identity, nor is it simply about Bond and his
identity — though that is a real part of it (by rejecting Vesper and what she had meant, Bond is rejecting the identity of himself as someone who could exist in that type of relationship) — but it is about defining the history of what has happened. In summing up the situation as “the bitch is dead,” Bond overwrites all of the other true facts — she loved him; he loved her; the suicide, etc. — and replaces them with his version (the definitive version) of the narrative.

Similarly, Lou Ford realizes he has lost control of the narrative when he wakes up alone with his injuries. “I shouldn’t have been alone. Your friends don’t leave you alone at a time like that. I’d lost the girl I was going to marry, and I’d been through a terrible experience. And they’d left me alone” (Thompson 173). He knows, by their absence, that everyone believes he is a murderer. Rather than searching out the answers to the mystery and providing them to others, Ford appears to be a man who is in search of answers. He loves his father’s library because it provides a sense of security. “It had always made me feel better to come here . . . All the answers were here, out in the open where you could look at them. And no one was terrified or horrified” (Thompson 22). This quest for answers extends to the final moments of the narrative where he clearly asks for answers. Self-immolation — the only power he has left is over life and death, his own life at least (though he attempts to take, and perhaps succeeds in taking, others with him).

Not only is information not to be trusted, what is also lost is the hero who can be trusted. Bond fails to provide a sense of security as he is unable even to save himself, and is deceived by those around him. He is a failed hero. Ford is the destroyed hero. Unlike in the Bond novel, Thompson’s work doesn’t provide us with a nationalistic hero who is able to defeat the threat from outside. He reveals that there is no clear distinction between
us and them, between the heroes and the villains. Ford writes the story of his crime into reality, laying out his actions as justified from his perspective. It is a partly hidden, distorted, and misleading story, and one which no one is able to fully interpret, not even himself. “But “myth that fails” is precisely the dream of hard-boiled virtue. The narrator remains as structuring principle and aesthetic agent, but, as such, has become a force of destruction — a menace and not a redeemer” (Lee 48). It is not a complete loss of an ethical center — there is still an awareness of what is right and what is wrong — a communal morality — it has just been lost by the protagonist. The detective's inability to read the traces of the criminal's text (the story of what they did) means that there is no one who can read that story, and there is no one who can provide reassurance. This could signal a couple of things – either the unreadable nature of the world (an essential inability to determine true meaningfulness or the loss of personal authority/certainty (individual ability). The last chapter demonstrated the impossibility of restoring an uncorrupted world; perfection, once lost, can never be regained. This chapter reveals that is not an individual positioned with enough abilities to solve the problems of the world; the world is unreadable and even the authoritative detective is filled with doubt about themselves and their role.
THE CRIMINALIZATION OF INNOCENCE

Tim Oxford was known at the Yard as “The Undertaker”, a sobriquet not unsuitable for the chief of the Murder Squad. The brightest tie he ever wore was pale grey, which matched his eyes. He never raised his voice, never attempted to browbeat a suspect. He was invariably polite to even the most diabolical villains and, when making inquiries among law-abiding citizens, was almost deferential (La Bern 62).

Detective Inspector Tim Oxford, in Arthur La Bern’s Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square (1966), at first appears to reincarnate the archetypical characteristics of the authoritative detective figure. Oxford resembles Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, and Lord Peter Wimsey and their approaches to detection — a traditional construction of the detective that John Scaggs labels as “the methodical detective” (Crime Fiction 39).

The methodical detective possesses the mental genius necessary not only to collect the snippets of information left behind by the criminal, but the ability to deploy that information to capture that criminal. Their approach relies on thorough analysis and the exercise of a calm rationality. Oxford’s investigative process flows along similar lines. He demonstrates a strong attention to detail as well as a personal investment in the case. He is unflurried in his investigation; he controls his emotions, subsuming them beneath an attitude of distanced rationality.

Detective Oxford serves as the lead detective investigating the homicide of Brenda Blamey, a matchmaker found raped and killed in her office. Eventually her case

---

21 The book was adapted into an Alfred Hitchcock film in 1972 and is now published (and better known) by the film’s title, Frenzy.
is connected to a string of similar attacks scattered throughout London’s West End. Oxford’s job is to find the information necessary to find, and condemn, the murderer. Brenda’s ex-husband, Richard Blamey, is an obvious suspect. In sharp contrast to Brenda’s business success, Blamey spent his post-RAF years struggling to scrape by financially. His riding school failed, partially due to his refusal to conform to construction regulations, and he was fired from his job as a bartender the day before Brenda’s murder, leaving him with limited cash and no place to live. Brenda’s purse has been emptied of cash, and an eyewitness placed Blamey at the scene of the crime near the time of the murder. This conjunction of circumstances creates enough suspicion for the police to place a notification in the newspaper seeking information about a man matching Blamey’s description, without outright naming him as a suspect. The next body found is that of Barbara “Babs” Milligan, a barmaid from Blamey’s former place of employment with whom he has recently been seen sharing a hotel room. Blamey’s easily traceable connections to both victims draws the condemnation of the police, the media, and the public.

Despite the media and police focus on Blamey as the suspect, Detective Inspector Oxford refuses to condemn Blamey and instead pursues all available leads. He remains open to evidence that might contradict the current assumptions about who committed the murder. This attitude is central to Oxford’s approach to detection: “He was always wary of assuming the guilt of too obvious a suspect” (La Bern 81). In standing apart from these public attitudes, Oxford performs authority, behaving as if he — the detective — has the authority to provide the correct judgment on the case. Oxford believes in the possibility of Blamey’s guilt, but wants to demonstrate that guilt through solid, verifiable evidence
rather than circumstance and conjecture. Like Wimsey or Marlowe, Oxford examines the information gathered from witnesses and the crime scenes in order to draw conclusions. He doggedly pursues all available leads as he searches for the true story of what happened. He traces Babs’ body from where it is found in a potato lorry back to a street containing, among other things, the apartment of a man named Bob Rusk. Rusk claims to have lent Blamey the key to his apartment and turns Blamey in to the police. Rusk’s claims satisfy others, but Oxford questions the evidence and its inconsistencies. He points out that despite Rusk’s claims of friendship, he does not even know Blamey’s surname. “Why should the man Rusk go out of his way to give Blamey a key to his flat? . . . he was not a wartime buddy” (La Bern 208). Despite his official alliance with the police department, Oxford operates more like the independent Sherlock Holmes than Conan Doyle’s police officer, Inspector Lestrade. Oxford refuses to accept unquestioned the narrative of Blamey’s guilt and investigates other possibilities, acting as though he has control over identifying the real criminal.

Oxford’s apparent authority, however much he behaves as though it is real, proves illusive. As explained earlier in this project, scholarly discussions of detective fiction often contain inherent assumptions about the role of the detective. The detective, in these discussions, possesses the authority and the ability to access the objective truth of reality. The detective finds the solution that reveals the world for the way it really is. As revealed in earlier chapters, however, even the early detective figures did not support this mythologizing of their abilities. Detectives fail to provide access to an unmediated truth; they serve only to construct narratives interpreting reality. So while their identification of a criminal could be objectively correct, it equally may not be. That mistake could be an
innocent one, or, as in the case of Lou Ford in the previous chapter, it could be knowingly wrong and designed to further the detective’s own desires through obscuring alternate interpretations.

Enhancing this changed view of the detective is La Bern’s narrative approach to the figure. Rather than orbiting around the character of the detective, using that figure to organize the details and progression of the narrative, La Bern minimizes the detective. Oxford attempts to act authoritatively, but his individual control is undermined, not just by the assumption of group authority over determinations of guilt — the public condemnation of Blamey, his trial by media and popular opinion — but also through the quashing of Oxford’s investigation by other, more powerful, authorities — embodied by the police commissioner. La Bern also undercuts any individuality to Oxford’s character by emphasizing his unremarkable style of dress and unobtrusive approach to personal interactions. Oxford’s non-individuality extends even to his nickname. His colleagues call him “The Undertaker” because of the role in which he serves, not due to any uniqueness of who he is. “In the Murder Squad they used to say that The Undertaker always got his body, the body referred to being that of the murderer, not the victim” (La Bern 81). The successful execution of his duties earns Oxford his reputation, and La Bern ties Oxford’s success not to the authoritative identification of a criminal, but to producing a body to be punished. Oxford’s jurisdiction is limited to following the orders of those higher in the hierarchy of the legal system. Authority belongs to the larger system of governance, not to Oxford as an individual. The system’s dictates are authoritative, while La Bern shows Oxford serving merely as a broker for the courts.
Though Oxford has the accoutrements of a detective, he lacks the substance to maintain that position of authority or carry out its interpretive function. He offers individual interpretations, but those interpretations are unable to affect the assumptions made about Blamey’s guilt. If Oxford truly retained authority over the case, over the identification of the guilty, then his dissatisfaction with Blamey as a suspect would inspire a more thorough investigation. Instead of fueling further investigation, Oxford’s continued resistance draws an official reprimand from his superior, the Commissioner. Early in the investigation, the Commissioner chastises Oxford for “wasting time investigating innocent clients” connected to Brenda Blamey’s matchmaking agency (La Bern 135). The assumption is that they already know who is guilty, while Oxford believes that the investigation is meant to determine guilt. Later, Oxford takes evidence of Blamey’s innocence to the Commissioner to ask for Blamey’s conviction to be dismissed and the death sentence reprieved. “That distinguished Civil Servant told Oxford to mind his own business. It was his job to get convictions, not quash them . . . It was not for the head of the Murder Squad to attempt to set aside the verdicts of Her Majesty’s courts. It was not for a Detective-Superintendent to assume the roles of Lord Chancellor and Home Secretary” (La Bern 211). The Commissioner dismisses the evidence and reprimands Oxford for assuming any authority over the outcome of the case. He aligns his rejection of Oxford’s evidence — and the accompanying rejection of Blamey’s innocence — with a designation of the limits of Oxford’s authority. He emphasizes that any authority Oxford possesses is not inherent to him, but conferred on him because of his job, and therefore limited by the definitions of his duties. This exchange redefines the business of the detective; detection is no longer Oxford’s
purview. His role does not extend to the determination of guilt; that determination is disbursed throughout bureaucratic processes of the juridical system. The vocation of detection is replaced by employment.

Framing the detective’s role as characterized by dictated interpretations of reality, rather than accurate observations of what really happened, may feel like an amplification of the detective’s individual authority, because it appears to give the detective power over interpretation. However, as seen in the case of La Bern’s Oxford, the power of an individual’s interpretation — even if that individual is a detective — is highly restricted by the power structure of the society in which they live. In *Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square*, La Bern emphasizes the restricted authority of the detective by moving that figure out of the central role. The protagonist is no longer the detective. This move, however, is not as simple as instead placing the criminal at the center of the narrative, as some historians of the genre have suggested. La Bern’s focus is not always on “the” criminal (or perhaps even “a” criminal). While psychological considerations do play a larger role, the examined psychology is not necessarily the broken psychology of a corrupt individual. Instead, this style of detective fiction scrutinizes the complex matrix of the interactions between society and individuals with an emphasis on the relationship between those individuals and the systems of law in which they live.

The detective fiction genre’s exaggerated focus on criminal transgressions and uncovering the hidden motivations behind an individual’s actions enables a close examination of the interplay between the totalizing effects of a codified, enforced system of law and those people governed by that law. This ability has led to a frequent situation of this genre of fiction as a path into cultural critique. Its cultural position as popular
fiction provides foundations for using detective fiction (and other popular genres) as arguments about their reflection of reality. Sean McCann in *Gumshoe America* (2000) examines the hard-boiled strain of detective fiction and argues that it became “not just a style of popular entertainment but a kind of literary critique” (5). He claims that “hard-boiled writers recognized the untenable paradoxes of liberal democracy and tried to imagine solutions to those dilemmas” (307). In *Unwilling Executioner: Crime Fiction and the State* (2016), Andrew Pepper argues that crime fiction “tends to produce a contradictory account of the state as both necessary for the creation and maintenance of collective life and central to the reproduction of entrenched socioeconomic inequalities, to the point that this tension becomes the constitutive and foundational feature of the emerging genre” (2). Pepper expands on McCann’s work to examine the conflicts between individuals and the state on a more global scale. He explores “how individual action is always socially and economically situated” (3). Any fictional world can only provide a reflection, and reflections carry with them reversals, warped surfaces, and reduced perspectives. What is offered by the reflections are concepts on which the imagination can work. McCann and Pepper argue that privileged in crime fiction are imaginings of conflicts between state systems — and their social and economic positioning of people — and individuals. By examining the systems in which people live, the question of blame is dislocated from belonging only to the perpetrator of the crime and the conditions enabling/producing the criminal acts become subject to scrutiny. The ongoing struggle within the fictional worlds of detective fiction between the private individual and the public structure reflects the core of the genre with its attraction and
repulsion between recovery and loss, the constant — yet doomed — attempt to remove and restore.

Arthur La Bern’s *Goodbye Piccadilly* uses Detective Oxford as a fulcrum for examining the power relations in the interactions between the individual and the system. Oxford’s lack of authority, which La Bern emphasizes throughout the novel, accentuates the tension within those interactions. Similarly, Patricia Highsmith in *The Glass Cell* (1964) shows the effects of the interactions between individuals and the systems of law, and the ways in which the pressures of the system affect the internal identities of the individual. In order to highlight these interactions, both La Bern and Highsmith move the detectives to the periphery of the novels, echoing in those peripheral narrative roles the subsidiary authority of the detective. Detectives like those in the first chapter, Marlowe and Wimsey, use their individuality to operate outside the boundaries of the law, gaining the reputation for pursuing justice rather than legality. They used their personal integrity and motivations to locate the guilty and prevent future harm — though that prevention, significantly, did not always equate to a legal capture and legislated punishment. Within these novels, the detective does not disappear from the story; the detective figure still performs a function, but a minimized and subordinate one. They no longer bear the sole responsibility for solving the case or identifying the criminal, as that responsibility belongs to the legislative system. Both *Goodbye Piccadilly* and *The Glass Cell* preserve detectives as characters, but move them out of the central role, transforming the authoritative figure into a corporate cog and emphasizing the lack of authority or reassurance the detective might provide.
Identity, the Legal System, and Interpellation

The dislocation of the detective from a central position of authority allows the novels to illuminate not just the interplay between individuals and the social systems in which they exist, but the depth of control exerted by those systems — even to the point of governing personal identity. Both novels contain a legal system dependent on the binarization of individuals, rendering individuals either innocent or guilty, with no grey spaces in between. The boundaries are established by the legal rules dictating what actions are permissible by codifying them into laws that must be followed. The ideology of justice is given form through the legal system, causing moral ideas of right and wrong to elide with written law, not with any other standard. Justice, then, is a label applied to the judgments of the system, not to an abstract ideal toward which the system should work.

The criminal act transgresses the bounds of codified acceptability and draws punishment from the agents of the legal system, personified perhaps most clearly in the police officer. However, since the criminal act is an action, there is no way to retaliate directly against it, only against the agent behind that action — the person who commits the crime. In order to preserve the order dictated by the written codes of behavior, the system of law — or legal system — punishes the criminal. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault traces a genealogy of shifting social mechanisms behind the legal system’s approach to punishment. He argues that although the punitive responses toward criminals originally focused on the prohibition of certain behaviors, with punishments designed to enforce the negative consequences of engaging in those behaviors, modern punishments focus on the perpetrator, rather than the actions. He says,
“that for a long time the criminal had been no more than the person to whom the crime could be attributed and could therefore be punished, today the crime tends to be no more than the event that signals the existence of a dangerous element” (Foucault 178). Mark Seltzer, in *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America’s Wound Culture* (1998), similarly claims that during the nineteenth century a shift took place: “a shift in focus from the criminal act to the character of the actor: the positing of the category of the dangerous individual . . . A kind of act was now a species of person” (4). It is the criminal who is seen as dangerous, not the action. Committing a crime makes one a criminal, an embodied threat to the social order. Crime serves as a marker of identity that transforms guilt and innocence into social positions occupied by individuals, positions determined by the relationship of that person’s actions to codified legal restrictions, not markers of moral absolutes.

In terms of the system’s binary, one is either a guilty-criminal, and therefore a threat, or one is innocent. In this type of divided system, the guilty must be separated from the innocent in order to protect those innocent individuals from corruption and in so doing to maintain the accepted boundaries of society. To prevent a recurrence of transgressive behavior, that threat must be punished, and the person of the criminal bears the punishment, and with it a separation from the innocent members of society. As this separation is carried out, the guilty-criminals become increasingly marginalized, since once identified as criminal, the guilty become subject to different standards of treatment. Seltzer uses the establishment of the Sex Offender Registry in California as an example of isolating the criminalized, locking them into a perpetual state of guilty-criminal whose identification as such justifies the isolation. Under this law, “serious” sex offenders are
required to register their location with local police, and this information is available on request, “a ‘lifting of the veil of anonymity’ shielding sex offenders from their neighbors” (Seltzer). Built into this justification is the assumption that the mere presence of a sex offender is such a high, present threat that the concealment of it is itself a transgression. As Seltzer puts it, “the right to privacy gives way to the crime of anonymity, where the sex offender is concerned.” Seltzer argues that by systemically violating the privacy of the offenders — people who purportedly already underwent the punishment for their crimes by serving their prison sentences — the state creates a “permanent class of stigmatized, second class citizens” (3). Marked as inherently and continually dangerous this class of people occupy a new, different social position.

Within social discourses, identity moves and shifts, and while the individual participates in the ongoing construction of their own identity, that participation does not extend to sovereign control over that identity. Others can, and do, externally impose social positions and roles onto the individual. Burke and Stets, in their explanation of Identity Control Theory, explain that how a person conceives of their own identity responds to the reactions to that identity by those around them. Burke and Stets argue that identity is “the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person” (3). This theory of how to understand identity — as tied to a set of meanings, rather than a singular sense of self, aligns with the post-modern idea of self in which the idea of a fixed “I” gives way to “having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity” (Hall Modernity 598). Identity can then be understood not as a constant self moving unaffected through the world. Instead,
individuals adapt their presentation, or selves, to the different environments and according to the feedback received from those around them. The discursive self fluxes to meet the needs and expectations of each scenario. While this leaves the individual purportedly in control of their own continual construction, society plays a large role in determining who is allowed to inhabit different social positions. Social norms assign places to people and prohibit crossing out of those places; violating boundaries is the exception, not the rule. People perform to suit their assigned roles, understanding themselves and defining who they are by conforming their behavior to expectations. Social positions, as explained by social psychologists Peter Burke and Jan Stets, are “shared by members of the culture and only slowly change or evolve as their use may change. Once created, these labels/categories . . . are present, shared, and used by all participants of the culture” (26). Social positions serve as zones of social agreement that standardizes interpretations.

Assigning an individual to a social role is another form of categorization — one using actions to determine the categorization rather than other inherent traits — that determines the individual’s social value and access to different social roles. Criminalizing an individual signals that their actions decrease their value to the system, other than as an example of what not to do. Seltzer argues that criminalizing the people who commit crimes, eliding the act of crime with the actor, effectively creates a lower tier of citizens without access to the same rights and freedoms. Their new identification is bound by their social position. In the case of the sex offender registry, the people who committed sexual offenses now permanently exist in the social position of sex offender, and the state concretizes that permanent existence by publishing the written record. That social
position places limits on where people can live and to what level of privacy they can expect. More broadly, people named as criminal become subject to the consequences of being assigned that social position; it becomes an unshakeable part of their public identity.

All of this theory, to this point, explains the interactions between the individual and the system in (mostly) external terms. The identification of the guilty requires a physical, or external, process — in detective fiction this frequently plays out in the detective’s investigation; the locating of physical clues; and then the invocation of the physical presence of the law in the form of police. These novels, *The Glass Cell* and *Goodbye Piccadilly*, push beyond that physical interaction, though that is a significant part of the process, and examine the ideological exchanges and effects. In the previous chapter, I argued that Jim Thompson and Ian Fleming wrote characters who illustrated the instability of an internal moral sense — its inability to provide guidance or resolution. Thompson’s protagonist, Lou Ford, demonstrated the ease with which apparent morality can cover corruption and endanger others. This chapter extends that examination of the impermanence of internal morality into a study of how that loss of morality is also a loss of the self. But that loss of morality/self is not only an internal process — as seen with Ford and Bond — but is subject to external processes as well. To summon up the spectre of Althusser … the self does not create its own identity, but is subject to the process of interpellation.

Put briefly, to be interpellated is to have been identified and accepted that identification. Althusser uses the example of a policeman hailing an individual from a distance and the individual turning in response. They accept that they are the subject of
call and signal that acceptance in their response. For Althusser, the absorption of an ideology/identity comes in the moment when the individual responds to the hail, recognizing it as having been addressed to them — making them the ‘subject’ of the hail. Althusser elaborates and eventually argues that within the system of interpellation, the subject simultaneously is interpreted/identified from the outside by an Authority/Subject; from the outside by other subjects; and internally within the recognition of the subject-self. In the case of detective fiction, it is clear that the most primary examples of ‘hailing’ are carried out by the State authorities, which Althusser would term Repressive State Apparatus (RSAs). The police identify and name the guilty, interpellating them into the social position of guilty — a social position that determines how the individual will be treated. It is not that any one identity is bounded entirely in any hail/act of hailing into a social role; a pediatrician is always more than a pediatrician — they could also be a mother, a golfer, and an amateur photographer — but the role of ‘pediatrician’ provides access to the identity of that individual and how they should be treated in certain contexts (¿). The recognition shapes interactions on a personal level — “this is what I think of you so this is how I behave towards you” but also on a broader social level — “this is the kind of person you are, so you have access to these assets.”

Categories of identification function both externally and internally. Seltzer points to another function of category recognition, the ability to experience one’s self through a category of persons: “[w]hat would it look like to experience oneself, through and through, as a type of person?” In other words, to understand who I am as an individual

---

22 Althusser would also, it is important to note, object to reducing interpellation to a cause-effect scenario. The moment of subject-acceptance, is not the moment of subject-making. Interpellation into ideology is ongoing and continual, and Althusser sees the individual as always already a subject.
based on the social positions which I inhabit — the interior self determined by external identifiers. Seltzer examines serial killers in America, a category of people typified by “cookie cutter” psychology, referring to them as “living composites.” Serial killers study serial killers — in effect, studying themselves, which shapes their own behavior as serial killers; they come to understand themselves through the category formed by the composite other. Seltzer describes this process, saying, “public knowledge about kinds of people has a way of interacting with the people who are known about and how those people conceive of themselves.” Seltzer’s described process is an interpellative one, not dependent on individual hails, but scaled up into interpellative categories. Interpellation, here, does not require direct address, but a categorical one that identifies through the assigning of social positions.

The process of interpellation is not merely an absorption into ideology, but an internal identity shift caused, at least partially, by external pressures. These pressures cannot be resisted or rejected and, as Seltzer shows, these external pressures operate at the systemic, categorical level. In the case of the Sex Offender Registry, the external identification is “the permanent *branding* of potentially dangerous people; the formation of a permanent class of the stigmatized person, a brand of person, marked and identified for all time by his criminal acts” (Seltzer 3). If an individual refused that branding, and attempted to reject that identifying hail, then what would happen? Althusser classifies that individual as one of the bad subjects “who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (Repressive) State Apparatus.” Refusing to register as a sex offender would provoke that reaction; that refusal results in, at minimum, a jail sentence. The category of identity offered by the social position of “sex offender” is both an access
point and a point of stricture. It gives access to identification of that individual, but it also restricts who that individual can be. The earlier example of a pediatrician listed multiple social positions that the pediatrician could also occupy, and those social positions would remain open to that person even if they stopped being a pediatrician. However, criminal/criminalized social positions limit an individual’s access to other identities beyond that criminal one. It is not that a serial killer cannot also be a golfer, but they can never just be a golfer; they will always be a serial killer who also golfs. The branding imposed by the external force of the legal system is a permanent, overwhelming identification.

The interpellated subject is a result of identification. In the case of the legal system, the legislative identification of an individual into either a social position of guilt or innocence is an identifying act, but the interpellation is not complete until, the person hailed by that act accepts the identification, either through immediate recognition or by result of a longer process in which the RSAs and ISAs work on the individual until that interpellation is complete. In The Glass Cell and Goodbye Piccadilly, Highsmith and La Bern look at the process of legislative interpellation and the effects of that interpellation on the individual when the identity category into which they are hailed is not one which genuinely belongs to them, or to which they belong. In both novels, the protagonists are innocent of the crimes of which they are accused and for which they are both, eventually, imprisoned. Blamey did not murder either his ex-wife or Babs, his girlfriend. Carter did not embezzle funds from his employers. Blamey’s experiences throughout the investigation and his trial alter him, making him willing to become the murderer he is accused of being. In a similar manner, Carter’s experiences in prison fundamentally
change him, both physically and mentally. When released, he attempts to re-enter his own life and finds himself unable to do so. He uncovers proof of his wife’s ongoing affair with their mutual friend, David Sullivan, and murders him. Carter and Blamey illustrate the process of the transformation of the self from both sides of the legislative act. The accusation of guilt launches Blamey’s transformation; the legislative sentencing of guilt serves as an endcap to his changes, not the impetus. For Carter, the jail sentence initiates his transformation, as the book begins with him already in prison. The systemic locus of interpretation does not rely on a judiciary conviction to situate the individual within the binary of guilt and innocence. Both books examine the ways in which the external forces of society — the beliefs, actions, legal systems of the fictional worlds inhabited by their characters — prevent their protagonists from maintaining their own self-identities in the face of systemic deputation of guilt.

**La Bern, Blamey, and the Imposition of Identity**

*Goodbye Piccadilly* illustrates the process of the disintegration of the self and the inability of the individual to maintain control over their own identity. The legislative replacement of the detective, the systemic accumulation of power and authority with the goal of enforcing an institutional code of behavior, shifts emphasis in the novel from the quest to identify the guilty and places it on the effects of guilty identification on an individual. La Bern and Highsmith parallel the detective’s loss of authority with the protagonists’ powerlessness to define themselves as innocent. Innocence as an identity is not under an individual’s control, but is externally imputed and individuals, even when they know they are innocent, cannot resist the pressures of the system. Their internal understanding of who they are erodes until they finally accept their criminalized identity
and engage in criminal actions. The irrelevancy of their self-conception breaks the moral center of even previously ethical individuals.

By placing judgments on the people within it, the system undermines self-identification. It dictates the social place of the individual and situates the over-riding identification of guilty outside of the individual’s control — either through their own behavior or their own self-conceptions. We see in Blamey and Carter, the protagonists of *Goodbye Piccadilly* and *The Glass Cell*, how the imputation of guilt usurps and finally fragments their understandings of their own identities. This alteration in self-conception gradually refashions their behavior. Ultimately, they demonstrate a willingness to act in ways completely counter to their previous understandings of who they are. Though both begin knowing they are innocent of the crimes of which they are accused, and appalled that others could believe them capable of those actions, by the end of their respective novels, both are willing to murder — and Carter has actually killed multiple times. The end result of interpellation is not a simple recognition of self as the subject addressed, but a re-cognition that shapes the self, transforming their thinking and self-conception until that point of recognition can be reached, a rewiring of identity. The systemic pressures destabilize the individual’s self-conception, changing their own understanding of who they are and what they are willing to do, revealing that their moral center is not merely broken or absent, but irrelevant.

Blamey, from the early pages of *Goodbye Piccadilly*, struggles against others’ ideas of who he is. The opening descriptions display the disjunction between Blamey’s self-identification — who he believes himself to be — and the identification of himself made by others — how the outside society sees and constructs who he is. Blamey sorts
through papers inherited from his recently deceased mother and finds a newspaper clipping. It says that “the King had been graciously pleased to approve the award of the Distinguished Service Order to Squadron Leader Richard Anthony Ian Blamey, DFC and Bar” (La Bern 1). The Distinguished Flying Cross, established in 1919, was awarded for “acts of valour, courage or devotion to duty performed whilst flying in active operations against the enemy” (King George). Blamey’s mother saved the clipping identifying her son as a hero. “Squadron Leader Blamey had consistently displayed skill and tenacity of a higher order . . . his qualities of leadership had been an inspiration to all who flew with him” (La Bern 1). For years she treasured this validation of Blamey; he shreds the clipping and flushes it down the toilet. Uncomfortable with imposed “heroism” and embittered by the emptiness of the label — it has not helped him succeed in his post-war life — Blamey dismisses the evidence from his sight.

While Blamey manages to flush away that instance of physical identification with his decorated military past, some social positions are personally apodictic. He cannot avoid being identified as guilty once accused of being a criminal. Even an accusation criminalizes Blamey and changes the way he is treated. Before Blamey is accused of murder, La Bern shows the power of an accusation on a smaller scale. Blamey works as a bartender in the West End of London. As he prepares for the pub’s afternoon opening, he reads a newspaper article about the suicide of a former soldier with whom he served. Larry Wellington had flown as Blamey’s rear gunner through multiple bombardments, “the Tail End Charlie on that trip to Regensberg. He’d been with him to Cologne, to Bremerhaven, to Berlin, to the Mohne Dam, to Dusseldorf and back more times than he could remember” (La Bern 2). The news hits Blamey hard and he pours himself some
whiskey from the bar’s stock. “He needed a drink. He would pay for it when the tills were unlocked” (La Bern 2). The manager sees Blamey drinking and accuses him of theft — not just at this moment, but at other times as well — and fires him immediately. The verbal accusation of guilt shifts Blamey out of a position of innocence. His actions are subject to interrogation while his intentions, to pay for his drink as soon as physically possible to do so, do nothing to protect him from the consequences of assumed guilt. While the severity and immediacy of the firing might be credited to the personal animosity of the manager, Blamey lacks recourse. His motivations, his physical state, and even his reputation as a faithful worker cannot resist the accusation of guilt levied from a position of authority. He loses his job and his lodging.

**External Treatment of the Accused and Blamey’s Inability to Escape Guilt**

The oppositional relationship between innocence and guilt means that once tainted, Blamey no longer merits the same considerate treatment as an innocent person and the interpretation of his actions is no longer under his control, even without a legally formalized charge. Blamey visited his ex-wife, Brenda, at her office the day before she was murdered. The next day he returned “intending to take her out to lunch, but found the door closed” (La Bern 55). Brenda’s receptionist, returning from her own lunch, sees Blamey walking away from the door. She thinks nothing of it until she finds Brenda’s body. Then, she reports Blamey’s presence to the police. As noted above, that leads to the newspapers printing “a more-or-less accurate description of Richard Blamey himself” with the note that he is wanted for questioning in relation to the case. After his description is printed in the paper, Blamey lives with the knowledge that “it’s quite on the cards that I’ll be picked up [by the police] and charged with the murder of my ex-wife”
His earlier indiscretion in the bar cost him his job — a potentially justifiable consequence since, no matter his motivation, he had been drinking from the stock. However, when the accusations involve homicide, a much more serious crime than sipping from the bar stock, the social consequences are proportionally serious and reinforce the control others hold over an individual’s social position. The accusation of murder removes his ability to live his life normally. Everyone, including Blamey, reads the newspaper statement as an encoded naming of Blamey as the guilty party. The police description combines with public suspicion to taint Blamey, moving him out of a social position of innocence. Without being charged, having a warrant issued, or being arrested, he, and his actions, immediately become suspect. He hides from the police, eventually leaving the country and going to Paris, hoping that by removing himself from direct interaction with the investigation, he could avoid arrest and the police would be driven to uncover the real culprit. His life in Paris, however, cannot be a rounded, free life. He lives under the constant fear of arrest and extradition. “He rarely went out. It was hardly a propitious time for sampling the pleasures of the gay city when a stroll might end with a tap on the shoulder” (La Bern 136). Blamey retains a level, though low, of individual autonomy over his movements; he can chose whether or not to exit the apartment and risk arrest, but the accusations identifying him as a potential criminal prohibit any real independence.

The public and media suspicions of Blamey are separate from the legal identification of him as a criminal, but that separation makes little difference in how he is treated. It is not until the day Blamey boards the flight to Paris, under an assumed name, that a warrant is finally issued for his arrest, formalizing the accusation of murder. At this
stage in the legislative process, he should still be treated as though he is innocent since
the letter of the law in Britain dictates that suspects are innocent until judged as guilty.
Nominally fair in conception, the practical application of this legal concept fails to live
up to that ideal. La Bern emphasizes the contradictions between the theory and the
practice. “The accused is invariably guilty until proven innocent. He who is accused of
murder is immediately clapped into a cell and there he remains under constant
surveillance until his innocence is proven. Dick Blamey knew quite well that this would
happen to him” (61). Blamey knows that turning himself into the police will not serve as
a vindication of his innocence, but will lead to his imprisonment. He remembers what
happened to his friend, Larry Wellington, incarcerated and driven to suicide by the
confinement. Blamey fears a similar fate — being trapped, going mad, and embracing
death as the only escape. The parallels between the two men accentuate Blamey’s fears.
He and Wellington flew not only in the same service in the same war, but in the same
plane. Both men survived the war but struggled with civilian life. Now Wellington “had
gone and hanged himself in a cell in Brixton prison” (La Bern 2). Blamey sees himself
traversing the same path, from war hero to convicted criminal to, potentially, a suicidal
madman. “[I]f I was shut up in a remand cell in Brixton for twenty-two hours of the day,
accused of killing the woman I once loved, Christ, I’d go stark raving mad” (La Bern 96).
Once arrested, Blamey rails against the unfairness of his situation, demanding to know
why he, if presumed innocent, is jailed with the already condemned criminals.
Unsympathetically, the governor of the prison justifies the imprisonment as “a measure
of precaution . . . Against your making a murderous attack on some other defenceless
woman” (La Bern 157). The legal system, through the person of the prison governor,
argues that Blamey, innocent or not, must be segregated in order to prevent potential harm.

Blamey’s trial showcases the power of external interpretations in determining an individual’s social position of guilt or innocence. Though the public and the police already believe Blamey guilty of murdering both Brenda and Babs, a barmaid from his former place of employment, the prosecution petitions to try him separately for each murder. They claim that separating the trials of the two murder charges maintains fairness and uphold the neutrality of the law, invoking tradition as precedent: “[T]he law of this land is scrupulously fair to an accused person. When it so happens that a man, as in this case, is committed for trial on more than one charge of murder, he is never tried for more than one of those crimes at the same time” (La Bern 159). The prosecution explains that this trial structure means that if any evidence produced applies to both cases, but seems too prejudiced against Blamey, the jury will be instructed to ignore it. Blamey scoffs at that farce, seeing the prosecution, the representatives of the law, as playing roles, and the argument of fairness as another pretense. He recognizes the hypocrisy of the proposed trial structure and rejects the prosecution’s claims as chicanery:

What goes on in the sacred name of the law? Here is the prosecution telling the jury, in effect, that we have enough to convict the man of two murders but we are being scrupulously fair in only prosecuting him for one at this stage, although we reserve the right to submit evidence on both. What you mean, you bastard, is that you intend to blacken me in the eyes of the jury as much as you unscrupulously can, then should you go too far
his lordship will direct the jury to dismiss it from their minds (La Bern 160).

Overriding Blamey’s protestations, the judge gives permission for the two murders to be tried separately, and the prosecution begins with Babs’s murder. Blamey’s fears are validated as the prosecution makes sure the murder of Brenda (for which he is the primary suspect) is foremost in the jury’s mind by repeatedly stressing that they are not to think of it. “It is not for you to speculate … That Brenda Mary Blamey was murdered there is no doubt, but it is not for you to speculate in any way, to harbour even the tiniest thought at the back of your mind that the prisoner might have had something to do with her death” (La Bern 164). The two-hour long closing statement of the Judge repeats this rhetorical strategy:

Presuming, as we must, his innocence of the murder of his ex-wife, Members of the Jury, you are called upon to decide his innocence or guilt of another murder … if this man is indeed innocent of both these crimes, and I am not suggesting that he is or is not, then it is a very extraordinary circumstance that two women in his life should be murdered within twenty-four hours of each other in circumstances that throw suspicion upon him. The mind boggles at it, perhaps, but you must not allow your minds to boggle (La Bern 193).

No evidence from the case of Brenda Blamey may have been directly introduced into Blamey’s trial for the murder of Babs, but it is clear that inference, assumptions, and popular opinion play a heavy role.
Throughout the trial, the presumption of Blamey’s guilt serve as an interpretive filter through which understandings of his behavior are formed. Others look at Blamey’s actions and use their preconceptions, tainted by the accusation of guilt, to decide whether those actions fit the standard for innocence. Actions which seem innocent to Blamey, or at least reasonable, do not to other people. The jury reads Blamey’s actions as giving credence to the prosecution’s claims that Blamey used Brenda as part of his plan to murder Babs. He signed the hotel registry using a false name, an act that the prosecution pounces on as an intentional act of deceiving the police about his whereabouts. “Richard Blamey was never able to give a coherent reason as to why he signed the hotel register in a false name” (La Bern 57). This detail, on its own perhaps only mildly salacious, gathers further suspicious connotations when connected to Blamey’s use of another, different, alias which he uses to flee the country and the police investigation. Blamey cannot explain to the jury his motivations for using a false name in either situation. The prosecutors are quick to explain what they see as his motivation: “Was it because he was afraid that a warrant had already been issued for his arrest for murder? Members of the Jury, what other reason could there be for giving this false name?” (La Bern 174). The prosecution lays out a clear, narrative interpretation of Blamey’s actions, judging his behavior not by his motivations but by how they appear to others. And, to those others, Blamey has already been criminalized by the accusations, casting his past choices under an automatic shroud of suspicion.

The prosecution uses these inconsistencies in Blamey’s behavior to build the case against him. For instance, Blamey spends the night before Brenda’s murder on a Salvation Army cot. The next night he checks into an upscale hotel with Babs. The next
day, Blamey and Babs check back out of the hotel and shortly after that, Babs disappears. A trucker finds her body in a potato lorry and investigations into her movements lead directly back to Blamey. The police trace money he uses to pay for the hotel back to Brenda’s purse and the prosecution uses that money to provide a motive for Blamey. Blamey explains that Brenda secretly gave him the money the day previous, but that explanation is a far less titillating, and thus attractive, interpretation than the sordid assertion that Blamey murdered his wife in order to use her money to fund his assignation with a barmaid. The prosecution argues that the actions of an innocent man would display confidence in the legal system, and that Blamey’s emphatically do not. The prosecution argues that an innocent man, hearing that the police are looking for him, want to question him, would want to go clear his name. He would want to answer their questions to the best of his ability in order to help them in their search to catch the real criminal. Blamey, instead of talking to the police, wastes police resources by avoiding capture and mailing in protestations of innocence. He goes into hiding. Even Blamey’s friends who believe in his innocence admit that his actions make him appear to be guilty. His fears of imprisonment are easily dismissed as unimportant, insignificant in the face of the proper legislative process. As one of his friends explains, “The only fact that matters is that you’re suspected of a dreadful crime you didn’t commit. So we’ve got to go and see these Scotland Yard bods and clear their minds” (La Bern 95).

Blamey’s continued refusal to perform what the legal system declares as the proper actions keeps him from hitting the required marks to be identified as innocent. Criminalized and under suspicion, his actions must meet the standards of others, not his own. He tries to act as though that is not the case, as though the abstract reality of his
innocence will inevitably triumph, no matter his other actions or the opposing interpretations formed. The trial demonstrates that it is the assumptions about identification that filter the interpretations of an individual’s actions, not a person’s actions that determine how they are identified. “Miss Smailes, a barmaid employed at a public house in the Haymarket . . . says, on oath, that she saw the accused [Blamey] with Barbara Milligan [Babs] in her downstairs bar at one o’clock that afternoon” (La Bern 195). Blamey did not visit that bar. He did not see Babs that afternoon. He declares those facts to the assembly, but his defense relies only on himself and his word — both tainted with the accusation of guilt. The jury ignores Blamey’s testimony in favor of that from other witnesses. Blamey’s criminalized state de-privileges his testimony and places authority for interpretation of his words and actions in the hands of others. Blamey’s own knowledge of his genuine innocence does nothing to counteract the perceptions of those around him. Preconceptions dominate, and those preconceptions have been formed through a whole network of perceptions based on interactions and interpretations. Filtered through the interpretive gaze of others, Blamey’s actions fail to meet the unwritten standard for proving his innocence. To perform a social role, an individual must meet the expectations of others for how that role should be filled; behavior signals belonging, aligning the self with social roles as the individual meets expectations.

No matter Blamey’s self-identification or knowledge of his innocence, it is the external judgment of Blamey and the interpretations of his behavior that classify him and determine his placement in the binary of guilt versus innocence. It’s worth remembering, however, that it is (again) not the authoritative detective who determines Blamey’s identity. Throughout the trial, Oxford continues to express doubts about whether or not
they’ve found the real criminal. Even when Blamey has completed the cycle through the justice system — arrest, trial, jury deliberation, sentencing, imprisonment (with pending death sentence) — Oxford remains unsatisfied. “Overwhelming as the evidence against Blamey had appeared Oxford felt that the whole truth had not emerged . . . A lesser detective would have shrugged his shoulders and gone off on a fishing trip. After all, the responsibility for the verdict was the jury’s, not his” (La Bern 208). Oxford’s dissatisfaction, however, doesn’t matter. It does nothing to prevent Blamey’s arrest, sentencing, or punishment. His instinct that Blamey is innocent carries no weight to push against the grinding processes of the justice system.

**Highsmith, Carter, and the Permanence of a Guilty Identification**

Like La Bern, Highsmith sidelines the detective, casting him as the justice system’s delegate, not a significant agent in his own right. Throughout the entirety of the investigation in *The Glass Cell*, the reader knows who the truly guilty party is while the detective does not. The novel’s focus thus pulls away from a race to solve the murder and identify the guilty, examining instead the ways that truth is revealed, or hidden, over the course of the investigation. Highsmith introduces Detective Ostreicher, not even an important enough character to earn a first name, as the lead investigator into the homicide of David Sullivan. Sullivan, Philip Carter’s friend and sometimes legal consultant, began an affair with Hazel, Carter’s wife, during Carter’s prison sentence. Carter discovers their ongoing affair and kills Sullivan. The reader possesses full knowledge of that murder — the perpetrator, the means, and the method. Because the reader already knows the truth, they do not rely on the detective to reveal it. By giving the readers that knowledge from the beginning of Ostreicher’s investigation, Highsmith upends any hint of competition
between the reader and the detective. Highsmith’s immediate mention of Ostreicher’s youth also serves to undercut his authority. Ostreicher “was a husky, blue-eyed young man who looked still in his twenties. With him was a dark-haired police officer, also rather young” (Highsmith 189). The emphasis on their appearance makes irrelevant any abilities the officers might have. Oxford’s investigation leaves open the possibility that Blamey may ultimately be found innocent, but Ostreicher can never return Carter to a position of innocence because of Carter’s previous conviction. Instead, he accepts the identification of Carter as guilty and uses that as the basis for their interactions. Spending hours narrating his assumptions about Carter and Carter’s character, Ostreicher traces an arc of moral character dissolution from imprisonment to the present accusations of murder. The relationship between Hazel and Sullivan makes Carter a prime suspect, especially when compounded with Carter’s identity as an ex-convict. Ostreicher strongly suspects that Carter is guilty, but that suspicion carries no weight beyond the weight of suspicion already incurred through Carter’s criminalization. He verbally attacks Carter, attempting to shake a confession from him. He points out that Carter’s guilt is inevitable — of course he made poor choices, stemming from “the effect of association with bad company for six solid years, the demoralizing effects of morphine, which Carter had taken to as all people of weak character took to it, damaging first the structure of his brain, then his moral fibre, what was left of it . . . and finally in the manner of a criminal had let his emotions burst out in murder” (TGC 263). Ostreicher’s characterization of Carter only allows Ostreicher to interpret Carter’s actions according to those presuppositions, preventing him from uncovering the real story of what happened.
Ostreicher navigates the physical world and performs the legislated actions of investigation, but these actions are framed as Ostreicher playing a role. He questions Carter and Hazel, Carter’s wife, on multiple occasions. Questioning should, in the hands of a detective, elicit further information that leads to the solution of the case. That appears to be Ostreicher’s intention as he pushes them to reveal more information that would fill in the blanks of a proper investigation: motive, method, and opportunity. He sets traps designed to provoke confessions of guilty, confronting his main suspects with evidence designed to frighten them and forcing Carter through a lie detector test.

Ostreicher lacks subtlety and the ability to actually uncover conclusive evidence. Carter recognizes Ostreicher’s ineffectiveness and verbally connects it to Ostreicher’s occupation of a detective role, rather than a genuine authoritative investigation.

Ostreicher demands details on Carter’s feelings about the affair between Hazel and Sullivan: “Ostreicher came close to Carter, wagging a finger. But even Ostreicher’s attack was not real, Carter felt. It was like something Ostreicher was enacting in a play. When the play was over in a few minutes, they’d start acting like themselves again, like people not connected with each other” (Highsmith 217). Ostreicher’s behavior reads as false because he does not possess authority over the case and cannot gain knowledge about what really happened. He moves the investigation forward from one legally prescribed step to the next, but uncovers little verifiable information. Although he enters the case believing in Carter’s guilt, and sincerely attempts to prove it, Ostreicher’s actions bear little narrative heft. Ostreicher cannot affect Carter’s future. The only way Ostreicher could potentially solve the case would be through the actions of others. He needs a confession from Carter, or an accusation from a witness, or a recanting of a
provided alibi. Ostreicher cannot uncover clues on his own; he performs the actions of a detective but cannot genuinely reveal the past. Like Oxford, Ostreicher attempts to identify the guilty, but is stymied. In his case, it is not that Carter is innocent, but is an even more stark picture of the lack of individual authority.

Philip Carter, the protagonist of *The Glass Cell*, undergoes a trajectory similar to Blamey’s. Like Blamey, he is accused of a crime he did not commit. Readers do, however, enter the trajectory at a different point. Highsmith begins her novel with Carter already imprisoned, already bearing the mark of juridical guilt. He has just begun a seven-year jail sentence for embezzling. As the imprisoned Carter reflects on his situation, Highsmith shows Carter’s early belief that his innocence would protect him, keeping him safe from legal conviction. As in Blamey’s case, Carter fails to recognize that others may interpret his actions differently than he does, and that their interpretations will be given more credence than his explanations. His behavior seemed reasonable to him. He believed that knowing prices for lumber and other building materials was not part of his job responsibilities. He signed unstudied the receipts placed in front of him, relying on the capabilities and morality of others to shore up any gaps in his own judgment. The judge presiding over Carter’s case views these choices as ridiculous. He lectures, “Come now, Mr. Carter, you’re an intelligent man, a college graduate, an engineer, a sophisticated New Yorker . . . You don’t sign papers not knowing what you’re signing!” (Highsmith 10). The judge invokes Carter’s other social roles, and the expectations for those roles, using them to set the standard for reasonable behavior and explain how Carter cannot possibly be innocent. An innocent, intelligent, sophisticated college graduate would have done his due diligence to safeguard the interests of his
employer and his own reputation. Once accused, he, like Blamey, is subject to other people’s interpretations of his actions; the material reality filters through the perception of others. A bank teller remembers Carter presenting a sizeable check to be cashed, a check originally made out to someone else and then legally signed over to Carter. Carter “cashed it and pocketed the money. The cheque had been a perfectly legitimate pay cheque, but it looked as if Carter were being paid off. It had made a strong impression on the judge and jury” (Highsmith 57-58). The accusation of embezzlement weights Carter’s actions, causing even innocent actions to take on tinges of guilt. Whatever Carter does, he cannot resist that label; he cannot vindicate himself. Because guilt and innocence pivot on external determinations, Carter not having committed a crime does not matter — his own intentions, actions, and knowledge cannot define who he is. Actual innocence cannot maintain dominance over the legislation of guilt.

The Consequences of Criminalization

As the wrongdoer moves from a social position of innocence to one of guilt, their very body itself becomes criminalized. This criminalization serves two main purposes. First, the one on which Foucault focuses in much of Discipline and Punish, criminalization allows the system to deploy the prisoner’s body as a part of the political mechanics of power. By physically demonstrating its power to constrain the criminal body, the system articulates and maintains the boundaries of social acceptability, or legality. While the physical enactment of power on the body used to be a much more direct and painful spectacle, imprisonment still functions as a policing of the body. The body loses the rights to free movement through the social regulatory function of imprisonment, and the social order is defended against those who break it. The power of
the system inscribes its authority over the lives and well-being of its inhabitants across the contained bodies of criminals. Blamey’s fear of imprisonment, and subsequent madness, runs throughout Goodbye Piccadilly. He knows that if he is determined to be guilty, he will be physically confined. That physical consequence fulfills the system’s need to preserve societal boundaries and reassure the innocent citizens of their safety.

The second purpose for the criminalization of the body is illustrated by the Auden-influenced theory of detective fiction in which the body of the criminal is framed as an explicit site of corruption that must be confined, not for the purposes of display, but for protection. Auden locates the fascination of detective fiction within “the dialectic of innocence and guilt” and argues that murder is an act of disruption that violates the otherwise innocent fabric of society. He says, “The magic formula is an innocence which is discovered to contain guilt; then a suspicion of being the guilty one; and finally a real innocence from which the guilty other has been expelled.” The body of the criminal houses the disease of criminality, but it is a fragile housing that always threatens to fail. The porous membrane of the body may temporarily contain the evil, but also threatens to poison the rest of society so must be isolated. In Goodbye Piccadilly, the fear of the criminal body manifests in public furor over blood transfusions. Blamey, originally sentenced to hang as a punishment for murder, attempts suicide as soon as the authorities commute his death sentence into life imprisonment. To save his life, hospital staff give him a blood transfusion. A reporter uncovers that information and publishes it. Furious protests erupt. “Why should precious plasma be used to save the life of a man who was a menace to society? . . . In future, blood donors should be given the assurance that their plasma would not be used to keep dangerous criminals alive” (La Bern 212). The news
media churned out a follow-up story that does little to assuage the tumult. They publish the information that a higher percentage of criminals donate blood than the rest of the community. Public anger redirects away from the idea that good blood is being wasted on criminals — the undeserving — and toward the fear of criminality infecting the general populace like a bloodborne pathogen. “This revelation was even more disturbing. It was not right that honest people undergoing an operation should have criminalized blood pumped into them” (La Bern 212). The criminalized body bears a double load, both the home and the vector of criminal corruption. The body belonging to the guilty must be controlled in order to prevent corruption from spreading, justifying the treatment of the guilty as distinctly different (in rights, consideration, etc.) from the innocent.

While *Goodbye Piccadilly* shows prisons bracketing off the criminal contaminants from the rest of society, *The Glass Cell* presents the prison not merely as a container for criminality, but as a tool that reinforces and perpetuates the initial identification of the guilty. Highsmith reveals the prison environment as a deliberately intricate ecosystem of injustice disguised as order. The guards force prisoners to conform to secret, convoluted, and unwritten codes of behavior. Breaking the codes, whether knowingly or out of ignorance, results in demerits and punishments administered at the guards’ discretion. The guards justify their punishments by categorizing the prisoners as doubly guilty — guilty because of the crime that led to their jail sentence, and guilty because of the new transgression of the prison boundary. With each punishment of a broken rule, the guards reinscribe the prisoners’ identification as guilty, while the prisoners affirm their own categorization through each transgression.
The prisoners know that the rules are arbitrary, meant to emphasize and exacerbate the power differentials, to keep them in their place. The punishments are not genuine, as those prisoners who are able to demonstrate their power are feared by the guards, avoided, and sometimes even rewarded. During Carter’s imprisonment, a group of prisoners starts a riot to protest treatment. Circumstances don’t change for most of them, but the riot leader now lives in a jail cell of his own “because he had demanded it, and the prison authorities were afraid of more trouble from him if they didn’t give it to him” (Highsmith 112). If the system was a genuine one, in which transgressive actions drew appropriate punitive responses, then fear of a powerful transgressor would not affect the cause-effect relationship. Caught in a web of new rules, Carter struggles to conform and through conformity to maintain his own innocence. He tries to decipher the rules in order to remain within the permitted boundaries and act as a rule-abiding, innocent citizen — the man he knows himself to be. He tries to perform according to the standards of an innocence, but finds it impossible:

There was no list of regulations anywhere that an inmate could read and so avoid committing misdemeanors. Carter had asked some inmates for all the ways of incurring demerits, and he had listened to thirty or forty, and then one inmate had said with a reconciled smile, ‘Ah, there must be about a thousand of ‘em. Gives the screws something’ to do (Highsmith 7).

Carter lives in the restricted world of the prison and attempts to adhere to its rigid guidelines. Because of the system’s opacity, however, he cannot choose his own categorization and prove he is a good man, an innocent man, by living according to the rules.
Carter’s initial offense, embezzlement, was a non-violent one and he believes, at first, that he will soon be released and his innocence validated. He writes appeals, conferences with lawyers, and actively attempts to counter the legislative conferral of guilt. Early in his prison career, he still trusts the efficacy of the system. While waiting for that day, he relies on obedience to protect him from further consequences. The prison guards betray that faith in the system. While transporting cigarettes between cells as a favor for his injured cellmate, Carter obediently follows two guards — Moony and Cherniver — when they order him to accompany them to The Hole, a basement chamber known as the site of prison punishments. They justify their command by invoking his known number of demerits. “It was true that he had a lot of demerits, but they were mostly due to the fact he did not yet know everything he could or could not do” (Highsmith 7). Carter reluctantly follows, in a further attempt to demonstrate willingness to conform. His obedience, his attempts to adhere to the demands being made of him so that he can preserve his innocence within the prison environment results in extreme, lasting physical harm. Instead of a fair reckoning for justifiably incurred demerits, Moony and Cherniver suspend Carter from the ceiling by his thumbs and beat him mercilessly:

Moony laughed and then one of them kicked him in the thigh and he began to swing back and forth, twisting a little. Then a push in the small of his back. Carter suppressed a groan. He held his breath. Now sweat trickled in front of his ears, down his jaw. Carter’s ears were ringing loudly. He smelt cigarette smoke. Carter wondered if they had a time limit, such as an hour, two hours? How much time had passed already? Three minutes? Fifteen? Carter was afraid he would scream in another few
seconds. Don’t scream, he told himself. The screws would love that.

Muscles down his back began to flutter. It was hard to breathe. He had a
brief fantasy that he was drowning, that he was in water instead of air.

Then the ringing in his ears drowned out the guards’ voices (Highsmith 9).

When finally taken down, Carter has been hallucinating and phasing in and out of
consciousness. Left suspended for forty-eight hours, he suffers permanent damage to his
thumbs; they will never again look normal and will always be weak and cause him pain
— enough pain that he develops a morphine addiction in order to deal with it. Guilt is
literally, and irrevocably, inscribed on his body, daily reminders of the pressures of the
system working to alter who he is. Rather than a quick appeal and early release that
would endorse his innocence, Carter’s imprisonment leads to torture and permanent
physical alterations.

Not only does the criminalization of the body affect the body — in Carter’s case,
visibly and permanently — but control of the body connects to control of the mind and
identity. Through The Glass Cell’s focus on post-imprisonment, Highsmith shows the
mental transformation Carter undergoes due to that public identification of him as a
criminal. Although wrongly imprisoned, Carter must still live within that prison
environment and slowly adapts to it. He writes to his wife, Hazel, “I was angry the first
weeks here and it got me nothing . . . Best not even to feel the anger if you can help it.
Make like the yogis or the passive resistance boys. We are up against something a lot
bigger than we are” (23). Though he spends his early days in prison distancing himself
from the rest of the inhabitants, trying to maintain the distinction between who he is and
who they are. Carter soon realizes that he cannot survive by ignoring the people and
activities within the prison. He also recognizes, however, that changing his behavior changes who he is.

He was going to the movies more frequently, though the bill of fare was always, or had been so far, stuff that he would never have wasted time on outside of prison . . . Without some compromise, without the movies, and maybe even without the wild stories that passed for jokes, he’d go mad. Men who tried to buck prison life, rejected the movies, counted off their time, became stir-crazy . . . completely insane or intractable, so that they had to be sent to the next station on the line, the State mental institution, if there was any room for them there. Carter could see that the men who got along best of all were those in good health with nobody in their lives . . . the men who could laugh at the whole business of prison with a loud and cynical guffaw. These men never missed a movie or ballgame (62-63).

Adaptation is necessary in order for Carter to preserve his sanity within the prison environment, but by participating in the activities permitted to prisoners, Carter aligns himself more and more with the guilty. He conforms his behavior to that of the other prisoners: attending games, socializing with the other inmates, swearing. Given a model to follow — how a successful, thriving prisoner looks and acts, Carter fashions his behavior along similar lines, stifling his initial instincts. Hazel tries to remind Carter that he is not the same as the others, that he is not a real criminal. She says, “They’re incapable of leading an ordinary life with responsibilities and a job and all that . . . once you start tolerating them, you’re going to end up being like them yourself” (Highsmith 89). Hazel sees Carter’s shifting behavior and worries, rightly, that the changes will
become permanent. Identified as guilty and placed among the other convicted, Carter undergoes not only extreme physical harm, but mental and emotional evolution.

Unacknowledged by Hazel is the fact that Carter not being a “real” criminal, not having committed the crime for which he was convicted, does not affect his environment or the way he is treated. Having been legally determined guilty, Carter lives with that determination. After the guards torture him, Hazel demands their names, insisting on filing a complaint, angry at the illegality of their cruel actions. Carter gives her their names, but muses, “The word illegal was strange, in view of some of the things he had seen in the prison. What about the old man in A-block whose false teeth had broken in half and who couldn’t get them fixed and couldn’t eat anything now but soup? Was that a legal way to treat a man in jail?” (27). Carter sees clearly from behind the bars that illegality and cruelty are not concomitant. Highsmith herself said, “neither the law nor nature cares about real justice” (Highsmith qtd. in Cooper-Clark 314). Legality and illegality are codified rules, not ethical decisions based on moral questions of how others are affected. Hazel lacks Carter’s perspective and continues to believe that he can avoid being punished if he could only behave properly. She writes to him, “37765’s demerits do not permit him to have visitors this week. And for being out of step in a cafeteria line, you said. For goodness sake, darling, do your best to conform to their stupid rules” (Highsmith 15). Even though she sees the rules as stupid, and despite the way the guards abuse Carter, Hazel still locates the fault with Carter. She still views failures as individual rather than systemic; if Carter would only behave correctly — like an innocent individual — then he will be able to avoid being treated like a guilty man. She does not recognize that, for the guards and those in authority, there are no innocent men in prison; all have
been legally identified as guilty and that identification justifies their (mis)treatment of the prisoners. Caught between the futility of protesting the injustices he sees around him, and the beliefs of those like Hazel who continue to assert that the fault lies with him, Carter conforms to the demands of his environment.

**The Permanency of Interpellated Guilt**

Through Carter’s experience of the structure of the legal system, including life inside the prison, Highsmith emphasizes the corrosive pressure of continual misidentification on the individual’s sense of self. Highsmith’s Carter undergoes an even greater transformation than Blamey, perhaps because of his longer immersion in the closed-system of the prison and, by extension, a longer exposure to the interpellative process refusing him access to any place of innocence. The determination of his guilt confirmed by the legal sentencing shoves Carter, unwillingly, out of his chosen roles as hard-working, adored (and adoring) husband and provider and into the role of convicted criminal. Though Carter knows that he is innocent, being continually treated as guilty pushes him into behaving like a guilty person. Mental confines imposed by the beliefs of others accompany physical imprisonment. He learns that his belief in the innocence of his own behavior cannot stand on its own. In other words, his internal knowledge exercises no control over how others will interpret his actions as fulfilling, or failing to fulfill, certain roles.

Guilt stains indelibly; the ongoing identification as guilty serves as a part of the punishment through its permanent operation on the individual. Carter believes at first that once he serves his prison sentence, he will be able to return to his life as it was. After all, he was all of the things listed by the judge — well-educated, intelligent, mostly capable.
He plans to rejoin Hazel and their son Timmy, find a job, and move forward with his life as though prison never happened. But, just as Hazel feared, Carter does become incapable of leading an ordinary life — not, as she thought, because of his patterns of behavior practiced in prison, but because of the way others perceive him. He physically leaves prison, but discovers that he cannot leave the experiences behind. Not only has he changed, but the way others perceive him has permanently altered. Imprisonment failed to expiate his guilt, but instead serves as a marker of his continued difference. Before his conviction, the pieces of Carter’s life fell neatly into place with him. Hazel, though already engaged to someone else, fell in love with him and chose him. With no effort on his part, a job appeared when he graduated college. He did not even need to accept an offered recommendation letter from a college professor. Now he struggles to even get an interview, receiving hundreds of rejections in response to his applications. Carter also wrestles with the intricacies of social interactions. He feels the marks of difference. “He was awkward with the knife and fork, would have preferred to eat everything with the spoon, but he felt that the man beside him was watching him, that he might look to the man like what he was, an ex-convict” (Highsmith 117). He attempts to mingle with the same crowds as before, to reconnect with old friends. He attends a dinner party with Hazel, but spends the whole night feeling separated from the crowd. “He was too aware of all of them staring at him, because he was so recently out of prison, Although Hazel and David had once said, ‘The new people you meet don’t have to know a thing about it,’ that wasn’t the way things worked. The word got around somehow” (Highsmith 135). Carter cannot reclaim an innocent existence; he can’t find a job on his own and feels distanced from friends and, more importantly, Hazel and Timmy.
In an attempt to take back what has been lost to him, Carter acts, but his actions — and thought processes — are no longer that of the innocent man wrongly condemned, but that of a criminal, a person willing to break the law in pursuit of their own desires. After learning of his wife’s affair with Sullivan, Carter contemplates how to respond. “In a prison, Carter thought, in the jungle law of a prison, if a man knew that another inmate had slept with his wife, that inmate might mysteriously be found in a corridor one day” (Highsmith 148). Carter acts according to the laws of a prison, the codes of the guilty men. He fulfills expectations of behavior for a convicted criminal and murders Sullivan, almost instinctively. He goes to see Sullivan to ask his intentions about a continued affair with Hazel and scares off a man in the act of murdering Sullivan (Sullivan, clearly, has multiple enemies). Carter looks at Sullivan and then acts. “Sullivan looked contemptible. This is the lily-livered swine that sleeps with Hazel, Carter thought in a flash … Carter hit him a blow in the side of the neck with his hand … Then Carter blacked out as he had in his rage in prison … Only when Sullivan was lying on the floor, twisted, gripping his stomach as if hurt, yet not moving, did Carter really see him, and stop” (Highsmith 184). Carter returns home to Hazel and Timmy, re-entering domesticity, until the police inform them of Sullivan’s murder and Ostreicher’s investigation begins.

Carter and a man named O’Brien (the man whose murder of Sullivan Carter interrupted) become the two main suspects in the murder investigation. O’Brien is the sole eyewitness to Blamey’s presence in Sullivan’s apartment and threatens to blackmail him. Carter lays in his bed next to a sleeping Hazel and contemplates his next actions. This midnight contemplation shows the depth of Carter’s transformation. At the beginning of the novel, viewing Carter as a hardened murderer — pondering whether to
kill again — would have been unthinkable. After all, he was jailed for being a careless
man, not a hardened, experienced one. Now he considers not his ability to murder, he has
no doubts of his capability, but whether he feels any qualms about committing his third
homicide. Lying next to his sleeping wife, he attempts to locate any feelings that would
prevent him from killing. Killing O’Brien would simplify Carter’s life. Carter and
O’Brien are the two main suspects in the homicide of David Sullivan. Killing O’Brien,
and preventing him from either demonstrating his own innocence or communicating his
knowledge of Carter’s guilt, would keep him from being convicted of murder. In Carter’s
mind, killing O’Brien is the logical action to take, and he can find no internal conscience
to object. After all, it isn’t his first murder, or even his second.

As for scruple — had he any? O’Brien had been going to do it. Why
should he scruple? To hell with O’Brien. Carter frowned in the darkness
and tried to find his own conscience. Or the void that meant the absence of
it. It slipped away from him. Maybe he hadn’t any any more. He felt no
pangs of conscience because of what he had done to Sullivan —
bludgeoned him to death — only a little distaste at the thought of blood
that he did not even remember, and a small jolt at the fact it had been he
doing the deed. He had killed another man in prison for less reason, really
less reason. That had never bothered him. Mickey Castle came to mind.
He remembered saying to himself the morning of Mickey’s death, that if
he’d taken the trouble to step between him and whatever it was that he’d
rammed himself into, Mickey might not have haemorrhaged, but was he
his brother’s keeper? And after a couple of days, he hadn’t thought about
it. Was that what happened to men’s consciences in prison? (Highsmith 229).

Carter is capable of killing — with purpose or without. No qualms exist; he cannot locate either his conscience or even a gap where a conscience could exist. The jolt as he reflects on his past is not a repulsed response to his actions, but to his recognition that it is himself who carried it out — he sees the new Carter and realized that his old self (a man who could never have bludgeoned a man to death) has irrevocably vanished. Carter links the reason for his lost conscience to his time in prison, binding the changes in who he is to his time as a prisoner. What happens to men’s consciences in prison? They disappear. And Carter’s internal dilemma, his deliberation over the void of conscience, reveals his understanding that it is he himself who has changed. The disappearance is an alteration within himself. He is not, to indulge in the cliché, the same man that he was before. He now inhabits criminality, with no twinges from his conscience; conscience belongs to the man he was, to the innocent Carter, not to the interpellated subject he has become.

Not only is being identified as guilty transformative, leading to lasting physical and mental consequences, but it is inescapable. The location of the individual within that binary overrides other markers of identity. Guilt subsumes the multiplicities of an individual’s ongoing identity construction, pushing all else to the periphery. Guilt is read as the base indicator of who a person truly is. In *Goodbye Piccadilly*, La Bern illustrates this transfer of identity mainly through the conflicts between Blamey and the media. As discussed earlier, the first external identification of Blamey encountered by the reader is the media construction of Blamey as war hero. Once under suspicion of murder, the media looks at Blamey much differently. The media stirred up sentiment until “lots of
public-spirited people were demanding that Richard Blamey should pay the extreme penalty as pronounced by Law, praying that no lily-livered Home Secretary would grant a reprieve” (La Bern 208). The accusations of guilt overwhelm the early knowledge of Blamey as a decorated war hero. He killed neither Brenda nor Babs and knows that the true guilty party is someone else, but cannot convince others of the truth of what he is and what he has done, and not done. Blamey’s legal conviction seals his identity as guilty. The theatre of law culminates in the judge’s official pronouncement. The chaplain covers the judge’s wig with a piece of black silk and declares the death sentence. “The sentence of the Court upon you is that you be taken from this place to a lawful prison and thence to your place of execution, and that you be there hanged by the neck until you be dead . . . And may the Lord have mercy on your soul” (La Bern 203). The chaplain pronounces his “Amen” and La Bern punctuates the theatrical nature of the scene with the final comment, “[t]he show was over” (203). The conviction seals Blamey’s fate, the identification pushed on him by external forces by interpretations beyond his control. The interpretations of his character formed by the society around him freeze the relationship he can have with the rest of the world. Their interactions are dominated by his assigned social position. The legal sentencing of Blamey is a judicial hail, stamping him as guilty, an identity that freezes around him. He is sentenced to death, and then to life in prison, the very consequences he fought to avoid.

The Final Loss of Self

Carter and Blamey’s innocence fails to protect them from the pressures of the justice system. The identity of the self is obviated by the workings of the legal system as manifested through the actions and beliefs of those existing within it. Though innocent,
and well aware of their innocence, Carter and Blamey find who they are transformed by
the imposition of guilt. Both Blamey and Carter lose their self-identities as they adjust
their performativity to match the inescapable external identity imposed upon them. Self-
knowledge, or even material reality, fails to resist legislated guilt. The view from outside
the self, the stricture of inflicted identity, dominates any internal identification. Innocence
is not something that can be internally maintained but is imposed or removed externally.
An authentic, self-willed identity cannot stand against external interpretations of behavior
as guilty. It is the public interpretation and labeling of their actions that matters, not their
own intentions or understandings. The identifications made by the justice system trap
Blamey and Carter in social positions not of their own making. Continually hailed,
treated, as guilty, they become interpellated into that subject position, moved from
positions of innocence to positions of guilt and continually hailed as such.

Once criminalized and imprisoned, Blamey knows he can no longer operate as an
innocent man. He is physically restrained and cannot even control his own death. When
he learns that the death sentence has been repealed, he hurls himself over the railings. His
suicide attempt fails. Blamey then decides to embrace his criminal identity. He accepts
the identification of a murderer and sets out to kill the real murderer of Brenda and Babs.
Sick, weak, and dressed in pajamas, he sneaks out of the hospital and sets off on a final
mission. “He weighed the crowbar in his hand . . . As he climbed the stairs, he reflected
that he was about to make criminal history. He had been sentenced to life imprisonment
for committing murder in this building. He would be the first murderer in history to
commit the crime after being sentenced for it” (La Bern 213). The novel ends without
confirming whether Blamey would really be able to follow through and commit a cold-
blooded murder — though nothing indicates that he would not be able to, as he is a war veteran who knows how to kill — but he makes his intentions clear. He breaks into the murderer’s flat, crosses over to the figure on the divan, and “pulled the bedclothes off the sleeping figure. But the person on the bed was Monica Barling. Her body was nude except for the stocking tied round her neck” (La Bern 214). Blamey once again stands over the body of a dead woman, weapon in hand, looking guilty of murder when the police burst into the room. The real murderer of Brenda, Babs, Monica, and other women has disappeared, but so also has the real, innocent Blamey. Squadron Leader Blamey, once commended for bravery and service to his country transformed into a man willing to commit premeditated murder.

Incarcerated in a social role he cannot resist, Carter’s initial innocence cannot withstand the eroding effects of his assigned guilt and the prison environment until by the end of the novel, Carter is willing to murder for a third time for his own gain. Although his innocence had a material reality that his assigned social role of guilt did not, it has been thoroughly overwritten. His future responses may also be governed by the laws of the prison/instincts of the guilty. His identity as an innocent man wrongly accused disappears. He cannot maintain his own innocence, or even his own moral center. *The Glass Cell* tells the story of a self in flux, molded by external pressures — with the individual, Carter, unable to maintain his own stable sense of who he is. In the discourse of identity, Carter becomes different than who he was before — unable to retain a solid state of ‘being’ innocent.

*The Glass Cell* and *Goodbye Piccadilly* portray justice systems bound within a dialectic of innocence and guilt, punishing the guilty to protect the innocent. The books
privilege an exploration of the ways in which the external forces of society — the beliefs, actions, and systems of the world inhabited by their characters — prevent the individual from maintaining their own self-identity in the face of systemic deputation of guilt. As part of crime fiction, these novels undoubtedly build on the traditions of the genre. While the last chapter explored the loss of an individual moral code as a reliable defining feature of the genre — focusing on the ways in which an individual’s morality cannot be relied upon to sustain or enforce right behavior — these two works show a different facet of loss. Not only does the moral center of self fragment, offering no anchor for continued solution, but the coherence of an individual’s self-knowledge of their own identity becomes undermined. Society, the external judgment of other people, dictates the place of the individual, not their own understanding of who they are. The needs of the legal system even subsume the individual authority of the detective, leaving that figure unable to provide an authoritative interpretation or identification. The external judgments of identity, with the accompanying interpretive presuppositions of behavior and the continual “hail” of guilt, interpellates the individual into that subject role. As McGee points out, “To say that someone is fully interpellated is to say that he or she has been successfully brought into accepting a certain role, or that he or she has accepted values willingly.” Carter and Blamey are moved from positions of innocence to positions of guilt, the corrupt and destabilizing criminal that society must protect against. In response, both men become the criminals the world has told them they are, demonstrating that innocence is not an internal state of being — or even determined by an empirical reality — but is a social assignment of identity based on external interpretations of society/justice system. A non-indictable figure, who can avoid through their own action
being criminalized or implicated in corruption, no longer exists. Taking on the
characteristics and attitudes of criminals, willing to murder to achieve their goals, both
Carter and Blamey have been fully interpellated, demonstrating the inability of the
individual to maintain a position of innocence. The external imposition of criminality is
not a manifestation of internal reality, but instead shows the impossibility of an
independent, innocent existence.
THE DANGERS OF CLOSURE TO DETECTION

William McIlvanney shocked readers when, shortly after receiving the prestigious Whitbread Novel Award for Docherty (1975), he began writing detective fiction. Readers resisted McIlvanney’s change in focus. In later years when he reflected on the transition, McIlvanney wrote that one man “went so far as to chastise me for doing something so ‘worthless’ as a detective novel. I suggested in the heat of the moment that if brains were food he could be suffering from malnutrition” (Surviving 153). Opposing entrenched prejudices that assumed detective fiction to be a less significant form of writing, McIlvanney viewed detective fiction as capable of saying as much, or more, than the more reputable literary forms. “I wanted a book that wasn’t intimidated into imagining that popularity equates with superficiality. I wanted a book that was unapologetic about the form in which it was cast” (McIlvanney Surviving 156). He deliberately elides the perceived distinctions between literary and genre fiction, unapologetically writing, in his first detective novel Laidlaw (1977), a gritty novel populated by tough, hardened criminals; angry, fearful citizens; and a protagonist gripped by doubt. Set in the urban context of Glasgow, Laidlaw offers depth of character and theme in keeping with McIlvanney’s stated goal of serious writing contained within a popular form. It tells the story of Detective Inspector Jack Laidlaw’s investigation into the murder of Jennifer Lawson.

Lawrence Block, an American contemporary of McIlvanney, lacks the same cultural cachet, never having ventured outside of genre fiction to earn literary accolades, though he has won multiple awards for his detective fiction. Unlike McIlvanney, Block spent little time offering a public, fervent defense of genre fiction. He does, however,
spurn the assumption that mysteries, with all of their popularity, automatically reside within a lower tier of literature. He stated cynically, “I think crime fiction was always enormously popular, but there was a tendency to hide the fact. As soon as a book had any pretension, any chance of strong commercial success, the publisher tried to conceal that it was a mystery and called it something else” (Block and Bulow 62). Block saw the line drawn between literary and popular fiction as a snobbish conceit shoring up delusions of pretentiousness and reinforced through publishing and marketing strategies. He teased collectors of genre fiction, even his fans, by refusing to release a compiled list of the works he has written under a variety of pseudonyms, claiming that he doubts even his own ability to identify them all. While this kind of statement might be interpreted as feeding perceptions of genre fiction as indistinguishable formulae churned out to satisfy the undiscerning hordes, it also operates as an ironic challenge. It places the responsibility for discernment on the readers, tasking them with the labor of distinguishing one author from another, or one qualitative level of writing from another — the very type of evaluative analysis on which claims for genre fiction being of a lower quality are based. For Block, the popularity of a work — no matter what genre contains it — demonstrates its value with no need to rely on the biased assessments of publishers, marketers, or literary thinkers. The work justifies itself in the reading, not in belonging to a certain category.

Placing McIlvanney and Block together as authors provides not only the expected pairing transatlantic perspectives, but also an examination of works that fall on opposite ends of the perceived echelons of detective fiction. McIlvanney’s work has been designated as exceptional, of significant enough quality to be considered literary. *Laidlaw*
specifically has been hailed as the foundational text that launched the subgenre of Tartan noir, “dark, contemporary Scottish crime fiction” (Wanner 5). Block, on the other hand, remains recognized only within existing genre limits, despite the fact that he contradicts assumptions about the nationalistic gap between American and British detective fiction. Though American, his two most popular series — one featuring the tough private investigator Matthew Scudder, and one featuring the gentleman thief Bernie Rhodenbarr — fall on either side of the purported gap between hard-boileds and cosies. The hard-boiled Matthew Scudder series currently contains seventeen novels, the first of which is *The Sins of the Fathers* (1976). Described frequently as urban noir, the series follows ex-police officer Matthew Scudder through the streets of New York City. Cale Hanniford, the step-father of a murdered girl, asks Scudder to investigate, even though the girl’s roommate confessed to the murder and committed suicide in prison.

Neither McIlvanney nor Block wanted to create anything besides a work of detective fiction. They were satisfied with that label for their work, not trying to elevate their writing in order to escape the genre and receive a ‘superior’ classification. Since they were both created and received as detective fiction, the two novels’ shared patterns offer insight into the preoccupations of the genre. The two novels ground themselves within the specifics of their individual urban settings, but center around remarkably similar crimes: brutal murders of young, single women. Their investigators have strong ties to the police, but also share a resistance to the processes of police-driven investigations and the presumptions of guilt — based on cultural prejudices against homosexuality — that motivates their detection.
As they narrate the investigations into the specific circumstances surrounding each of their murders, neither McIlvanney nor Block treat the knowledge of the criminal’s identity as they endpoint of their respective detective’s investigation. Murder is a unique crime. It is simultaneously the most harm one can do another — thus demanding the strongest social response — but it is also perhaps the only crime an individual can commit against another individual that leaves no potential path for restitution. The wronged individual lies dead, leaving no possibility of reparation. Because of this, murder is also perhaps the crime that places the heaviest burden on a community because it falls to that community to determine and implement punishments for the crime: “society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand restitution or grant forgiveness; it is the one crime in which society has a direct interest” (Auden). The presence of the crime demands a response, a punitive one designed to preserve the boundaries of the society and assure the community of its ultimate safety. The goal is to punish the guilty. By grounding the beginning of their novels in situations where the identification of the murderer is apparently known, either by the detective or the reader, McIlvanney and Block focus attention away from a pursuit of closure, away from an end goal of knowing who committed the crime and offering the guilty up for punishment.

Abandoning Identification as Closure

Scudder’s investigation was never intended to focus on identifying a criminal. At the beginning of The Sins of the Fathers, Scudder — and the rest of the characters — believe that the murderer has already been imprisoned, confessed, and committed suicide. Cale Hanniford asks Scudder to investigate, and Scudder explains that he cannot offer
any further answers about who killed Wendy Hanniford, his step-daughter: “I’m not sure that there’s anything I can do for you. Your daughter is dead. I can’t change that. The boy who killed her was picked up on the spot. From what I read in the papers, it couldn’t be more open-and-shut if they had the homicide on film” (Block 5). Cale asks for an investigation beyond who killed her. Wendy had stopped contacting him and her mother years previously, and he wants answers to other, more complicated questions. “I really need to know these things. Who was she? Who did Wendy turn into? And why would anyone want to kill her?” (Block 7). As Scudder digs into these questions, he discovers that the presumed murderer was innocent and uncovers the real criminal, but that discovery was not the motivating force. Block’s early narrative framing of the investigation gives the reader and the detective equal confidence in the identity of the criminal, placing them on equal planes of authoritative knowledge. The relationship between the detective and the reader is an alliance of discovery, and that discovery is bent on illuminating Wendy as an individual, not identifying her murderer for the sake of punishment.

In Laidlaw, McIlvanney draws focus away from the murderer’s identity as the endpoint of the investigation not by having his detective, the eponymous Jack Laidlaw, begin with knowledge of who the murderer is, but by giving that knowledge directly to the reader. Laidlaw’s opening paragraph dumps the reader into the running monologue taking place inside the murderer’s head. Tommy Bryson runs through the streets, caught in an inner maelstrom of his own emotions. He hates himself and who he is, what he has become. “Nothing to do. Sit becoming what you are. Admit yourself, the just hatred of every other person. Nowhere in all the city could there be anyone to understand what you
had done, to share it with you. No one, no one” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 12). When the body of teenager Jennifer Lawson is found in a public park, Detective Inspector Laidlaw, along with Detective Constable Brian Harkness, investigates her murder. By giving the reader information about the murderer’s identity from the beginning, McIlvanney prevents that question from serving as the anchor for the novel. The attention falls on the process of investigation, not its product. Laidlaw does identify Bryson as the murderer and locates him, but not without help. He relies on the aid of Harkness as well as that of some of the members of a criminal gang in Glasgow. Laidlaw does not operate as the sole agent of revelation; finding the story of the past is not a solo endeavor, nor does it focus on finding the guilty individual among the crowd of innocents.

Scudder and Laidlaw’s investigations look beyond the questions of who committed the murder and instead enter into an extended exploration of the conditions of guilt. Identifying and punishing a murderer is a creation of closure — ending an investigation into a case and indicating that the events are not worth further scrutiny; it is over, done with, and the person responsible has been properly punished. Condemning an individual as a murderer and punishing them places responsibility for the murder solely upon that individual. Reading Laidlaw and The Sins of the Fathers together reveals a shared belief in the importance of social responsibility for crime and criminals. Murderers are people, living in the same society as their victims, and the social pressures of their lives affect behavior. In the previous chapter, Richard Blamey and Philip Carter offered a model showing how innocent men could be transformed into murderers through an ongoing legislative process of interpellation. A comparison between Laidlaw and The Sins of the Fathers, one a founding text for a new subgenre and the other a text with a
relatively standard reception, reveals a shared belief in the significance of what surrounds a murder, how social contexts incubate the conditions for crime. Criminals do not emerge from a social vacuum, nor does a social system maintain its locus of authority without being borne up by individuals within that system. By shifting the focus of the investigations, McIlvanney and Block show that not only is there a social responsibility for the society to take the victim’s place in pursuing legal retribution, but there is a responsibility to recognize the social responsibility for the conditions which enabled those murders. The texts emphasize the responsibility of all people, not just those in positions of authority, in the dehumanizing categorization performed explicitly by the legal system, and implicitly by all those within its purview.

Through each of their queer characters, Block and McIlvanney illustrate both the significance of social context to the individual, and the way that context — and the people within it — carries identifying and controlling power. This mirrors the process, explored in the previous chapter, through which the legal system carries power of condemnation over the guilty. As discussed in the last chapter, legal systems frequently rely on totalizing claims about identity that allow people to be distributed into categories that suit the needs of those systems. In the 1970s, when these two novels were written, homosexuality frequently appeared in fiction as a shorthand indicator for corruption. Block and McIlvanney resist that shorthand. McIlvanney’s queer character is the murderer, but because the goal is not solely to find the murderer, homosexuality is not implemented as a marker of corruption. It is utilized as a complicating factor underscoring the pressures of identity and persons on the individual. Block’s queer character is initially believed to be the murderer, but is then revealed as innocent —
framed because of his sexual identity. Equating queerness with criminality implicates one in the reifying processes of the system, demonstrating a belief in the authority of abstract categorizations to identify the essential nature of an individual. Reading the two novels together prevents a replacement of one totalization with another — they offer neither an affirmation of homosexuality as corrupting nor a denial that homosexuals can be criminal — and instead emphasizes that totalizations will always eventually mislead. The desire to close a case by identifying the guilty party is a totalizing urge that wants to place responsibility only on the guilty individual. Rather than locating a criminal, the detectives pursue answers beyond ‘what happened’ to answers about ‘why it might have happened.’ Comparing these two novels reveals a refusal, rather than a pursuit, of closure. Exposing closure as artificially constructed, Scudder and Laidlaw resist the systemic reifications of individuals and suggest that it is necessary to refuse the imposition of false order by prizing uncertainty and a lack of resolution.

**Homosexuality, Culture, and Identity**

Both *Laidlaw* and *The Sins of the Fathers* were written and published in the 1970s, when homosexuality was viewed as a fundamental threat to the basic social order in the United States. Similar views held sway in Scotland, where it remained medically classified as a behavioral disorder typified by self-destructive and anti-social actions. Historically, the 1970s — following on the heels of the 1969 Stonewall riots — saw unprecedented levels of resistance against the marginalization of homosexuality, with more organized public opposition and the formation of multiple gay rights groups. Despite this public resistance, and even though the British Parliament passed a law in 1967 decriminalizing homosexual acts, scholar Roger Davidson argues that cultural
perspectives still left “young male homosexuals often anxious, depressed, and guilt-ridden about their sexual feelings” (Davidson 123). Culturally, heterosexuality was, and still is, situated as the norm — the standard from which deviation takes place. However, in any binary definition, each term relies upon the other in order to maintain itself and to serve the work of categorization. Like the categories of guilt and innocence discussed in the previous chapter, homosexuality and heterosexuality are social positions offering no middle ground — you can only exist as one or the other — but they also rely on each other. The legal system relies on these binaries in order to assign identities to persons, identities that become inescapable and control those persons. As queer theory scholar Eve Sedgwick argues, the connected relationship between homosexuality and heterosexuality constructs each term as a site “charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation — through precisely the mechanisms of self-contradictory definition” (17). As each term relies on the other for its definition, the connotations assigned to each filter across the binary and affect the other; the nature of their relationship breeds opposition.

Much literature of the 1970s reflected cultural concerns about homosexuality and immorality and frequently invoked an alienating perspective of homosexuality as necessary for maintaining heterosexuality as the norm. Heterosexuality cannot exist as a solid constant without homosexuality against which to define itself (Foucault). That approach builds homosexuality and heterosexuality into a binary construction akin to good and evil, right and wrong, or guilty and innocent. Cultural attitudes lock those binaries in parallel with each other, making an identification of homosexuality more than one of sexual preferences by binding it to moral connotations. Sexual identity tethers to morality, with that sexual identity serving as a marker that indicates whether an
individual is right or wrong, good or evil, guilty or innocent. Heterosexuality is the normal, lawful good, which leaves its opposite — homosexuality — as the suspicious moral failure. Early publications of gay and lesbian fiction originated and developed the trope of the miserable homosexual in which characters, of both genders, who were homosexual became depressed, self-hating, and unhappy. Frequently the characters endured narratives arcs that culminated either in death or in conversion to heterosexuality. In *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction: the Misplaced Heritage*, Drewey Wayne Gunn and Jaime Harker tie that trope’s existence to the culture “that legally defined homosexuals as criminals, morally labeled them as sinners, and psychologically viewed them as suffering from a mental disorder” (4). The gay and lesbian pulps fulfilled dual purposes — providing images and representations of homosexuals with which people could identify, but in so doing, also serving as warnings against the dangers of aberrant homosexuality.

In *Laidlaw* and *The Sins of the Fathers*, McIlvanney and Block break away from the automatic alliance between homosexuality and criminality, a clear divergence from those established genre expectations, and that divergence enables the uncovering of truth within the novels. Homosexuality’s cultural significance as a foundational identifier, along with the usual tropes of homosexuality in fiction, makes the use of homosexuality in *Laidlaw* and *The Sins of the Fathers* especially intriguing. Laidlaw identifies Tommy Bryson as the man who killed Jennifer Lawson. Bryson killed her in a panic over not being able to perform sexually with her, to become “normal” by performing heterosexuality. Matthew Scudder — Block’s detective — is called in after the police have already closed the case. Richie Vanderpoel confessed to murdering his roommate,
Wendy Hanniford, then committed suicide in prison. As part of Scudder’s investigation, he discovers the truth of who really murdered Wendy. He uncovers the real culprit by refusing an automatic condemnation of homosexuals and homosexuality. On the surface, since both novels set up homosexuals as murderers, they could be seen as complicit in simply reflecting the majority cultural attitudes of the 1970s, positioning homosexuality as a stand-in for moral corruption, a metaphor for a polluting evil threatening good society. However, digging beneath the surface reveals both authors pushing past that thorny alliance as they use their detectives to push for more understanding of others, and others’ actions. If the detectives conformed to cultural preconceptions that cast homosexuality as automatically corrupting, the truth about the murders of Wendy and Jennifer would not have been uncovered.

**Homosexuality, Isolation, and Mechanisms of Control**

The closet remains one of the strongest and most persistent images around the configuration of gay identification. In *Murder in the Closet*, Michael Moone explains the closet as “a powerful social mechanism for regulating the open secret that same-sex desires and relationships existed, but did so largely invisibly and inaudibly” (68). In the same collection, Curtis Evans describes it as a “powerful negative image . . . that place where “all the gay” had to be hidden away from public view, confined to its own restricted world” (3). The closet continues to frame contemporary conversations around secrecy and revelations in regard to homosexuality. People “come out” to friends and family, underscoring the persistence of the designation of homosexuality as non-norm, or other. Homosexuality is something to be either hidden or revealed, aligning knowledge with power. Sedgewick describes this relationship as knowledge forming “the magnetic
field of power” (4). In this relationship, knowledge extends the reach of power’s orbit. Knowledge about sexual identity similarly shuttles power, pushing and pulling it into different configurations, situating the closet as a kind of magnetic field reversal in which knowledge of an individual’s sexual orientation, whether they are in or out of the closet, can flip the polarity. The direction of the knowledge affects the treatment of people. The closet exists as a space of privacy, but also of secrecy, equating the private with the hidden and casting the closet not only as place of shelter for an individual, but also a barrier from the outside world.

Through the character of Richie in *The Sins of the Father*, Block shows the correlation between public identification as a homosexual and isolation — a correlation undergirded by cultural moral connotations. Richie absorbs prejudices about his homosexuality from broader society, especially from a childhood and adolescence spent with his father, a minister who believes “[r]elations between men are an abomination in the eyes of God” (Block 253). Reverend Vanderpoel resists any evidence that Richie might be homosexual. He says, “I took it for granted that Richard would ultimately develop a fine and healthy loving relationship with the girl who would eventually become his wife and bear his children” (Block 103). Growing up under the dominion of Reverend Vanderpoel, Richie continually performed a kind of mimesis, a deliberate enacting of heterosexual identity which allowed him to remain in the closet. Richie never “came out,” an action that would involve leaving the closet and confronting the realities of identifying as a homosexual. Because he has not come out, his sexuality can only be assumed by those around him, but does not need to be addressed. For most people, Richie’s sexuality is what D. A. Miller would call an open secret — something that is
known, but of which no one speaks. So when Scudder asks the neighbor about Richie, she can shrug and say, “I sort of took it for granted that he was gay” (Block 44). Similarly, Richie’s coworker states, “I always assumed it for heaven’s sake. He certainly seemed gay” (Block 69). Neither of these people dealt with a public identification of Richie, so were able to assume what it was, while simultaneously not speaking of it, keeping it hidden.

By never confirming his homosexual identity, Richie subjects himself to the dual polarity of the closet. The lack of confirmation can be used as a defense against judgment, but the falsity of his lived identity carries isolation with it. The only public confirmation Richie makes of his sexual preferences, at least that Scudder can find, lies in Richie’s visits to a gay bar. A bartender remembers Richie as a once-frequent visitor who stopped coming into the bar about a year before the murder took place. Every night he visited the bar, Richie went home with a different man. He moved from encounter to encounter with no indication that he wanted to form a personal connection. “Didn’t even care to linger for coffee and brandy. Just wham-bam-thank-you-sir. And no interest in a repeat performance . . . Didn’t even want to speak to anyone once he’d shared a pillow with him” (Block 180). This cycle of repeated non-intimacy confirmed Richie’s sexual preferences while also highlighting his discomfort with their being known and acknowledged. His sexual identity is, for him, automatically isolating as he cannot endure even a conversation with anyone who knew about it. Moving in with Wendy allowed Richie to deliberately shape his life around his identity and his own choices to reveal, or conceal, his sexual identity. Having internalized the equation of homosexuality with wrongness, Richie retreats. Once he moves in with Wendy, he stops visiting the gay bar.
His relationship with Wendy serves as a metaphorical closet door through which his father, and others, cannot see. His life choices mimic those of a heterosexual stereotype — leaving home, moving in with a woman — and help him avoid being condemned by his father as an abomination. He meets expectations for the social role of heterosexuality, but that camouflage, purportedly protective, also leads to isolation. Removing himself from the possibility of external judgment by this retreat — a choice to hide — Richie tries to live at peace by using the closet to enable selective isolation, an attempt that ultimately fails, a failure physicalized in Wendy’s murder as she is killed because of assumptions made about her sexual relationship with Richie.

McIlvanney also establishes a correlation between societal isolation and homosexuality, using multiple characters to emphasize the impossibility of avoiding that association. Tommy Bryson, the murderer in *Laidlaw*, shares Richie’s self-rejection, running away from acknowledging his homosexuality. His lover, Harry Rayburn, “remembered how good bed had been together, so good that it frightened Tommy by offering him definition. Finding himself becoming one thing, he had rushed to try to prove himself another” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 124). Tommy fears being defined as a homosexual. As established in the last chapter, a self-definition cannot happen on one’s own — others’ beliefs and perspectives influence what a definition means, the parameters of the social role. Tommy knows that the offered definition of homosexual means he will be isolated.

While the mechanisms of the closet present as though they can be flexibly invoked or ignored by the different characters — they can be used as a cover or an alibi, an actual secret-keeper, or an excuse to not acknowledge the truth — the closet fails to
operate as an impervious method of control. Instead, it gets co-opted by those outside of the closet, and they use the open secrecy enabled by the closet (the hidden/open secret that can be ignored or invoked at will) to justify the treatment of the individual. Both Tommy and Richie see homosexuality as inevitably isolating and attempt to forge identities/relationships untouched by that social role. In *The Sins of the Fathers*, Richie withdraws into a friendship with Wendy, abandoning his efforts to come to terms with his sexuality. Richie hides himself within the closet, but it does not hide the truth of who he is; others are aware of his sexual preferences. Richie’s situation in *The Sins of the Fathers* illustrates the dual function of the closet. His attempted removal from external judgment is not enough to keep him from being seen as homosexual and treated accordingly. Nor is it enough to prevent his death. In *Laidlaw*, Rayburn uses the closet as a set piece in the stage performance of his identity, but that does not allow him to flourish in a secure identity; he remains distanced from the people and the society in which he lives.

Rayburn serves as an example of an “out” gay man and the ostracism that accompanies it. He constantly hears dismissive comments characterizing him “as queer as a three-pound note . . . He’s been screwed that often his bum’s got a thread on it” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 210). Because of the cultural hostility, even the arrogant Rayburn, apparently accepting of his own sexuality, relies on performative moves to maintain a barrier between himself and the rest of the world. He uses the expectations of the trappings of homosexuality to camouflage his emotions and create distance. “Although he had admitted his homosexuality to himself for a long time, he had admitted it only to contrive more effective ways of distancing himself from other people” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 29). Rayburn exited the closet to destroy the possibility of his homosexuality
existing as an open secret, forcing other people to confront the reality of his identity and, because of cultural prejudices, dividing himself from them.

Rayburn understands the isolation of being gay, but unlike Tommy, he surrounds himself with signifiers of that identity. He embraces the contrasts between morality and his lifestyle, decorating his room, in his own terms, “like a Calvinist brothel,” and spends most of his time there. Rayburn’s sanctuary reflects his inner divisions. Calvinist theology — long part of Scotland’s history since the Scottish Reformation in the sixteenth century — viewed bodily pleasure as sinful. In contrast, pleasure is the business of a brothel. To claim to have decorated a room as a Calvinist brothel is to build a defensive performativity uniting gloomy asceticism with sumptuous decadence. The two cannot unite; one could lay over the other, but never truly grow together. “More than once he had lain there and laughed at his pretentiousness. The room was such a wardrobe of psychological drag . . . this morning he had no time to achieve that distance from his attempts to come to terms with his own nature” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 27). Rayburn’s room exemplifies the performativity of his homosexuality, his use of costuming to cover over the inner, unresolved disjunctions of self. By performing gayness, making it a role even as simultaneously it is the truth of who he is, Rayburn is able to tie the isolation to the performance, defending himself — at some level — from the continual cultural rejection. For him, performing homosexuality removed him from the closet but did not reveal his true self unsupported. The drag of the bedroom, the disguise that fails to hide, shuts out other people before they have the chance to reject him.

Rayburn attempts to gain agency over rejection by creating a false image of himself even while admitting to the truth of his homosexuality, while Tommy seeks
acceptance through heterosexual expression. Tommy fears coming out in 1970s Glasgow, hearing himself referred to as a “poof” or any of the other slurs endured by Rayburn. “He couldn’t come all the way out. A lot of people can’t. He still wanted to be straight. Heterosexual . . . He wanted to try to make it with girls” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 229). As he searches for that acceptance, Tommy tries to hide his homosexual desires by carrying out the actions of a straight man. He rejects Rayburn and turns to Jennifer Lawson, a nice girl who likes him, or at least the him he pretends to be when he is with her, enough to defy her father and sneak out to meet him for a date. Tommy tries to deny that the closet exists, or that he has anything to hide. His inability to genuinely be heterosexual manifests in his failure to perform sexually, dead-ending his relationship with Jennifer. His attempts to escape the social stigma culturally bonded to his hidden sexual identity fail, and he loses himself, becoming someone who murders rather than someone who can build personal connections.

The closet cannot provide real shelter, nor can it be denied, nor effectively utilized as a defense. In each case, the closet, as a mechanism of social control, fails to either prevent the truth from coming to light or to keep people from being harmed. Attempts to use the closet are attempts to control the polarity, or direction, of knowledge. But it is not those within the closet who have that control. Whether the closet “succeeds” or “fails” — it is not the operation of the closet that is the issue, but the formation of the binaric alliance that aligns moral judgments with homosexuality. The real harm is caused by the disconnections, the alienation of people and the division of those people into inescapable categories tied to moral verdicts. An abstraction of personal identity into a category, especially a category weighted down by cultural presumption of corruption,
causes harm — either directly or indirectly. Rayburn lives a life of rejection and rage. Tommy murders Jennifer Lawson. Richie hangs himself in his cell.

**Rejecting Reification: The Detectives and Homosexuality**

By refusing to automatically accept the correlation between homosexuality and corruption, the detectives disrupt both the legal system and the closet, revealing both as dehumanizing mechanisms spreading rejection and isolation. Scudder and Laidlaw’s responses to the homosexual identities of Richie and Tommy provide concrete examples of how the legal system’s dehumanizing influence might be combated; homosexuality serves as a litmus test for the detectives’ resistance against the systemic mechanisms of control. The closet, like the legal system, categorizes people. It directs the flow of knowledge via the proliferation of labels. That labeling takes a degenerative toll, adding a layer of distance between the individual and the rest of the world, duplicating through prejudice the reification processes of the legal system. Laidlaw and Scudder work with their limited authority to resist the rigid closure of systemic processes.

Scudder denies the false parallel between homosexuality and corruption and by doing so, is able to uncover the truth about who really killed Wendy. He does not offer an explicit support of homosexuality; indeed, Leland S. Person offers a convincing reading of Scudder as deeply uncomfortable with alternative ideas of masculinity and sexuality. Even with those personal prejudices, Scudder does investigate Richie without automatically condemning him. He illuminates Richie’s home life with Wendy, the way he helped Wendy create a home. Scudder points out that Richie and Wendy “were good for each other . . . They were able to have a domestic life together that gave them both a measure of security they hadn’t had before” (Block 214). Living with Wendy provides
Richie with a space free of pressure and expectations, but it does the same for Wendy — giving them both a home in which to find themselves. Scudder also refuses to automatically assume Richie’s guilt, despite apparently overwhelming evidence. He puzzles over the mismatches between the different pieces of information he finds. “[W]hy did the whole apartment have such an air of placid domesticity to it, a comfortable domesticity that all the blood in the bedroom could not entirely drown?” (Block 120). Scudder does not stop his investigation where everyone else does; he continues until he finds the true murderer and is able to confront him.

While Scudder is aware of Richie’s homosexuality very early in his investigation, Laidlaw remains ignorant of Tommy’s homosexuality for much of the novel, and, importantly, discovering it changes nothing about his approach to the investigation. Even though Tommy is both gay and a murderer, Laidlaw carefully avoids elisions between those two identifiers, refusing the obvious obverse that would condemn homosexuality as morally tainting. He continues to prioritize connections over categorization, seeing Tommy as a fellow human above all else. Laidlaw’s vocation is to see people in the midst of destructive situations, not to dehumanize those people because of the surrounding wreckage, even if those people created that wreckage. Harkness claims that Tommy’s horrific actions, the brutality apparent in the murder of Jennifer, equate to a resignation from the human species, demanding to know “How are we supposed to connect with something like this? How do we begin to relate to him?” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 79). Society, explains Laidlaw, needs “to pretend that things like this aren’t really done by people” in order to maintain the unreality of order. The constructed space with rules, regulations, and moral dispensations built by those who have the power relies on casting
monsters as the enemies. “[M]onstrosity’s made by false gentility . . . You know what the horror of this kind of crime is? It’s the tax we pay for the unreality we choose to live in” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 80). Instead of using the regulations of society to excommunicate, Laidlaw dips beneath the surface to trace the connections — the rhizomatic ways in which he sees everyone as present at Jennifer’s death. “There are always connections. The idea that the bad things can happen somehow of their own accord, in isolation. Without having roots in the rest of us. I think that’s just hypocrisy. I think we’re all accessories. It’s just that in specific cases some are more directly involved than others” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 208). Tommy’s homosexual identity is not a signal of a broken, monstrous nature. Tommy is the agent of murder, but also the product of his culture. Pretending his actions invalidate his humanity is willed blindness to the effects a system can have on the individual, and the ways in which every person within that system bears responsibility for its operation.

**Police and Closure**

As discussed in the last chapter, the legal system pursues the condemnation and punishment of criminals as a justification for its own existence. Within *The Sins of the Fathers* and *Laidlaw*, the official police care only about who committed the crime, looking for who to punish, not about any circumstantial information or underlying motivations. Information is accumulated and interpreted for the purpose of applying identifying labels. As the legislative process rolls forward, the legal system uses the accumulation of information to sort people into categories through which they can be understood, and managed. The closet is one social mechanism of control, and it hinges on identity and identity performance. It demands, if not a whole, unified identity, at least the
pretense of it. Much like the discussion of guilt and innocence in the last chapter, there is not a liminal space between the poles. There is not partial existence peeking through the closet door; one is in, or one is out. A defined identity can leave no space for uncertainty. It, along with other mechanisms, supports the undergirding categorizations necessary to sustain the legal system. The legal system not only values closure, it relies on it. It maintains its own existence by proving its value through maintaining the boundaries of society, reassuring inhabitants that order and security, will continue. It uses laws as tools to keep people within the accepted order, without regard for nuance or space for uncertainty. Like the social positions of guilt and innocence demonstrated in the last chapter, the categorization of people serves to control perceptions and interactions.

Applying identifying labels determines how people will be treated and, in many ways, who they will be. Categorizing identities in this way is an abstraction of person to thing, operating along familiar lines — just as ‘murderer’ serves as a dominant social position label turning an individual into an identity category, so too do other categorizations. The categories of guilt and innocence are not the only ones within which people operate. McIlvanney and Block emphasize this by navigating through other categories of identity — most notably homosexuality and its intersections with criminality. Categorization serves as a mechanism of control, determining how people — according to their identifying labels — will be treated. The legal system continually replicates a stripping away of unique personhood, an abstraction of person to thing, numbering and processing each person within its purview in order to disposition them properly. A consideration of personhood is not a requirement of the system, nor is it an interest.
In *Laidlaw* and *The Sins of the Fathers*, the structure of the legal systems emphasizes that the police rely on the reification of people into controllable elements. The legal process requires a continuous valuing, and achieving, of closure. Both novels show legal systems using the corpses of the victims as raw material to be processed in order to shore up their own authority. In *The Sins of the Fathers*, Wendy’s murdered body provides the occasion for the police to launch an investigation, to engage in the work of proving their worth. As part of their process, the police use her corpse to birth postmortem notes, investigative scribbles, and other “bits of information which would ultimately be supplemented with copies of formal reports filed by other branches of the machine” (Block 28). The generation of these materials, however, is divorced from Wendy herself, and even from any pursuit of justice, since her case has already been closed. They excavate the details of her life, building an image of who Wendy was in order to mulch the features of her life into the contents of a folder. Scudder knows that “[t]he folder would grow fatter in time to come. The case was closed, but the Sixth’s file would go on growing like a corpse’s hair and fingernails” (Block 28). For the police, Wendy’s death makes her life significant by fueling the legal system. Even beyond the basic ugliness of that dehumanization, the processing exists to serve its own ends, not an ideal of some higher good. Wendy’s case is closed — the file continues to grow not because the police believe anything further needs to be accomplished, but because the systematic accounting of her life justifies their existence. The bureaucratic pulverization verifies the conclusions already reached — confirming Wendy as the murdered victim and Richie as the criminal responsible. The processing of Wendy’s case through the operations of the system validates the mechanisms of the system and affirms the
categorizations of each individual, creating no new understanding or developing further depths of knowledge.

*Laidlaw* contains a similarly mechanistic legal system, relying on the continual abstraction of people; it perpetually dehumanizes the individual inhabitants within its purview. McIlvanney’s detective, Laidlaw, describes the physical High Court building in Glasgow as a processor, especially the adjoining mortuary:

This is the police mortuary, the tradesmen’s entrance to the Court, as it were. Here are delivered the raw materials of justice, corpses that are precipitates of strange experience, alloys of fear and hate and anger and love and viciousness and bewilderment, that the Court will take and refine into comprehension. Through the double glass doors come those with a grief to collect. They take away the offal of a death, its privateness, the irrelevant uniqueness of the person, the parts that no one else has any further use for. The Court will keep only what matters, the way in which the person becomes an event. To come in here is to be reminded that the first law is real estate, and people are its property. It was a reminder that always sickened Laidlaw (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 43).

Laidlaw describes a system that unwrites — de-composes — people, removing the uniqueness of individuality and replacing it with identification tags. The legal system, as seen through Laidlaw’s eyes, fuels its own existence with the lives, and perhaps even more with the deaths, of its inhabitants. It views the emotions, complexities, and individuality of those people as chaff to be burned away until all that remains is the utility
of the person to the system. The processes of the system assimilate everything into its purview — a purview maintained through the management and distribution of things.

_Laidlaw_ further emphasizes the dehumanization caused by the legal system by illustrating its extension beyond that single binary. The Court, the police, and the other members of the legal system function as the locus of knowledge, enabling the processing of all within its jurisdiction. Not only are the victims dehumanized by the reduction of their lives into paperwork, but their deaths are then used to justify the dehumanization of those who killed them, by labeling them as criminals deserving only punishment. The priorities of the legal system require absolutism, insisting on the sorting of individuals definitively into one category or another. Furthermore, the processors of that paperwork become themselves interpellated by enforcing that system of absolutes and approaching each interaction through those definitions. The reification of people is not restricted to violators of the system and their victims, but extends to all who live within it, even — or perhaps especially — the agents actively working to maintain it.

Within _Laidlaw_, the character of Burt Milligan highlights the absorption of individual police officers into the dehumanizing perspective of the legal system. Both Burt Milligan and Jack Laidlaw work as Detective Inspectors. Milligan adopts completely the absolutist framework of the novel’s legal system. For Milligan, alternative perspectives do not exist; his perspective, which is the perspective of the legal system, automatically carries authority with it and determines the correct procedural path. His job is “about catching the baddies. And doing whatever you have to catch them. You have to batter down whatever’s in your road. Doors or faces make no odds” (McIlvanney _Laidlaw_ 60). As an arm of the system, Milligan views people as obstacles to be
conquered in his quest to contain the criminals. This attitude extends to all; he sees others, even people classified as non-criminals, as nothing more than objects to be used or discarded as convenient. Milligan embraces his work, prioritizing “catching the baddies” with close-minded dedication. Milligan’s lack of interest in ethical considerations makes Laidlaw wonder “if it was possible to be a policeman and not be a fascist” (McIlvanney 20). This lack of personal care for nuances reflects Milligan’s loss of individuality. He does not need to consider moral distinctions because the system’s dictates stand in for his own, purifying his actions as an agent of that system. As a member of the police force, Milligan operates like an army recruit, with similar results. “Through his unquestioning obedience to authority and through the routinization of his job” as social ethicist Herbert Kelman argues for soldiers, “he is deprived of personal agency” (51). Just as a command structure subsumes a soldier, with the commanding officer bearing responsibility for the actions carried out, Milligan’s position as a police officer absolves him of personal responsibility. He uses that absolution to justify his participation in the dehumanization of others. To Milligan, the Lawsons are not grieving parents who deserve sympathy, but potential sources of information to be exploited (Laidlaw 62). Victims, murderers, bystanders, family, friends, other police officers — every person is subservient to the needs of the system.

Resisting Closure by Rejecting the Legal System

Policing aims to identify criminals for the purpose of punishment, and, as explored above, that process is built on a foundation of reification. No part of the legal system is meant to attempt to heal the wounds inflicted by murder. The legal system takes the various nuances of each individual situation and funneling them through the
compressing standard of approved interpretive frameworks. The police display a lack of interest in investigating the nuances of the murder cases. They want the cases to be closed, and as soon as possible. Scudder and Laidlaw operate against the push for closure, rejecting the parasitic nature of the legal system.

At first, it seems that the detectives will, like Milligan, show the reach of legal system as inescapable. McIlvanney and Block place their detectives in opening scenes that appear to ally their detectives with the legal system by showing similarities between their interpretive processes. It appears at first that Scudder and Laidlaw will replicate the system’s dehumanization by taking the messy nuances of the surrounding world and conforming them into the rigid neatness of a single, unemotional interpretive framework. *The Sins of the Fathers* opens with Scudder’s mental monologue of his impressions of Cale Hanniford, eventually revealed as the murdered Wendy Hanniford’s stepfather, seeking to hire Scudder. In his monologue, Scudder reduces his observations to a dispassionate listing of facts. “Cale Hanniford . . . He had last year’s Cadillac parked outside at the curb. He had a wife waiting for him in his room at the Carlyle. He had a daughter in a cold steel drawer at the city mortuary” (Block 4). Echoing the language of an official police report, Scudder’s assessment of Cale reduces him down to identifiers, categorizing him in relation to external, systemic definitions. Similarly, Laidlaw’s first conversation with Jennifer’s distraught father, Bud Lawson, sees Laidlaw attempting to organize the incoming stream of information onto a single page. “The man’s [Lawson’s] confusion funneled through a filter onto Laidlaw’s pad . . . It looked neat on paper” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 18). Reducing human emotion, the desperation of a father who cannot find his daughter, to ink on a page provides an illusion of neat control. Creating a
record of spoken words upholds a mirage pretending that capturing confusion, worry, and fear within a few scattered words is possible.

The next actions by each detective, however, undermines that apparent alliance as both Laidlaw and Scudder move away from prioritizing categorization and closure by stepping outside the limitations of that early interpretive framework. Laidlaw disconnects from the standard police procedure of simply transcribing Lawson’s report. He breaks away from passive recordings, and connects to Lawson, looking up at the emotional father and recognizing his pain. Police procedure calls for Laidlaw to scold Lawson for reporting his daughter’s disappearance so soon, after a mere night. Because of what he sees in Lawson’s eyes, Laidlaw refuses to utter that warning and instead reassures Lawson that the police will watch for Jennifer. “For a second he [Lawson] looked oddly vulnerable and Laidlaw thought he saw through the cleft of his indecision another person flicker behind his toughness . . . A tortoise needs his shell because its flesh is so soft. And he felt sorry for him” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 19). Instead of remaining disconnected from the situation, Laidlaw reacts to Lawson’s grief with empathy and consideration. Block’s detective, Scudder, also responds to a father’s pain with compassion. He looks at Hanniford, and “[h]is eyes returned to mine, and there was something in them that I wanted to turn from, and couldn’t” (Block 13). Even as he tries to dissuade him, Scudder understands Hanniford’s motives for pursuing further investigations into his daughter’s life and death. The connection to other people, to grieving fathers, fuels the drive to detect. Both detectives resist the reification of the legal system, rejecting the embrasure of closure with its accompanying dehumanization of others, by responding with empathy to others, not by creating a dehumanizing distance from the nuances of the situations.
They do not accept that following the dictates of the legal system absolves them from personal responsibility.

Scudder’s rejection of the legal system is more complete than Laidlaw’s philosophical conflict. Not only has he left his employment with the police force, but Scudder refuses even to secure an official license permitting him to work legally as a private investigator. Scudder’s avoidance of licensure is also an avoidance of the code of the system and of the system’s authority to dictate who can or cannot control information. It is also an attempt to place himself beyond the system’s control over identification; he rebuffs their title of “private investigator” and remains outside of that neat categorization. The catalyst for Scudder’s resignation from the police force links his motivations to his repugnance at the inevitable dehumanization caused by its logics. In order to prevent two thieves from successfully fleeing the scene of their crime, Scudder pulls out his gun and shoots after them. One of his shots flies wide, hitting seven-year-old Estrellita Rivera in the head and killing her instantly. Scudder never completely verbalizes the impact of her death on him, but carries with him a buried awareness of the irrevocable consequences of his actions, of the harm he caused by prioritizing the ends of the legal system over care for others. He hides that guilt like he hides the alcohol tremor in his hands, but it lingers, strengthened by his realization that not only is Estrellita dehumanized, reified by the system — a justifiable loss in the face of triumphant, law-enforcing violence — but his individual beliefs and emotions are also being overwritten. “There was no question of culpability. As a matter of fact, I got a departmental commendation. Then I resigned. I just didn’t want to be a cop anymore” (Block 16). Scudder cannot accept the reification of Estrellita from a child whose life was stolen to a disposable object whose nonexistence
is a regrettable result warranted by the successful apprehension of the criminals. By commending Scudder’s actions, the police revealed their disregard for individuals, and their view of people as utilities to be used, or discarded, as needed. If he remained on the force, Scudder would be accepting the justification for Estrellita’s death, and this acceptance would in turn transform him, from an individual into a police officer, abstracted into an avatar of the legal system. Scudder must resign, or remain knowingly complicit.

After his resignation, Scudder carries out his work as a detective by pushing back against the inevitably absolutist closure delivered by the legal system. Because he works neither as a police officer nor as a private investigator, he maintains a high level of independence that allows him to investigate without externally imposed limits. He frames his investigations not as jobs for which he is hired, but as favors that he does for other people. This empowers him to pursue more than questions of legal responsibility, and even more than the questions to which he has been directly asked to find answers. He continues his investigation even though he agrees with Hanniford’s assessment that, for the police, the case is closed: “They apprehended the killer, and he’s beyond punishment” (Block 5). He maintains control over his choices, refusing to stop investigating Wendy, even when given the excuse of being able to satisfy Hanniford, the man who came to him for help. “I was doing him a favor . . . I was not working for him. So I couldn’t call it quits . . . there were still a few blank spaces and I wanted to fill them in” (Block 176). Scudder casts his responsibility as more than fulfilling some terms of employment, checking off the bullet points on a contract.
Capturing the criminal ends the need for police investigation, but does not address the needs of other people affected by the crime. Because the focus of the police is disciplinary, nothing about the Hanniford case matters to them once the need to visibly enact punishment ends. For Hanniford, Scudder’s investigation of Wendy matters because of her personhood, not because he seeks retribution; he wants to know more about her life circumstances. A couple of years before her murder, Wendy dropped out of college and disappeared, cutting her parents out of her life. The only news they received from her were a few scattered postcards. Hanniford sees her murder as a chance to find out about that gap of years. He seeks answers not about her death, but about her life. Scudder understands this: “[t]he murder was a door starting to open for you. Now you have to know what’s inside the room” (Block 7). Hanniford wants an investigation that uncovers more than the name of the person holding the murder weapon. Scudder makes it clear that he cannot accurately reconstruct reality. He knows that he cannot provide a complete image of who Wendy truly was, or even what actually happened. “You want photographs of your daughter and the boy who killed her. I’m not equipped to offer you that. No one is” (Block 11). Instead, Scudder offers what he compares to a police Identikit sketch — a rough facsimile that, with the right context, bears a resemblance to reality. Scudder’s task, then, extends beyond identifying and assigning guilt; he looks past the death to see what it reveals. He focuses on revealing hidden connections and uncovering what the legal system dismisses as unimportant, the unique features of each situation and person that acknowledge the impossibility of completeness.

Scudder’s investigation initially follows the process the police would have used if they had not been able — due to Richie’s confession — to label as closed the case of
Wendy’s murder. He discusses with one of his former colleagues that “[i]f she [Wendy Hanniford] was killed by person or persons unknown, you’d have put the past two years of her life on slides and run them through a microscope. But it was over before it started and it’s not your job to do that now” (Block 30-31). The police’s job is not to care about the victim, who they were and what their life was like. Each successful closure of a case testifies to their worth, so that is where they focus attention. As McIlvanney wrote in *Laidlaw*, “Police tended not to see what was there in their anxiety to see what was behind it” (15). Or, in other words, their concern is not for the nuances of the situation in front of them, but on how they can resolve and move beyond it. The police manifest no willingness to see beyond the first apparent solution and interrogate the situation further. A crime scene, to a police official, is not an invitation to exploration, but a call for solution and closure.

Continual tension exists between Laidlaw, with his opposition to the dehumanization of individuals, and his learned investigative frameworks. McIlvanney describes Laidlaw as a man who feels his nature as “a wrack of paradox. He was potentially a violent man who hated violence, a believer in fidelity who was unfaithful, an active man who longed for understanding . . . He knew nothing to do but inhabit the paradoxes” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 12-13). Living in these paradoxes, Laidlaw maintains a constant search for connections between apparently disparate elements. Scholars Peter Humm and Paul Stigant argue that “McIlvanney’s strategy is always to refuse any tight binary opposition which separates professional from amateur, hard from soft . . . [he] sets his own credibility, learned from the streets, against the black and white simplicities shared by the career detective and the professional criminal” (91-92). Laidlaw uses doubt
to resist certainty. Laidlaw’s approach to investigation casts murder not as an endpoint, but as a goad toward further discovery. He explains to Harkness that people “see it [murder] as the culmination of an abnormal sequence of events. But it’s only that for the victim. For everybody else — the murderer, the people connected with him, the people connected with the victim — it’s the beginning of the sequence” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 81). The murder of Jennifer Lawson ended her life, but not anything around it — the forces, the persons, the elements that fed into and led to her murder. Rather than stopping the story, Jennifer’s death catalyzes an exploration of human connection and relationship. Laidlaw’s investigation ripples out from the central event of her murder, but the goal is to look beyond it and see what is revealed. McIlvanney uses murder, and the subsequent investigation to underscore the tendrils of connection fanning out from node into the world around them.

Laidlaw’s reaction to a crime scene places him in direct opposition to the other police officers. At the scene of Jennifer’s murder, the crowd of people trying to catch a glimpse of her abused corpse angers Laidlaw. “Laidlaw never understood them. It wasn’t as if they could help. They were just voyeurs of disaster” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 36). The other police at the scene shut down Laidlaw’s attempts to move Jennifer’s body out of the view of the gawking crowd. “She cannot be moved until she is certified dead. Meanwhile, I don’t think she’s suffering too much discomfort” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 38). Laidlaw’s response emphasizes his view that it should be more than the corpse that matters. He says, “It’s just that I wouldn’t want her father to have to buy a ticket to view the corpse” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 38). Laidlaw refuses to view Jennifer as only a corpse providing an occasion for the legal system to enact punishment; He observes the world
around him as filled with complex human interactions and is repulsed by the displayed lack of empathy.

Laidlaw not only rejects the idea that he can find the single answer to what really happened, but asserts that finding the answer is so unobtainable that to claim it as even a possibility would be destructive. Laidlaw’s investigation also leads him to the identity of the murderer. He both identifies Tommy Bryson as the murderer and participates in locating and arresting him. However, Laidlaw chooses not to close out potential inquiry by resting on that single answer. His rejection of the binary of guilt and innocence requires him to embrace an ongoing innumerability of answers. Naming the murderer solves little about the circumstances in which the characters find themselves. It cannot restore Jennifer’s life, nor does it mitigate the grief endured by those who loved her. Bryson as murderer is not the only answer to the questions raised by the situation, nor is it, perhaps, the most important one. Every answer leads to more questions, and should. Laidlaw’s acknowledgment of uncertainty pushes against the categorical binarizations content to reinforce what is already known. He resists their provision of illusive reassurance. “I think false certainties are what destroy us . . . What is murder but a willed absolute, and invented certainty” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 146). Murder is an imposed certainty, and Laidlaw sees the police response as another form of imposed certainty. Laidlaw attempts to destabilize the belief that a solitary truth exists to be found, undermining the system of categorical certainty represented by the rest of the legal system.

In both novels, the detectives push back against the closure of the legal system, closure achieved through the automatic criminalization of people. The detectives
recognize the distortion produced by eliding punishment with resolution. As individual detectives, Laidlaw and Scudder do more than provide a different slant to the police’s mechanistic categorization. Their refusal to accept the closure embraced by the police, to blindly adopt the provided labels and categories, allows them to resist the dehumanizing impulses of the legal system. The lack of certainty the detective can offer does not mean that there are no answers to be found, or that the criminals are not identified and punished. The detective knows, or uncovers, who the murderer is. Throughout the course of the investigation, Scudder provides Hanniford with answers about Wendy and also uncovers the truth about who really murdered her. Even though his intent was to discover facts about Wendy, those facts reveal that the police’s closure of the case was premature. Richie, her roommate, may have confessed and committed suicide in prison after his arrest, but not because he killed her. Scudder’s investigation does not end with an assumption of guilt — or even with the discovery of the murderer. Because he does not end there, he is able to offer Hanniford more than the name of a killer; he gives him a better understanding of Wendy, the knowledge of his stepdaughter’s past for which Hanniford was really searching. Scudder provides, within the complexity of the world, what Block summarizes as the best a detective could do, to “try to create some semblance of personal order in a world that is always chaos” (Stasio). Both Scudder and Laidlaw inhabit and embrace that perspective: they live within the continued chaos of unanswered questions.

**Trading Closure for Questions**

For the detectives, both Scudder and Laidlaw, murder launches inquiry; it is not a call for closure. The characters within the novels want more than knowing who
committed the crime. McIlvanney and Block wrote stories revolving around more than confirmations of guilt. Their detectives push beyond the drive to find the murderer, and consequently refute the implicit assumption that murder (and the victim) only matters until the criminal can be disposed of correctly, labeled and set aside. The detectives’ goals must differ from that of the legal system or risk replicating the same dehumanization in their investigations. If Scudder and Laidlaw acted only as police officers do, they would become synonymous with the police and unable to offer anything different. Bounded, pre-determined certainties are the real plague, and murder serves as a symptom of that danger, not the disease itself. Doubt tendrils out from known facts and into the blank space around those facts in order to question reactions to them, motivations behind them, and what all of that information says about the surrounding world. The goal of the detectives is to apprehend those around them — perceiving and understanding who they are — not, as in the case of the police, to apprehend the criminals — capturing and punishing them. Scudder and Laidlaw live in uncertain worlds where the best a detective can do is not identify the guilty, but offer a glimpse of possibilities — possibilities of what may have happened in the past and of what the future could hold.

The job of the detective, then, becomes not a task of identification, but of exploration, an etiology instead of an inquest. The dehumanization of certainty caused by the system serves for the detectives as a synecdoche for evil; doubt anchors their actions. They resist the easy closure offered by labels, making no severing distinction between heroes and villains. At the end of Scudder’s investigation, he returns to Hanniford and tells him what he has uncovered about Wendy. He confirms that she worked as a prostitute, and that she was good at persuading older men to part with their money.
Hanniford listens and points out, “Earlier you made her sound like a victim. Now she sounds like a villain” (Block 220). Scudder replies, simply, “Everybody’s both” (220).

Scudder sits in church and listens to the sermon given by Reverend Vanderpoel, the man he knows murdered Wendy, and contemplates the tensions between right and wrong, and the crossovers between hero and villain. “I wondered whether it was worse for men to do the wrong things for the right reason or the right things for the wrong reason. It wasn’t the first time I wondered, or the last” (Block 244). Laidlaw’s constant questioning of assumptions serves as a path to discovering connections. He criticizes Milligan — and by extension the legal system — for having no questions. “Milligan has no doubts . . . If everybody could wake up tomorrow morning and have the courage of their doubts, not their convictions, the millennium would be here. I think false certainties are what destroy us” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 146). Claiming to have no doubt, to have all of the answers, is to accept a false veneer that covers the complexities of humanity.

Laidlaw offers a glimpse of hope, finding a way to move beyond judgment, certainties, and self-centered perspectives of the world, pushing for a re-examination of ideological boundaries. Recognizing human connections breaks the binary between guilt and innocence to implicate everyone. Bud Lawson discovers who murdered his daughter and hunts Tommy down, with Laidlaw pursuing them both, attempting to keep Lawson from killing Tommy. In their rooftop confrontation, Laidlaw shows every individual as existing beyond a single role-incarnation. Tommy Bryson is more than just a murderer to be condemned; Bud Lawson is more than a failed father bent on violent retribution; and Laidlaw is more than an avatar of the legal system who gathers clues in order to close cases. Laidlaw calls on his understanding of the connections between them all to reach
out to Lawson, the man behind the anger. He reminds Lawson of his shared culpability for Jennifer’s death, “she hid from you. She didn’t trust you because you gave her none. You wouldn’t let her be herself. You helped to make what happened to her happen . . . What rights have you? What right have any of us to touch that boy?” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 239). By arguing for connections, showing the convergence of social rejections of Tommy because of his homosexuality and the influence of Lawson’s refusal to recognize Jennifer’s autonomy, Laidlaw punctures Lawson’s conviction that murder calls for a vengeful, murderous response. Lawson listens, and hesitates, creating a moment in which “[u]ncertainty had happened, and with it hope” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 239). That hope is a hope of survival, of growth. Lawson cannot regain his daughter. But he doesn’t shoot Tommy; he doesn’t become a murderer in her name. Laidlaw’s detection is not a quest to restore social order, but an unveiling of the dangers woven into its threads and a resistance to the dehumanization of closure and certainty.

The Continual Hope of Inquiry

Breaking free from a system of dehumanization requires finding a way past condemning individuals as nothing more than guilty others, and reaching instead for an ideal of communal connection and responsibility. In the end, there will always be more questions than answers. Each new discovery leads to further unanswerable gaps in knowledge. There are always gaps; that is where people live. The detectives negotiate those gaps by understanding that they can never be closed, and that all are affected by them. As Laidlaw asserts, “what we’re looking for is a part of us. You don’t know that, you can’t begin” (McIlvanney Laidlaw 81). The final page of Laidlaw shows Laidlaw bringing a cup of tea to Tommy Bryson in his cell. Tommy is “huddled into himself,
trembling slightly, like a rabbit caught in the glare of a lamp” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 250). The criminal, or rather, the man who committed a crime, accepts the tea with wonder. Tea, with its traditional British associations with civilization and hospitality passes from Laidlaw to Tommy, breaking the barrier meant to isolate the criminal from society.

By recognizing that justice does not equate to punishment of the guilty, and that close of a legal case — identification and imprisonment of a murderer — fails to offer genuine closure or restoration, both *Laidlaw* and *The Sins of the Fathers* push for a recognition of the humanity of all, a humanity not determined by social roles or on living within prescribed boundaries of identity. Tommy is a person even as he is also a murderer and also a homosexual. The same is true of Richie. Albert Camus claimed “it is fear and silence and the spiritual isolation they cause that must be fought today. And it is sociability (’le dialogue’) the universal intercommunication of men that must be defended” (53). Resisting dehumanization and the separation it builds requires using “every opportunity to individualize the targets of violence... protest[ing] all implications that there are groups — within our own society or outside of it — that are subhuman and fair game” (Kelman 56). Institutional thinking affects the ways in which people act. Because the legal system offers only reified categorization in place of justice, its effects must be resisted through an honest awareness of the interconnectedness and the shared nature of tragedy and pain. At the scene of a murder, there are more people affected than those physically present. Accepting the labels of the system and the moral judgments equated with those labels damages everyone living within that dehumanizing system. Admitting ignorance takes courage. In breaking those divisions and labels, the detectives form responses designed not to uphold reification, but to make people more
human. “Maybe the only answer to a crime like this isn’t arrest and conviction. Maybe it’s for the rest of us to try and love well. Not amputate that part. Just try to heal the world in other places” (McIlvanney *Laidlaw* 183).

Within their contributions to the genre, both McIlvanney and Block cast detection not as dictation, but as part of a non-ending search for understanding. Their detectives serve as more than code-breaking ciphers, but are people who feel, question, and reach out to others. Detective fiction always presents a broken world, but it also attempts to heal it. Fittingly, for a detective who does not know the answer to the brokenness, Scudder also does not know what form the healing should take, or even if his approach is correct. In their final confrontation, Reverend Vanderpoel challenges him, “what about you, Mr. Scudder? Are you a force for good or evil? I’m sure you’ve asked yourself the question . . . How do you answer it?” Scudder’s response is brief and pointed, “Ambivalently” (Block 268). Scudder knows that allowing people to be treated as things in order to impose a false order over chaos is wrong, but does not offer a clear path beyond that. He will not offer answers, but will continue to question, remembering the individuals and making restitution where he can. “I walked around the block to St. Paul’s and put a hundred dollars in the poor box . . . I sat in the back for a while, thinking about a lot of things. Before I left I lit four candles. One for Wendy, one for Richie, the usual one for Estrellita Rivera. And one for Martin Vanderpoel, of course” (Block 276).

Scudder’s final contemplations recognize common, shared humanity. He values each individual — and their connection with him and others — through remembrance. As McIlvanney explained in an interview, “I don’t think life’s about success: I think it’s about the honor of the endeavor” (Wanner 18). Not only is it impossible for any
individual, even a detective, to provide a solution, but prioritizing a solution —
pretending that complete closure is even possible — contributes to a loss of humanity, a
contribution into which the reader can either fall or resist.
CONCLUSION

To conclude this project, I want to touch on more recent texts that more clearly move into postmodernism and demonstrate the consistency of my analysis within the context of another instrumentalized subgenre, the meta detective novel. Postmodernism, to speak generally, embraces genres in their role as representational strategies — tools through which certain types of meaning can be produced. Postmodern literature tends to treat genres not as pure forms but as mechanisms to be dismantled and reassembled into new configurations. In this brief examination of two postmodern texts — Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* (1985) and China Miéville’s *The City and The City* (2009) — I demonstrate that even as style and form shift across the landscape of literary movements, the fiction created within the detective fiction genre continues to grapple with the same omnipresence of loss.

The protagonist in *City of Glass* is Daniel Quinn, a man living alone in New York City after the unexpected death of his wife and child. He works as a detective novelist, an employment that takes up minimal amounts of his time. While this brief overview of Quinn feels like a fairly straightforward identification of a character, his identity immediately becomes undermined. Quinn’s working pseudonym is William Wilson, but he identifies more as the hero of his fiction, Max Work. Then, he falsely identifies himself as Paul Auster, a private detective, over the phone … and eventually in an appointment with Peter and Virginia Stillman. They hire Quinn to protect Peter Stillman from his father, Peter Stillman, who is being released from prison the next day.

After fruitlessly following the elder Stillman for weeks, Quinn begins to converse with the man. On the first day, Quinn uses his own name (Quinn) reasoning that “[s]ince
he was technically Paul Auster, that was the name he had to protect. Anything else, even the truth, would be an invention, a mask to hide behind and keep him safe” (114). He is, of course, technically not Paul Auster; he is artificially Paul Auster. It is Paul Auster who is an invented identity, but now he sees himself/his own identity as Quinn, as the invention. The next day, Quinn meets with Stillman again, this time introducing himself as Henry Dark, the fictional protagonist from Stillman’s book. Later that same day, Quinn again introduces himself to Stillman, this time giving his name as Peter Stillman. Stillman immediately identifies Quinn’s Peter Stillman as Stillman’s own son, the Peter Stillman. That mis-identification is the only moment in which the elder Stillman verifies an identity. He never recognizes Quinn from one encounter to the next. The differing names and identities pile on top of each other, creating a morass of mis-identity and un-identity in which neither Quinn nor Stillman agree on who he is at any moment.

The multiplication of names and identities prevents Quinn from operating with any authority. He is unable even to maintain the stability of his own identity. After their third meeting, the elder Stillman disappears. Virginia and Peter Stillman stop answering their phone, so Quinn is unable to reach them. In an effort to continue his protection of the younger Peter Stillman, Quinn takes up residence in an alley outside Virginia and Peter’s apartment. After months in the alleyway, with no sign of any of the Stillmans, Quinn gives up and attempts to return home. His apartment is occupied by someone else. He can’t return to the place of Daniel Quinn, and so has also lost William Wilson and Max Work. “Quinn let out a deep sigh. He had come to the end of himself. He could feel it now, as though a great truth had finally dawned in him. There was nothing left” (Auster 188-189). He returns to the Stillman’s empty apartment, no longer knowing his own
identity. Eventually, Quinn even disappears from the pages of the novel, his one-time presence only registered through the notes in his notebook, found abandoned within the empty apartment.

This brief overview of Quinn and his entanglements of identity only skims over the complexities of the novel. Every character within the book lives with obscurity and ambiguity. The City may be built of glass, but that transparency does not lead to solution. The apparent pellucidity renders everything opaque. Because everything is available to be seen, there is no possibility of not-seeing, no filtering that would imbue any object, moment, or character with significance. Everything being visible means that nothing really is. Auster shows the city as a labyrinth composed of endless possibilities into which an individual can disappear. The world itself becomes unknowable, unparseable; significance itself disappears into the void of a perpetual deferment of closure.

China Miéville’s *The City and The City* similarly grapples with visibility and identity, but uses frames of seeing to illuminate the ways in which interpretation makes meaning, as opposed to a denial of meaning. Miéville created a fictional world in which the two titular cities — Ul-Qoma and Besźel — occupy the same geographical, or topological space. The history of the two cities is unknown, with some theorizing that the two cities used to exist separately and grew together, and some theorizing that they used to be one city and underwent some sort of cataclysmic schism. However they were formed, these two cities now share a single physical space. It is a unique arrangement even within that fictional world, and difficult for outsiders to understand. “If someone needed to go to a house physically next door to their own but in the neighbouring city, it was in a different road in an unfriendly power. That is what foreigners rarely understood.
A Besź dweller cannot walk a few paces next door into an alter house without breach” (Miéville 70). Tyador Borlú, our investigator and narrator, is forced to go to Ul Qoma to investigate the murder, and walks the same streets as he does when in Besźel, but the experience is a completely different one:

Illitan everywhere … from the vendors, taxi drivers and insult-hurling traffic. I realised how much invective I had been hearing on cross-hatched roads at home. Each city in the world has its own road-grammar, and though we were not in any total Ul Qoma areas yet, so these streets shared the dimensions and shapes of those I knew, they felt in the sharp turns we took more intricate. It was as strange as I had expected it would be, seeing and unseeing, being in Ul Qoma (Miéville 135).

Borlú's experience of the street is shaped not by its realities – what it really looks like – but by the perpetuation of a visual chain of objectification in which what exists is filtered through what is permissible. The existence of Ul-Qoma and Besźel as two separate cities is not maintained through any physical reality, but through a continual exercise of interpretive surveillance in which the citizens of each city constantly engage in unseeing the parts of the other city in order to maintain a permissible existence in whichever social reality they inhabit. Walking through the streets is an exercise in continual interpretation that filters what they allow themselves to see, shaping the world around them into an acceptable formation.

Miéville presents a world in which spatial practices and their apparatuses do not depend on the physical reality of a space. In other words, the disciplinary system which supports and maintains the two cities as separate does not rely on material separations.
Underscoring this point is the fact that much of the novel leaves open the possibility that the two cities are somehow actually distinct. The interpretation chosen by the individual reader, as Cowley and Hanna assert, depends on the preconceptions that the reader brings to the text, underlining “the issue of genre, not as a formal property, but as an interpretive move: whether the city and the city of the title, Besźel and its neighbour Ul Qoma, are one city or two, depends on the expectations, generic and disciplinary, brought to the story” (Cowley and Hanna 2). If one is expecting a sci-fi/fantasy novel, then it is much easier to see the cities as separate, divided by a Barrier. If, on the other hand, one expects realism, then denying even the possibility of a mystical or fantastical explanation leaves no interpretations other than the two cities geographically being one. Because of this construction, emphasized by Miéville's choices of terminology, the reader must constantly engage in seeing/unseeing and interpretation around their own position – just as the characters within the cit(y)(ies) do.

Breaching happens when someone fails to correctly unsee, or otherwise unperceive, the other city, and cases of breaching are punished by an entity, or force, known as Breach. Functionally, Breach are the police of the breach. They maintain the division between the two cities by punishing anyone who breaks, or attempts to break, the boundary lines dividing them. The invisible Breach enforcers are always watching: “We know it's there. Watching. Any excuse . . . we're gone” (Miéville 52). The all-seeing, powerful, panoptic Breach exists as a force attempting to freeze the city-space, to eliminate deviations from correct ways of seeing, and to convert the individual into a controlled and reliable constant. Acceptable existence is predicated on constant, correct interpretation, living within a state of ongoing doubt about the realities of the seen world.
A young woman has been killed, and her body found in Besźel. As a detective, Tyador Borlú holds the responsibility of looking at the available clues and solving the open questions of who she is; who killed her; and why she was murdered. As expected, given a detective fiction genre, Borlú’s job is to see and, having seen, to interpret and to provide the story of what happened. Borlú's investigation is, however, hindered by the separation of the cities. Not only can he not see the entirety of the area around the crime scene, but he quickly suspects that her murder may not be a simple murder, but also a case of breach.

As Borlú carries out his investigation, he travels from one city to the other and then, in order to prevent a crime, breaches. He then is taken by Breach and trained to be one of them. Borlú’s embracing of Breach’s power allows him to stop a murderer’s escape, to shore up the boundaries around and between the cities by removing the criminal element. He “grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, turned him, marched him away . . . pulled him out of either town into neither, into the Breach” (Miéville 303). He accepts the new reality and sees the falsity of the separation between the two cities. He knows that he can never go back to the single interpretation, the single sight, of the world which he knew before. “I imagined myself in Besźel now, unseeing the Ul Qoma of the crosshatched terrain. Living in half of the space. Unseeing all the people and the architecture and vehicles and everything in and among which I had lived. I could pretend perhaps, at best, but something would happen” (Miéville 310). However, instead of sharing the truth about the reality of the world, Borlu joins Breach, becoming part of the mechanism of enclosure. He becomes complicit in the maintenance of the cities’ separation, perpetuating the continued training of citizens into blindness.
Much like Auster’s *City of Glass*, *The City and the City* emphasizes the role of visibility. However, unlike Auster’s text, *The City and the City* emphasizes visibility as shaped by systemic power and the detective as a part of that shaping. Quinn, Auster’s detective, sees everything but cannot identify what is significant and loses himself in the labyrinth of the city. Quinn highlights the inability of an individual to intervene successfully in the world; there is no individual power that can resist the overwhelming nature of information without meaning. Borlú, Miéville’s detective, learns to see everything, but chooses to restrict that knowledge. The inhabitants of the two cities believe in an interpreted meaning that is incorrect, and Borlú, by the end of the novel, supports that interpretation, becoming part of the power structure that maintains that meaning and prevents anyone from venturing outside of the accepted understanding of the world. In a way, these novels provide a weird amalgamation of the different types of loss threading through the other chapters. There is not a trustworthy individual who can offer solutions; there is no sense of a safe, secure world; there is no maintenance of self or self-identity; and there is no guarantee that there is even a solution that could be found. Ultimately, both authors use the detective fiction genre to emphasize the loss of access to an empirically provable or meaningful world.

Throughout this project, I have worked to destabilize several assumptions, which have become critical consensus, about detective fiction existing as a static, limited form able only to reassure readers of the inevitability of restoration. First, by pairing texts from the UK and the US, I have shown that building national divisions into the definition of the detective fiction genre is an impulse based on presuppositions of difference, not a result of close analysis. I have also argued that genre-based hierarchies are maintained
through external classicist impositions. Critics sustain stratifications between genre fictions and literary fictions by emphasizing readership. Genre fictions — like fantasy, science fiction, and detective fiction — are popular, and critics use that popularity to disqualify genre fictions from the realm of quality literature. Quality, however, is not determined by the boundary lines drawn around a genre, and the number of excellent detective fiction works have left scholars in the position of justifying texts and authors as worthy of study while simultaneously making excuses for that value judgment. For example, W. H. Auden wrote of Raymond Chandler — one of the authors in my first chapter — that “whatever he may say, I think Mr. Chandler is interested in writing, not detective stories, but serious studies of a criminal milieu, the Great Wrong Place, and his powerful but extremely depressing books should be read and judged, not as escape literature, but as works of art.” Similarly, Graham Greene excused another of my chosen authors, Patricia Highsmith, from too-close genre allegiance. “Miss Highsmith is a crime novelist whose books one can reread many times. There are very few of whom one can say that” (Greene qtd. in Highsmith’s Eleven). The pattern of identifying certain texts or authors as somehow superior to the genres they inhabit is a consistent one. By including some of those authors and texts, alongside others who have not consistently earned similar elevation, I resist the assumption that such justifications are necessary.

Just as I reject the stratification between genre fiction and literary fiction, so also I reject the implementation of genre labels as an act of strict categorization. Histories of the detective fiction genre treat its progression as one of constant exclusion in which any new idea is banished to a new category, rather than being allowed to expand the definition of what detective fiction is, or can be. Identicality across texts, authors, geographies, and
times is not possible, nor even desirable. Genres as categories must allow for evolution. So also, genres as interpretive frameworks must be flexible — allow the texts to be seen in relationship to one another. Using that relational understanding enables an investigation of the connections and concerns shared across the texts rather than requiring an ongoing shoring up of categorical frameworks. These connections reveal a genre marked by loss and the inability of the detective to provide real restoration. It is incompleteness and the inability to achieve perfect closure that binds the genre together as whole.

As I end this project, I also want to touch, finally and extremely briefly, on another key aspect of the detective fiction genre — seriality. Detective fiction and seriality consistently entwine. Many early detective figures appeared in serials, or in serial forms, their adventures splashed across different magazine or anthology issues. Even as the popularity of the novel form has swallowed the short story, that seriality continues. It is far more common for a detective to continue through a series than it is for the detective to exist in only a single novel. Though I treat them, for the most part, as individual texts, many of the books that appear in this project are from a series. One of the delights of detective fiction is the potential infinitude of installments in any detective’s story. Scholars like Porter and Cawelti argue that the seriality performs the function of reassurance as the repetition contains crime within expected structures and plays out, over and over, a cycle of crime and investigation inevitably ending in identification and punishment. As I have demonstrated, that cycle of closure is never fully resolved; the detective approaches the fulfillment of restoration, but never quite reaches it. The discrete, but interconnected stories of detection show the detective
constantly re-engaging in the search for restoration, but unable to ever completely tell that story. Set within worlds in which a complete answer can never be reached, detective fiction seduces readers by dwelling within “the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the dissolve” (Barthes). Incompleteness weaves through the genre itself as it works and reworks, tells and retells, stories about the search for an unreachable answer that cannot, and must not, be falsely apprehended.


Camus, Albert. "Neither Victim nor Executioner."


Chandler, Daniel. "An Introduction to Genre Theory."


Freeman, R. A. "The Art of the Detective Story."


Sayers, Dorothy L. "Unnatural Death : A Lord Peter Wimsey Mystery


---. *We must have Certainty: Four Essays on the Detective Story* Selinsgrove, Pa.: Susquehanna University Press, 2005.


