

FROM HOLMES TO SHERLOCK: CONFESSION, SURVEILLANCE, AND THE DETECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines detective fiction through the prism of confession. It argues that a certain kind of secular confession remains at the heart of the main project of detective fiction, and that detectives like Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot are literary embodiments of secular pastor figures who command and extract confessions from clients and criminals alike. Hard-boiled detectives like Philip Marlowe moreover, operate, at least ostensibly, as confessants of sorts, as characters who lay before us, in seeming detail, all manners of private information related to their professional and personal lives. Similarly, post-modern detectives like Quinn from Paul Auster's *City of Glass* or Galip from Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*, as well as contemporary television detectives like those from BBC's *Sherlock* challenge, revise, and reformat the way in which detective fiction engages with confession and its paradigms. Confession, in detective fiction, is something that both powers the detective and determines his powers. The dissertation chooses to study it in relation to a certain kind of intrusive surveillance that seeks to create the truth not only about those it purports to serve but also, by implication, about the confessor/confessant detectives themselves. The dissertation argues that the detective is one of the most useful literary figure through which to examine the dynamic relation between surveillance and confession, since the private detective has by turns operated both as the seemingly all-seeing "eye" which induces confession, as well as the seemingly all-divulging "I" of the narrator who is offering the confession. If, as Michel Foucault posits, Western man has become a confessing

animal, then detective fiction provides an appropriate avenue to study the evolution of the subjectivity of this confessional animal through the ages and the purpose of this dissertation is to trace the evolution of the confessional subjectivity through the changing figure of the literary detective and examine the socio-cultural implications of that evolving confessional subjectivity.

Confession, in this dissertation, is seen as a disciplinary mechanism that creates rather than states an irrepressible truth about a subject. It is something intrinsically linked not only to the self, but also to expressions of power, authority, and surveillance. It studies the changing relationship between “truth,” “self,” and confession in detective fiction. Given detective fiction’s fetishistic relationship towards the or at least a “truth” that reveals all, discloses all, dispels doubts, it becomes interesting to study its dependence and engagement with confession, which is at best, a deeply complex, complicated venue for truth creation and self revelation. This constant tension between, on the one hand, an obsessive and indeed generic need to ascertain a unique, authentic, undisputed, and singular truth, and yet, on the other hand, an inherently unreliable mode of self-expression, is something that this dissertation purports to examine and explore.

For *Borobaba* and *Dadu*.

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INTRODUCTION

“Give me a true account of all that happened....a TRUE account, mind you, with nothing added and nothing taken off”

—Sherlock Holmes in “The Adventure of the Abbey Grange”¹

“It was close to 11:00 when I got back to my apartment. I’d concealed a murder and suppressed evidence for twenty-four hours, but I was still at large and nobody seemed unduly worried.”

—Philip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*²

The two quotes above—the first, a typical command stated by Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes to his client asking them to lay before him everything they know about a certain event in their lives, and the second, an equally typical first-person account by Raymond Chandler’s private investigator Philip Marlowe narrating his own illicit and illegal actions—capture some of the basic purposes of this dissertation. This dissertation examines detective fiction through the prism of confession. It argues that a certain kind of secular confession remains at the heart of the main project of detective fiction, and that detectives like Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot are literary embodiments of secular pastor figures who command and extract confessions from clients and criminals alike. Hard-boiled detectives like Philip Marlowe moreover, operate, at least ostensibly, as confessants of sorts, as characters who lay before us, in seeming detail, all manners of private information related to their professional and personal lives. Confession, in detective fiction, is something that both powers the detective and determines his powers. It must be studied, however, in detective fiction, in relation to a certain kind of intrusive

¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Abbey Grange,” *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, (Project Gutenberg, 2007), accessed July 28, 2013, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/108/108-h/108-h.htm#linkH2H_4_0012.

² Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, (Project Gutenberg, 2011), accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/chandlerr-bigsleep/chandlerr-bigsleep-00-h.html>.

surveillance that seeks to create the truth not only about those it purports to serve but also, by implication, about the confessor/confessant detective themselves. The detective, then, becomes the most useful figure through which to examine the dynamic relation between surveillance and confession, since the private detective has by turns operated both as the seemingly all-seeing “eye” which induces confession, as well as the seemingly all-divulging “I” of the narrator who is offering the confession. Indeed confession, as a narrative mode or simply as a plot device is ubiquitous in detective fiction. However, there really has not been any critical or academic consideration of the significance of this aspect of the genre. If, as Michel Foucault posits, “Western man has become a confessing animal,”³ then detective fiction provides an appropriate avenue to study the evolution of the subjectivity of the confessional animal through the ages.

It should be clarified that “confession, then, is not a means of expressing the irrepressible truth of prior lived experience.”⁴ Confession here is largely seen as a disciplinary device linked to intrusive but subtle surveillance techniques. I see confession, following Foucault, as “a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence, or virtual presence, of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile.”⁵ Confession, as discussed here, is a truth creating mechanism, something that creates rather than states an irrepressible truth. It is, in many circumstances, usually provided or constructed under duress, rather than a free expression of the self. It is “poietic not mimetic, it constructs rather than reflects some pre-textual truth.”⁶ It is something

³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 59.

⁴ Jo Gill, “Introduction,” *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays*, ed. Jo Gill (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 4.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, 61-62.

⁶ Jo Gill, “Introduction,” *Modern Confessional Writing*, 4.

intrinsically linked not only to the self, but also to expressions of power, authority, and surveillance.

Of course, this makes the dissertation full of potential pitfalls, for, “To think about confession is, paradoxically given confession’s apparent proximity to truthful revelation, to enter into profound uncertainty....To think about confession is to abandon conventional and hitherto dependable notions of reliability, authority and authenticity and to embrace, and find new ways of addressing, the difficulty and slipperiness.”⁷ This is ironic and perhaps only fitting given that detective fiction is a genre which is entirely oriented towards dispelling the unreliable, the uncertain, and the doubtful, and towards leading the reader to what it insists to be the absolute, undeniable truth. This constant tension between, on the one hand, an obsessive and indeed generic need to ascertain a unique, authentic, undisputed, and singular truth, and yet, on the other hand, an inherently unreliable mode of self-expression is something that can be found barely under the surface of most detective fiction, always threatening to burst out and submerge the entire narrative. In spite of confession being something that deals with the obscure and the secretive and difficult to express or incite, in the west, at least, it has long been associated with the “truth” and the “self,” or as a means by which one may get to the truth of the self. Indeed, it is confession’s purported proximity with a supposed truth that makes it so important strategically to detective fiction, which must always be geared towards it.

Confession is today pervasive, to be found not only in church practices, but in literature, be they confessional poetry, autobiographies, memoirs, or simply the liberal use of the first person voice; in television, in chat shows or “reality” shows; online, in blogs, video blogs, and

⁷ Jo Gill, “Introduction,” *Modern Confessional Writing*, 1.

social networking sites; and is required of us equally in other civic aspects of everyday life, in doctor's chambers, lawyers offices, in the couch of the shrink, with personal bankers, et al.

This ripeness of confessional practices indeed end up making it all the more invisible, seemingly “natural,” and almost spontaneous. However, confession, too, has a past, a history of the way it came to be viewed as quintessential to human experience, as it were. Foucault, for instance, in “Technologies of the Self” describes some alternative modes of confessional writing as part of a “care of the self” routine practiced by the Stoics in their effort to reach a self-realization-al truth. However, over time, the Stoic sense of confession as a means of caring for the self was overridden by the Christian sense of confession, which indeed forms the basis of the kind of confessional practices that we find in society since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which forms the basis of many subsequent forms of confessional practices.⁸ Jo Gill, in her introduction to *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays* outlines some of the major dates that led to the development of confession as a regular, mandatory, and even voluntary practice in the Christian church. It was the fourth Lateran Council (1215) of the pre-Reformation Roman Christian Church that “for the first time, prescribed annual confession and penance for the faithful, making it a condition for admission to Easter communion.”⁹ The fifteenth-century saw confession becoming a monthly or more frequent practice, as required by the church. However, it was in the sixteenth century, when the Roman Church in the West was facing challenges from the likes of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the emergence of new Protestant practices, that “The Council of Trent (1545-1563) took the fundamental step of codifying the place of confession in the Roman Church,” and confession was declared to be

⁸ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1994), 221-251, accessed July 28, 2013, <http://thinkingtogether.org/rcream/archive/dighum/foucaultpacket.pdf>.

⁹ Jo Gill, “Introduction,” *Modern Confessional Writing*, 5.

divine in origin and compulsory for achieving salvation of the spirit.¹⁰ The change from this form of confession to a more secular form that pervaded almost all of civilian life, I shall discuss in the next chapter, but for now, what this brief history tells us is that confession has a history of its own and was hardly a natural human act whose content could be taken at face value. Indeed, through the ages, as the link between confession and actuality became more apparently complicated, the detective would have to use his skills not simply to incite confessions, but also to collate and compare and organize them, and analyze them for their veracity. Indeed, the genre's sometimes overreliance on confession as indicating conclusive facts, climactic revelations, and satisfying endings would grow to be a major underlying concern and tension in many major detective texts.

Confession, in my dissertation, then, is studied mostly as a form of pastoral power, as a kind of subtle surveillance put in place to ensure a better management of population—of a creation of a manageable, docile, paint, visible, speaking subject. It is also studied as a form of supposed self-expression and/or self evasion/self-construction, as something that purports to tell the truth about a person. As such, confessional narratives and/or scenes depicting confession beg to be read closely, between the lines. For instance, when a client comes in to Sherlock Holmes' chamber and Holmes leans over their chair and commands them to speak, causing the client to launch into a detailed narrative, it is not merely a narrative device or plot necessity to carry the story forwards. There is a power play at work here; a power relationship is being established and certain subject positions are being established. This is a site of creation, of certain kinds of performances, and it yields certain subjects, certain products. And therefore, these scenes are

¹⁰ Ibid.

worth studying closely. While these concepts will be expanded upon and clarified in the chapters to come, for now, I would like to identify a few more or less constant aspects of the confession.

Firstly, there is the confessant, that is, the one making the confession. In detective fiction, this could be the client seeking salvation either from a crime or scandal or error in their own ways, or from any wrongdoing done to them. Secondly, there is the confessor, the one who takes the confessions. The confessant is also called the confessor at times, and I think it is significant that the same word can at times refer to the people on both ends of the ritual. The confessor can, by turns or all together, induce confession seemingly spontaneously or by coercion, persuasion, and or force. The confessor not only induces confession, brings it out of hiding, but also manages it interprets it, categorizes it, and decided what to do with it, that is, decides whether confessor needs punishment/penance even beyond confession.

Moreover, confession always takes place in some sort of closed space, a space that is sacred, denoting a kind of solemnity and privacy. This is typically a space that either belongs to the confessor/detective, or is one that the detective controls, is central to, and creates. This could be the confession box; in the detective fiction studied here, it could be Holmes' chambers. Poirot, for instance, creates this magic space by creating his "reunion" scenes and creating a closed circle of people bound by the crime. This space, may, in certain cases, may even be denoted by a larger space like an entire village, holiday home, city, etc.

Another aspect of confession is language. The self is recognized and expressed purely through language in confession. It is a speech act, in that confession cannot be expressed without language. For instance, there is no scope in detective fiction for a feeling of anguish/shame/guilt/panic to be implicitly expressed by the subject; in order to be recognized, it *must* be verbalized. Contrition, admission, repentance, or even defiance must be explicitly,

verbally expressed, more often than not, in order to be registered. The slippery nature of language itself, however, means that this causes certain complications in the veracity of the “truths” expressed in confession. Detective fiction then seems to be a genre that puts into play all these different aspects of confession in relation to each other.

Moreover, detective fiction, more so than any other kind of literature, can imagine the self only through confession. In fact, this confessional self is one that is a product of the performance of the confession. A character’s truth, a character’s identity, can only be affirmed and validated through confession—be it in narrating one’s problems to the detective, admitting guilt, explaining one’s past or one’s actions, etc., each character is identified only through confession. Even within a story, the chief characters are usually either one who has already confessed, or one who has not yet confessed. Character’s movements through the text, therefore, are often defined by their position vis-a vis their confession to the detective.

I would like to point out at the outset, that in this dissertation I have focused exclusively on certain canonical (mostly) white, male detectives. If in this dissertation, therefore, I use the masculine pronoun to refer to the detective, it is not to use it indiscriminately to refer to male and female detectives alike, but rather because this current work refers only to detectives like Holmes, Poirot, and Marlowe. My decision to do so is partly to do with reasons of time and space, and also partly to do with my inclination to assume that, women, or for that matter detectives representing marginalized cultures and identities may indeed engage with confession, surveillance, self, and authority, in distinctly different ways than (mostly) white male detectives do, and I would also not want to do them the dishonor of clubbing them all together in one section, or attaching them as tailcoats to each chapter. The detectives I study in this dissertation

then are decidedly male and decidedly (mostly) white and a lot of their attitude, voice, and style derive heavily from those identities.

Having made that clarification, I would like to provide here a brief summary of the different chapters of my dissertation as a quick prelude to the things to come.

Chapter 1 traces the rise of pastoral power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and charts the rise of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes as a literary embodiment this power. It traces briefly the changes in crime fiction from the Newgate stories, through the Sensation, Gothic, and stories where detectives began to appear as supporting characters, leading to the rise of the detective as the protagonist appearing in serialized form in short stories and the novel. It also briefly looks at the concurrent transformations in law enforcement and policing systems, as well as in changes in population and the city—all of which contributed to the rise of Sherlock Holmes as a master inciter and manager of spontaneous confessions, meant to represent a form of subtle and insidious surveillance of population and who ultimately makes a certain kind of surveillance and a certain kind of regular divulgence to that surveying power seem regular, safe, and indeed useful.

Chapter 2 shifts focus on to Agatha Christie's funny Belgian detective Hercule Poirot and examines how the "golden age" detective story's rigid form indicated a problematisation of the notion of a single truth that one could connect naturally to confession. It engages in a close study of a few Poirot stories, particularly *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* where the already complicated relation between truth and confession is further complicated by Christie's deft use of a deceptively unreliable confessional narrator. Moreover, it examines how, Poirot as a much more visible and obvious panoptic figure (and yet as someone who often has to struggle more than Holmes, on account of his stereotypically comic-foreigner stature) an outsider who enters a

closed society with the precise purpose of subjecting one and all under his scrutiny is much more transparent than Holmes in the sometimes obsessive almost pathological need in the pastoral to hound out confessions. Indeed, Poirot has to pretty much engage in elaborate theatrical performances to force, trick or hound out the culprit by often, *imposing* a confession onto someone, (mostly in his famous “reunion” scenes) as it were, in the absence of voluntary or spontaneous admission of guilt.

In **Chapter 3** the focus moves to America, particularly to the hard-boiled detective, and specifically to Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe. Indeed, the hard-boiled variant of the genre provides an interesting counterpoint to the detective-as-confessor. In Chandler’s decadent urban landscape, it is Marlowe himself who is laying before us, in engaging detail, accounts of his often illicit and illegal interactions with women, the law, the underworld, despite the “private” nature of his profession. The chapter, does not, however, take the first-person narrative of events provided by the hard-boiled sleuth at face value. It reads the urban detective’s laconic, terse, yet witty first person narrative account of his cases as a confession of sorts, but a confession, that rather than focusing inwards, projects outwards, especially and ultimately onto women’s bodies in an effort to control, contain and simultaneously repudiate.

Even in the hard-boiled detective, though, strangely enough, that is, even when the detective takes over the other end of confession as it were, delivering the confessing voice, confession still operates as a certain kind of surveillance and scrutiny directed outwards towards the society at large and but always coming to rest most harshly on women and women’s bodies. In a reading of Raymond Chandler’s penultimate Marlowe novel, *A Long Goodbye*—a story bookended by two key unreliable confessions that mirror each other other—I try to demonstrate how the hard boiled detective’s insistence of projecting all of the moral corruption it sees in the

society around it onto the body of the woman results in a narrative that is, at least in this case, palpably unconvinced by its own verdict and keeps groping with other possibilities, other variants of what it claims to be the truth.

Finally, **Chapter 4** studies the unique problems of the detectives, specifically David Quinn from Paul Auster's *City of Glass* and Galip from Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*, in the postmodern situation, where not is confession ubiquitous, easily available, and no longer privileged, but also where certain notions that one presupposes in confession—an interiority and depth of an unique self; a stable, private, safe even sacred space; and the reliability of language as a means of navigating space and self—are all crumbling and collapsing under the weight of the postmodern skepticism of all grand narratives. In the pre-Victorian and Victorian world out of which emerged Sherlock Holmes, characters were also forever “confessing” to one another. The Victorian stories and novels were littered with characters making painstakingly detailed first-person revelations to one another. However, most of these everyday confessions either happened within close doors, or were conveyed through personal letters, or divulged to figures of authority, like the detective. The detective provides not only deliverance in this secretive society, but also a sense of security in a fast-changing world, in exchange for a certain kind of submission to his/her surveillance. But in a world where confession is becoming more and more public, telecast live to over a million viewers and shared with over a hundred Facebook friends and twitter followers, the detective's role seems simultaneously impossibly challenging and extremely redundant. This makes the role of the detective, paradoxically more important than ever as a figure that must continually reinvent himself to align himself with the morphing nature of confession and surveillance. Moreover, this chapter takes a look at how BBC's *Sherlock* tries

to take on some of the same postmodern concerns that debilitates other literary detectives and the relative successes he makes in navigating this new uncertain ever changing terrain.

Before moving on to the actual dissertation, I would like to take a moment and outline very briefly the different kinds of confession that one may encounter in the subsequent chapters. In chapter one, I see not only the admissions of criminality extracted from the culprits as confessions, but also, and in fact, especially the detailed accounts of personal trouble and or failures that the *clients* must present to the detective. This is especially significant in the Holmes stories almost all of which begin by introducing a new character at Holmes' door seeking help with a problem, and must be immediately be subjected to a confession session if they are to obtain the detective's services. The other crucial kind of confession in terms of plot development is the all-illuminating one that is provided by usually the main guilty party at the end of the story. This confession reaffirms our faith in the detective by usually confirming his deductions, even though, sometimes, even the fact that he can draw out the confession/truth is enough to justify the detective's powers. In several cases, like in the Holmes stories, even these much more obviously guilt admitting, incriminating confessions appear to be spontaneously provided, without much pressure from Holmes. The Poirot stories, however, more often than the Holmes stories, would create a climactic spectacle out of these final confessional scenes, with the entire narrative building up to the detective's famous "reunion" scenes where he would theatrically stage a confession, as it were, one by one implicating as well as absolving almost the entire cast of characters present, leading up to the crafty, sometimes almost violent revelation of the murderer.

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd presents another kind of confession—the confession of the unreliable narrator, presenting a classic example of narrative and confession's potential for

hiding truth as much as revealing it and indeed transforming its stated purposes, its intentions and goals, as it goes along. The hard-boiled detective's first-person narrative presents another kind of unreliable confessional account, interesting in that here it is also the confessor who is the confessant, opening up a whole host of complications in our study of the genre. The postmodern detectives I study in this dissertation, presents confessional accounts that are painfully self-aware—cast as they often are, in metafictional texts—a self-awareness, that more often than not lead to their complete disintegration or even disappearance from. The confession that contemporary detectives, like Sherlock, deal with are usually fragmented into several banal pieces of information, spread across different electronic and other media, transmitted into a depthless cyberspace, from where it must be mined and brought to light.

All these different kinds of confessions—by no means an exhaustive representation—are allied with or respond to surveillance in subtly different ways. In the subsequent chapters, I travel through several ages and several texts of detective fiction to take a broad look at how confession features in and engages with other elements of the texts, bringing into relief interesting unexpected and covert features that would perhaps gone unnoticed when studied through more conventional lenses.

CHAPTER 1

"TELL ME EVERYTHING": THE RISE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES AS SECULAR CONFESSOR

"My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know."

Sherlock Holmes, in "The Adventures of the Blue Carbuncle"¹¹

When Sherlock Holmes meets Dr. John H. Watson, M.D. for the first time, introduced by a mutual acquaintance, Holmes, after listing to Watson his possible shortcomings as a potential roommate, asks him, "What have you to confess now?"¹² While the word "confession" here is likely used casually, devoid of the power-relations it will imply in other instances of confession in the Holmes stories, it is nevertheless significant that this historic first meeting between the world's most famous private detective and his soon to become loyal and intrepid sidekick was marked by confession—a need to express to each other the truths about themselves.

The imperative of the detective, from the very inception of the genre, has been to get to the truth by unearthing that which is hidden, that which is secret. Not only does detective fiction have a fetishistic relationship with the truth, but it also is obsessed with that which is undisclosed, and makes changing the covert into the overt its primary goal. And to this end, it is not merely the detective's superior analytical skills or his ability to observe what is missed by others that gives him a special ability to lead us to the truth, but rather, as I would like to argue, much of the literary detective's success depends on his ability to cast himself in the role of a confessor to one and all. In this chapter, I will look at the rise of the literary detective, specifically Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, as the literary embodiment of the secularisation of

¹¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle," *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Project Gutenberg, 2002), accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1661/1661-h/1661-h.htm#7>.

¹² Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Project Gutenberg, 2008), accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/244/244-h/244-h.htm#link2HCH0001>.

a pastoral power, examining the changes in the power-knowledge equation in the policing and governing systems that made it possible. I would like to demonstrate how the detective operates as a secular pastor of sorts, his special efficacy hinging on his ability to extract confessions out of his “flock,” and argue that this pastor-like power of the detective pitched him as a saviour-figure, making surveillance seem natural and even desirable. By examining certain stories and texts I hope to show that the confession is a vital part of the detective story and where a story does not formally mimic a confession, scenes of confession not only abound but are the *key* scenes that drives the plot forward and/or that the plot builds up to. The confession not only powers the detective but also reaffirms his powers.

The emergence of the literary detective in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries can be seen as a reflection of certain changes and shifts in the nature of administration and government, giving rise to a kind of knowledge/power system that Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* and several of his other works. Indeed, Foucault’s panopticon model of social discipline and surveillance can often find a suitable literary example in the figure of the detective. However, it can be a too simplistic understanding of the functions of the literary private detective, especially, since ever so often, the detective is seen, in a somewhat reductive reading of both Foucault’s concepts of the panopticon and detective fiction, as simply, an all-*seeing* power. This makes for an image of the detective as an intrusive agent of surveillance who relies primarily on his “super-vision”¹³ to get the job done. I argue that the detective presents a knowledge-power system that is even more subtle and insidious than that represented by the panopticon, in that, while the disciplinary surveillance represented by the panopticon is often taken to indicate a scrutiny of the subject’s *actions*, the detective attempts to bring its subject’s

¹³ D.A Miller, “Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and Bleak House,” *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 35.

thoughts into its disciplinary radar. Indeed, “the disciplinary move from surveillance to self-surveillance in the development of confessional subjectivity can be compared to his analysis of panopticism in *Discipline and Punish*, but now it is not externally exhibited behaviours of prisoners which are monitored and self-monitored, but rather the internal life of the persons being watched, and who have thus learned to watch themselves, which needs to be verbalised aloud to another.”¹⁴ This mechanism of power, which requires the subject to confess itself to a higher authority can be classed under what Foucault describes as “pastoral power” and one could argue that the detective represents a pastoral power that needs to rely on “insight” rather than simply a panoptic power that is based entirely on “sight.” To be precise, reading the detective as an embodiment of a Foucauldian “pastoral” power that relies for its efficacy on a kind of management of confessions, sometimes allows us to better grasp some of the nuances of the workings of the modes of power represented by detective fiction, even though, both a panoptic surveillance and a pastoral self-surveillance continually depend on and reinforce each other.

A Brief pre-History

To understand the cultural and political significance of the figure of the detective, we must look at the power structures prevalent in society prior to the dramatic rise of the detective. The *Newgate Calendar* provides a good example of the notions of discipline and punishment that prevailed in the 17th century. Named after the Newgate prison, it was a series of collections of stories produced by the keeper of Newgate Prison in London relating the details of real-life crimes, published initially as a monthly bulletin of executions and later as collected editions of these stories, and which eventually went on to inspire the Newgate novel. The “real” life stories that appeared in the *Newgate Calendar* were glorified tales about the criminal’s thrilling

¹⁴ Susan David Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture* (The University of North Carolina Press: London, 1997), 71.

adventures, veiled thinly as moral tales about how a life of sin can lead to a gruesome and terrible death. Each story was accompanied by vivid and explicit illustrations of either the criminal in the act of committing the crime, or of the criminal being meted some gory punishment. The stories range from tales of legendary robbers to murderers and cannibals. The focus, then, was clearly on the criminal on the one hand and punishment on the other, and the purpose was to satisfy a kind of depraved public desire for the criminal “other,” the illegal, and the forbidden. The Newgate novel evolved out of this format and relied, similarly, on creating a spectacle out of a life of gruesome crime for the masses to consume. Some of these accounts were formatted as purported confessions of a repentant criminal that the author had apparently decided to share with the public as a cautionary tale—Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722)¹⁵, for instance, —but the aim was very much to feed the voyeuristic and curious minds of the general public. Confession, in the Newgate novel, whenever it did occur, was then simultaneously a narrative device intended to increase the credibility and touted authenticity of the narrative, and a way of sometimes, perhaps unwittingly humanising and valourising the “heroic” exploits of criminals, thereby making the audience response to them complicated.

Even a cursory reading of these stories makes it clear that this was emphatically not an account meant to raise people’s faith in the state of law and order in the country. Whenever a criminal was captured, it was more often than not, due to some oversight or folly on the part of the criminal her/himself and not due to any competence shown by those on the side of the law. This kind of crime writing “articulates deep anxiety rather than consolation”¹⁶ and provides no

¹⁵ Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*, ed., Albert J. Rivero (South Carolina: BiblioBazaar, 2007).

¹⁶ Lynn Pykett, “The Newgate novel and sensation fiction, 1830-1868,” *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19.

“psychic sense of security”¹⁷ that the Holmes stories provided to its reader. It exemplifies the “radical indictments of oppressive legal and penal systems at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”¹⁸ that Foucault described in *Discipline and Punish*. This world, and the almost pornographic focus on crime is in sharp contrast with the detective stories of Doyle or Christie where it is the detective and his power to rearrange, reorganise, and reinterpret criminal activity that is focus of the story.

Subversive Silences: The Gothic and the Sensational

Of course, this transformation from the Newgate style stories to the Holmesian kind did not happen overnight. There is a significant amount literary work which marks the transitional phase of the detective story from the Newgate novel, chief among them being the Sensation and Gothic tales. Sensation novel’s contribution towards the development of the detective fiction is that it shifts the scene of the crime from the dark underside of society by placing more “small-scale, intimate crimes at the heart of middle and upper class homes.” That is, “crime was no longer perceived as constituting a world of its own...Rather, crime was now seen as an integral part of the respectable world.”¹⁹ The Gothic, on the other hand, nurtured a fascination for the uncanny, the atmospheric, the gruesome, and again, the fear of the contamination of the chaste Victorian home. What the Sensation novel and the Gothic story both did, was to make us, as the reader, begin to view silences as suspicious, threatening, and potentially subversive.

Moreover, the Victorian novel in general, provides characters constantly speaking to each other or the reader in surprisingly, and almost implausibly long, minutely-detailed, first-person,

¹⁷ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 25.

¹⁸ Lynn Pykett, “The Newgate novel and sensation fiction, 1830-1868,” *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, 19.

¹⁹ Martin Priestman, “Introduction,” *Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, 4.

relating accounts of events as viewed or experienced by them. Often these exchanges take place among the men within close doors, or are offered by relatively hapless women to authoritative men who have taken charge of the narrative. At other times, these minutely detailed accounts may be gleaned from long letters, journal entries, legal depositions, and so on, showing the importance that this fast changing urban landscape of Victorian England was placing on disclosures, to one another, to a diary, or to a higher, usually male authority. In a world where first-person narratives and first-person narratives within narratives are always exhaustive and meticulously detailed, secrets and silences are automatically associated with a sense of foreboding. For instance, in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872)²⁰, a story teeming with first-person disclosures, the one character that refuses to speak is Carmilla. In this story, much of which centers around the friendship of two young girls, the bright and airy Laura, and the dark and mysterious Carmilla, the contrast between the two is also borne out by Laura's frankness and openness—indeed, it is her first person voice that narrates the tale—and Carmilla's inherent secrecy. In fact, Carmilla's refusal to talk about her childhood and her past, sometimes even in the face of concerted interrogation, becomes a source of unease and ill-comfort even before she turns out to be a vampire.

This deep unease and vehement rejection of silences is also borne out by Sensation Novels. In Mary Elisabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862)²¹, Lady Audley, “Braddon's bigamous heroine” from a poverty-ridden past who marries into wealth, and who “deserts her child, pushes husband number one down a well, thinks about poisoning husband number two and sets fire to a hotel in which her other male acquaintances are residing”²² is allowed a detailed

²⁰ Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (Portland: Bizarro Press, 2012).

²¹ Mary Elisabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, ed. Lyn Pykett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²² Elaine Showalter, “Subverting the Feminine Novel: Sensationalism and the Feminine Protest,” *Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessin* (New Jersey: Princeton Publishing, 1977), 153.

first person “confession” only at the very end of the novel, before she is being packed off to a mental institution, out of harm’s way. Her confession, then, effectively neutralizes the threat presented by her to respectable Victorian society or at least, signals her departure from the safe space of the Victorian home, into a penitentiary.

Women, in fact, always remain a great source of anxiety both in the Gothic and Sensation novels and there is always a high emphasis placed on them to speak, and that too, to speak to *men* about their secrets and troubles, and as such, transgressive silences of women are a source of much higher concern and anxiety than that of men. Men routinely confess to each other, consult, seek advice, but more often than not, women are subjected to confessions by men but not quite as often do we find either women confessing to other women and almost never is there even a scope for men to confess to women built in the plots. Indeed, even in *Carmilla*, Laura, the protagonist’s first-person confessional narration of the story is subscribed within a case study conducted by Dr. Hesselius, thereby effectively making the tale a woman’s confessional account to a male authoritative figure. This anxiety surrounding women’s secrets and women’s silences, as we shall see, is carried forward by the detective fiction genre and in almost all of its forms women’s silences and secrets remains a source of great concern.²³

²³ An interesting counterpoint to this may be found in the American Gothic tales of Edgar Allan Poe. Poe is rightfully credited as being a pioneer in detective fiction, not only creating arguably the first literary detective in Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, but also infusing in him qualities that would provide a model for detectives for generation to come. But it is Poe’s macabre tales that should be of interest to us here in their creation of the clinically acute confessional narrators whose very willing admission of guilt about the sordid crimes they commit and narrate render them unreliable, horrifying, macabre. Poe’s narrators seem to be afflicted by this unnamed disease which is not only incurable, but also infectious and hereditary, and therefore unavoidable. And this disease manifests itself not only in making Poe’s narrators commit paranoia-ridden crimes but to experience and thereby narrate them with terrifying precision. Poe imbues his protagonists with “a narrative consciousness that can account exhaustively, and with absolute precision, for every instant of its unfolding—a consciousness upon which...not so much of a heartbeat is lost.” [Peter Coviello, *Intimacy in America: Dreams Of Affiliation in Antebellum Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 67.] In creating a narrative, an exhaustively confessing voice which even as it confesses, horrifyingly challenges our responses to it, our easy assumptions about confession and truth, Poe proves to be years ahead of his time and foreshadows the modernist and postmodernist crime fiction authors who would tackle these issues only decades and centuries later. That the frank, first person, confessing, all

The Detective as the Panopticon

These novels then contributed to detective fiction by making frank disclosure a sign of good (usually male) character and by marking silences as potentially subversive. However, in a Victorian society that was still after all paradoxically obsessed with privacy, the detective's task was never going to be as simple as to simply force confessions out of criminals. That is made apparent in the failure of some of the earliest literary detectives, like Inspector Bucket in Dickens' *Bleak House* and Sergeant Cuff in Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* both of whom, like many early literary detective figures, were agents of the police. It is crucial to note that while the police are a favourite punching bag of most detective stories, the detective is definitely a development on a system introduced by the new policing systems in the late 17th and early 18th century and in fact, the detective is definitely an extra-legal form of the same systems of knowledge and power encapsulated in the police. The gradual change from the Newgate world where criminals were romantic heroes to one in which it was the detective who was the protagonist was marked, first, by the intensification and radical modification in the police.

The change from Newgate novels to the Gothic and Sensation novel to finally the rise of the Sherlock Holmes was concurrent to a change in the policing and governing systems of Britain. Douglas G Browne in *The Rise of the Scotland Yard: A History of the Metropolitan Police* and Patrick Pringle in *Hue and Cry: The Birth of the British Police* both point out that as late as middle of the eighteenth century there really was not any police force in the British Isles. The first important date towards the establishment of a police system was 1747, when Henry Fielding became the magistrate of the Bow Street court in London's Covent Garden and did

admitting voice can be as much a source of abject terror precisely because rather than in spite of their faithfulness to events transpired, is something that can be found like nowhere else in the narrators of the Gothic short tales of Edgar Allan Poe. See for instance, "The Black Cat," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Fall of the House of Usher" in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed., Dawn B. Sova, (Barnes and Nobles: New York, 2006).

away with the ineffective payoffs and other forms of corruption that had characterised the system of the “thief takers” and gathered together a small group of constable and procured for them a modest salary, who came to be known as the “Bow Street Runners.” However, the Runners were soon overcome with news of scandal and accusations of bribery and thievery themselves, and their rather poor salary and relatively poorer class backgrounds apparently did not do much to ingratiate them in the eyes of the public. However, they remained the main policing system in England until 1829 when, with the passage of Robert Peel’s Metropolitan Police Act newer police men, known informally as the “Bobbies” began to patrol the streets of London. The “Bobbies,” unlike the Bow Street Runners were trained to maintain a relatively low profile, focusing more on prevention of crime rather than punishment. Moreover, unlike with the Bow Street Runners, the “Bobbies” were not offered huge rewards by their administrators—a practice that had led to much corruption among the Runners. While the Runners were ultimately disbanded by 1839, it was not until 1842 that an official detective branch of the Metropolitan Police was established. This first Detective Department, as it was known, consisted of a group of eight plainclothes officers and while some of the members were former Runners unlike the Runners their reputation remained relatively unscathed and, in fact, was bolstered by positive reports in the media and literature of the time.^{24 25}

Chief amongst these was that provided by Charles Dickens, who, with his abiding interest in crime, took interest in the detectives early on in his journalistic writings for *Household Words*. In “The Detective Police,” Dickens acknowledges the lack of faith of the public in the police force that prevailed in the era of Newgate calendars and novels:

²⁴ Douglas G Browne, *The Rise of the Scotland Yard: A History of the Metropolitan Police* (London: George G Harrap, 1956).

²⁵ Patrick Pringle, *Hue and Cry: The Birth of the British Police*, (New York: Gordon Press Publishers, 1992).

We are not by any means devout believers in the old Bow Street police to say the truth. We think there was a vast amount of humbug about those worthies. Apart from many of them being men of very indifferent character, and far too much in the habit of consorting with thieves and the like, they never lost a public occasion of jobbing and trading in mystery and making the most of themselves. Continually puffed besides by incompetent magistrates anxious to conceal their own deficiency and hand in glove with the penny liners of that time, they became a sort of superstition. Although a Preventive Police, they're utterly ineffective, and, as a detective police, were very loose and uncertain in their operations. They remain with some people a superstition to the present day.²⁶

In the same article, however, Dickens goes on to insist, “The detective force organized since the establishment of the existing police, is ...well chosen and trained, proceeds ... systematically and quietly, does its business in such a work like manner, and is always ... calmly and steadily engaged in the service of the public.”²⁷ By way of elaboration, he goes on to describe a happy evening *tete-a-tete* with some of the young officers of the new detective force in the *Household Words* offices where the bright young men genially swap anecdotes from their work life, all illustrations of their competence at what is clearly not an ordinary job.²⁸ Dickens also wrote a piece called “Three Detective Anecdotes” where he presents purportedly real life accounts of various members of this new detective police force in an effort to showcase their various talents, generally holding them up as stand up men of good moral character. In these accounts, Dickens introduces the public to Inspector Wield, Inspector Stalker and their associates—Sergeants Witchem, Mith, Fendall, Dornton, and Straw. Between them, this group of men can “steadily pursue the inductive process, from small beginnings, working on from clue to clue” and profess an active “acquaintance with the swell mob.”²⁹ They have amongst them men who are “a dab at housebreakers” and “a prodigious hand at pursuing private inquiries of a

²⁶ Charles Dickens, “The Detective Police,” *Reprinted Pieces* (Project Gutenberg, 1997), accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/872/pg872.html>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Charles Dickens, “Three Detective Anecdotes,” *Reprinted Pieces*.

delicate nature,” as well as men who have mastered the art of “knocking at a door and asking a series of questions in any mild character you choose to prescribe to him.”³⁰

Careful to segregate them from the old police force, Dickens assures his readers that “they are one and all respectable looking men; of perfectly good deportment and unusually good intelligence and nothing lounging or stinking in their manners; with an air of keen observation and quick perception when addressed generally presenting in their faces traces more or less marked of habitually leading lives of strong mental excitement. They have all good eyes; and they all can and they all do look full at whomsoever they speak to.”³¹ Most of the anecdotes involve the police men shadowing criminals, finding means to break into suspects’ houses under clever disguises, or lying in wait at strategic locations hoping to eavesdrop on and/or catch criminals. The Detective Force, then clearly has begun to represent a kind of constant surveillance. However, Dickens, while focusing greatly on their collective skills, also takes pains to depict them as genial, good natured, well-intentioned young fellows, the kind you would want to make friends with, thereby neutralising the intrusive nature of their job.

It was a year later that Dickens published “On Duty with Inspector Field” in the same column and by now the detective is already a towering, awe-inspiring personality, almost omniscient and omnipresent.³² The article describes a fictionalized account of the Chief of the Detective Branch, Inspector Charles Frederick Field’s nocturnal perambulatory tour as he inspects several areas of the city, which are normally associated with crime and criminality. Dickens depicts Inspector Field as a stern, strict, patriarchal figure whose foreboding presence looms large over the miserable and wretched existence of the petty criminals. Inspector Field,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Charles Dickens, “On Duty with Inspector Field,” *Reprinted Pieces*.

“sagacious, vigilant, lamp in hand throwing monstrous shadows on the walls and ceilings” is the “guardian genius of the British Museum...bringing his shrewd eye to bear on every corner of its solitary galleries, before he reports ‘all right.’ Suspicious of the Elgin marbles, and not to be done by cat-faced Egyptian giants with their hands upon their knees.”³³ Such a metaphor seems to bring out, for the first time, parallels between the detective’s role in society and England’s erstwhile status as a colonizing empire. The museum, after all, is a prime symbol of England’s notorious colonial practices, a display of the empire’s colonial procurements. Therefore, Dickens’ description of Fields as someone who “has come fast from the ores and metals of the deep mines of the earth and the parrot gods of the south sea islands, and from the birds and beetles of the tropics and from the arts of Greece and Rome,”³⁴ seems to underline the subject-object relationship of not only Britain and its colonies, but also of the detectives and the criminals. As the night progresses, we are introduced to a range of criminals, beggars, and homeless vagabonds; from “a lost boy, extremely calm and small...who says if you show him Newgate street he can show you where he lives” to “a raving drunken woman in the cells who has screeched her voice away and hardly has power enough left to declare...that she is the daughter of a British officer;” from “Rat’s castle” where one is in “the company of noted thieves,” to “a house of Irish poors where scores of semi-naked men, women and children are “heaped upon the floor like maggots and cheese,”³⁵ all must be subjected to the harsh glare of the Inspector’s lamp. Indeed, “when the turning lane of light becomes stationary for a moment” the object has no choice and simply “submits himself to be scrutinized and fades away into the darkness.”³⁶ S/he realizes that “before the power of the law, the power of superior sense—for

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

common thieves are fools besides these men—and the power of a perfect mastery of their character, they have no hope of escape.”³⁷ Sitting at the *Household Words* office in the company of his colleagues, sharing anecdotes, the detective may come across as a benevolent, companionable man. But here he is exalted and elevated into a towering, commanding personality. In these streets and cellars, “Inspector Field is the bustling speaker. Inspector Field’s eye is a roving eye that searches every corner of the cellar as he talks. Inspector Field’s hand is the well-known hand that has collared half the people here...yet Inspector Field stands in his den the Sultan of the place. Every thief here cowers before him like a schoolboy before his schoolmaster—all watch him, all answer when addressed, all laugh at his jokes, all seek to propitiate him.”³⁸ At the receiving end of such relentless intrusive surveillance lies the criminal and Dickens attempts to give voice to his anguish: “to lie at night wrapped in the legend of my slinking life; to take the cry that pursues me, waking to my breast in sleep; to have it staring at me and clamoring for me as soon as consciousness returns...STOP THIEF! And to know that I must be stopped, come what will. To know that I am no match for this individual energy and keenness or this organized and steady system.”³⁹

For the first time, therefore, the detective emerges as a figure in the face of which the criminal is rendered hopeless, helpless. As a figure who sees everything, hears everything, and knows everything, and as an enforcer of discipline not through brute force but by scrutiny the detective is now indeed beginning to embody Foucauldian equations of knowledge and power. As Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, “The formation of knowledge and their increase

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

and power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process.”⁴⁰ Foucault explains, “this power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance capable of making all visible.”⁴¹ Field thus emerges as a prototype of Jeremy Bentham’s image of the Panopticon, and as one of the “guardian genius”-es of all the symbols British imperial power—material, ideological and symbolic.

The Defective Detective

However, unlike in the Newgate era, crime was now no longer something out in Newgate Street or Rat Castle. As is evident from the Sensational novels that placed shocking tales of bigamy, murder, adultery, et al in familiar, ordinary, domestic settings, crime was now out in the seedy underbelly of London as well as in the comfortable homes of the middle and upper classes. Thus the detective had to be someone who could straddle both these worlds effortlessly. However, the early detectives often failed in their tasks when they stepped into the domestic sphere, into the parlours and kitchens of respectable Victorian homes. Two examples of these relatively unsuccessful detectives are Inspector Bucket from Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* and Sergeant Cuff from Wilkie Collins’ *Moonstone*.

To put it briefly and avoid unnecessary summary of sections of a portly Dickensian novel that are not of relevance to our study, *Bleak House* is set against a the long -winded and never ending court case, Jarndyce vs Jarndyce, the details of which are never really explained because no one apparently remembers what it was about in the first place. It has a dual narrative, with some chapters being narrated by the orphaned Esther Summerson, the novel’s protagonist, and

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 198.

⁴¹ Ibid.

the other by an omniscient, third person narrator. Between the two narrators, the novel vacillates from the households of the dignified gentry to the grimy alleys in the dirty underbelly of its urban space. Although Bucket, by the end of the novel, appears in both narratives, in fact, drawing Esther Summerson into his investigation (even identifying that the events described in the two narratives are linked), by and large, it is the omniscient narrative that follows Bucket, thereby allowing the novel to go into places that Esther, a young girl now adopted by Mr. Jarndyce, owner of the lordly Bleak House, cannot. The omniscient narrator follows Inspector Bucket into London's seedy alley ways, squalid poorhouses, seamy public houses, etc., and while this again, showcases the detective's mastery over all kinds of urban and suburban spaces, it should be noted, that the novel still requires a separate narrative to effectively oversee and report all the happenings in the greater *Bleak House* London area. The detective, then, is still not omniscient enough to be the sole source of knowledge, information, and authority.

Bucket makes his appearance in the novel much before the murder is committed. In fact, he is assigned by Tulkinghorn the lawyer in order to uncover the murky past of Lady Dedlock, the beautiful but mysterious wife of Sir Leicester Dedlock, lord of Chesney Wold. Bucket is introduced largely in connection with what at least initially seems like a sub plot. However, Bucket ultimately and somewhat ironically ends up having to investigate the murder of the very person who hired him once Tulkinghorn is suddenly murdered half-way through the story. Although introduced to us as "only Mr. Bucket" by Tulkinghorn, from his very first appearance it becomes clear that this man holds extraordinary, almost supernatural powers. Dickens describes how, "Mr. Snagsby [a hapless law-stationer, who gets inadvertently caught up in other people's secrets on account of being on the wrong place at the wrong time] is dismayed to see standing with an attentive face between himself and the lawyer, at a little distance from the table,

a person with a hat and a stick in his hand, who was not there when he himself came in and has not since entered by the doors or by either of the windows. There is a press in the room, but its hinges have not creaked, nor has a step been audible upon the floor. Yet this third person stands there with his attentive face, and his hands behind him are composed and quiet listener.”⁴²

Bucket proves to foreshadow many of Sherlock Holmes’ remarkable abilities. He is capable of reading minds and “in a moment’s hesitation on the part of Mr. Snagsby, Bucket dips down to the bottom of his mind.”⁴³ He is also a master of disguise. The very first time Esther Summerson encounters him, he introduces himself as an aged physician, who has come to enquire after a patient residing in Mr. George’s shooting gallery. However, the moment he is allowed in, “the physician stopped, and taking off his hat, appeared to vanish by magic and to leave another and quite different man in his place.”⁴⁴ Moreover, like Holmes and many of his followers, Bucket has the tendency of viewing a case on purely aesthetic terms. When investigating the case of Mr. Tulkinghorn’s murder, at one point he exclaims, “It is a beautiful case—a beautiful case.”⁴⁵ He later specifies, “I mean from my point of view. As considered from other points of view, such cases will always involve more or less unpleasantness.”⁴⁶ While Holmes can be seen pressing his fingertips together when lost in contemplation over a particularly confounding clue, Bucket prefers to make his forefinger his main ally:

When Mr. Bucket has a matter of this pressing interest under his consideration, the fat forefinger seems to rise to the dignity of a familiar demon. He puts it to his ears and it whispers information; he puts it to his lips and it enjoins him to secrecy, he rubs it over his nose, and it sharpens his scent; he shakes it before a guilty man and it charms him to his destruction. The augurs of the Detective Temple invariably predict that when Mr.

⁴² Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Project Gutenberg, 1997), accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1023/1023-h/1023-h.htm>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Bucket and that fat finger are in much conference, a terrible avenger will be heard before long.⁴⁷

Armed with his forefinger Bucket uses his skills to make people act according to his will in the manner of a hypnotist—coaxing yet commanding, intimate yet overpowering. And his helpless prey can do nothing but yield to his command. When he requires Mr. Snagsby to keep his contribution into Buckets’s investigations a secret from Mrs. Snagsby, he merely says: “You see, Mr. Snagsby...what I like in you, is, that you’re a man it’s of no use pumping; that’s what you are. When you know you have done a right thing, you put it away, and it’s done with and gone, and there’s an end of it. That’s what you do.”⁴⁸ Needless to say, Mr. Snagsby has no choice but “to put it away” even at the cost of arousing the suspicions of his terrifying wife. This is of course ironic since has just received a lot of “pumping” from Bucket, and divulged crucial information to him.

After Tulkinghorn is killed, what was a relatively simple investigation into a woman’s secret past becomes a murder investigation causing Bucket to sharpen his intrusive vigilant glare. As he secretly surveys the crowd outside the Lincoln’s Inn-Field on the occasion of the lawyer’s funeral we discover that, “he has a keen eye for a crowd—as for what not...nothing escapes him.”⁴⁹ Cooped up in the horse carriage that hides him, Bucket makes sure that he takes “note of the fittings of the carriage in case he should ever find such knowledge useful.”⁵⁰ Bucket might not be able to extract information from a gentleman’s hat or a client’s walking stick, however, he does acknowledge the importance of material evidence, objects that can speak and divulge information, and as such, Bucket here begins to represent both incessant, secret surveillance, as well as a database of inexhaustible information and data.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Although deployed mainly as a comic and indeed extremely sympathetic character, as the novel progresses the figure of Bucket seems to assume towering, gigantic proportions. Hence, Joe the poor orphan's terrified claim that "he is in all manner of places, all at wunst."⁵¹ The text repeatedly describes Buckets demonic powers, his hypnotic finger, and his near immanence: "Time and place cannot bind Mr. Bucket. Like man in the abstract, he is here today and gone tomorrow—but very unlike man indeed, he is here again the next day."⁵² As Bucket's role in the novel becomes increasingly important, he "exerts mastery over the urban domain, a domain that in the nineteenth century was both entirely new and a locus of complex fears"⁵³ Ultimately, he is even able to pin down Tulkinghorn's murder on Hortense, the scorned house-maid, by gathering the scattered clues from across the narrative. However his investigations have already done their damage. Upon learning that her past—the affair, the child out of the wedlock—have all been revealed, Lady Dedlock, fearing scandal and rejection, flees. At his point, Bucket "mounts a high tower in his mind, and looks out far and wide. Many solitary figures he perceives, creeping through the streets; many so solitary figures out on heaths and roads and lying under haystacks. But the figure he seeks is not among them."⁵⁴ Here, "Bucket's breadth of vision, his mastery of the urban scene, the rivers and bridges, his knowledge of all figures moving within them,"⁵⁵ equates him like never before with the Foucauldian Panopticon.

But, as pointed out by Andrei Baltakmens, "his moment of triumph is also his moment of failure. The one object that he seeks, despite his comprehensiveness of vision, is invisible to

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Andrei Baltakmens, "Esther and the Detectives," *Deep South* 2.3 (Spring 1996), accessed July 26, 2013, <http://www.otago.ac.nz/deepsouth/vol2no3/andrei.html>.

⁵⁴ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*.

⁵⁵ Andrei Baltakmens, "Esther and the Detectives."

him....Despite his powers, though, Bucket is unable to contain the crisis.”⁵⁶ In questing for Lady Dedlock, Bucket hastens to contain the crisis caused, after all, by his own investigations, but fails to undo the chain of events that he has set off. Esther and Bucket find Lady Dedlock, but only in the graveyard. As it turns out, Bucket, in spite of his breadth of vision, has arrived too late. Lady Dedlock is dead. The mystery will not be solved; there will be no final confession from Lady Dedlock that will explain her past. Indeed, Lord Dedlock had already instructed Bucket to let it be known to his wife that her past makes no difference to him whatsoever and that all he wants is that she come back home safely. Thus, here, Bucket’s intrusion, rather than providing a satisfying closure, actually causes a tragedy that could have been avoided. Bucket, then, has sufficient mastery of “sight” to see everything, stalk everyone, go everywhere, but lacks enough “insight” to be able to predict how Lady Dedlock may react, or how this may affect her family, and indeed how to step out of his duties in a professional capacity and bring Lady Dedlock to voluntarily disclose everything to him and thereby manage her salvation by dispensing off her guilt in a safe, manageable space.

Bucket, however, was not the only unsuccessful professional detective in Victorian literature. Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone*, considered by many to be the first full-scale detective novel in English literature also features an ineffective detective. The plot of *The Moonstone* revolves around the disappearance of an expensive diamond (the moonstone) in the eminently respectable Verinder household. As suspicions and accusations begin to fly fast, Lady Verinder reluctantly decides to call in the police saying, “I suppose I *have no alternative* but to send for the police” [emphasis mine] and Superintendent Seegrave from the local police station is called

⁵⁶ Ibid.

in.⁵⁷ However, it is soon rather evident that “That man will be of no earthly use to [the Verinder household],” and Mr Franklin, arguably the romantic hero of this multi-narrator novel, soon declares “Superintendent Seegrave is an ass.”⁵⁸ Seegrave, having proven himself to belong to the long line of bumbling, inefficient, untrustworthy policemen, the rose-bush obsessed, eccentric police detective Sergeant Cuff is called in and from the very beginning Collins takes great care to distinguish him from Seegrave (much like Dickens had taken care to distinguish the new breed of detectives from the Old Bow Street Runners). After dismissing Seegrave, Franklin raises great hope about Cuff saying “I begin to hope we are seeing the end of our anxieties already...when it comes to unraveling a mystery, there isn’t the equal in England of Sergeant Cuff.”⁵⁹

Collins makes sure the two are set apart even in physical appearance. Seegrave is described as “tall and portly, and military in his manners” who “had a fine commanding voice, and a mighty resolute eye, and a grand frock-coat which buttoned beautifully up to his leather stock,” and as someone who had “‘I’m the man you want!’ was written all over his face; and he ordered his two inferior police men about with a severity which convinced us all that there was no trifling with HIM.”⁶⁰ And less than a few pages after establishing that handsome appearances do not a good detective make, Cuff is described thus: “[A] grizzled, elderly man, so miserably lean that he looked as if he had not got an ounce of flesh on his bones in any part of him. He was dressed all in decent black, with a white cravat round his neck. His face was as sharp as a hatchet, and the skin of it was as yellow and dry and withered as an autumn leaf. His eyes, of a steely light grey, had a very disconcerting trick, when they encountered your eyes, of

⁵⁷ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (Project Gutenberg, 2006), accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/155/155-h/155-h.htm#link2HCH0011>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

looking as if they expected something more from you than you were aware of yourself. His walk was soft; his voice was melancholy; his long lanky fingers were hooked like claws. He might have been a parson, or an undertaker—or anything else you like, except what he really was.”⁶¹

As soon as Cuff arrives Seegrave diminishes in stature next to his tremendous genius. Betteredge, the butler of the Verinder household (and also the narrator of this section of the novel) remarks, “Why Superintendent Seegrave should have appeared to be several sizes smaller than life, on being presented to Sergeant Cuff, I can’t undertake to explain. I can only state the fact.”⁶² Upon arrival, Cuffs seems to prefigure a lot of Holmes’s qualities. Apart from having his pet eccentricities and hobbies, like a love of rose bushes, he also foreshadows some of Holmes methods, like an obsession with seemingly inconsequential details. He also presages Holmes and Poirot in having a flair for the dramatic and refusing to declare who he suspects even though he lets all know that he has arrived at some conclusions. Moreover, being described from the point of view of an awestruck “lesser being” has the same effect of alleviating him to the status of a mysterious, towering personality, much like what happens when we look at Holmes through the lens of Watson.

Cuff makes his deductions based purely on the reliance of his hawk-eyesight, by perceiving what would otherwise have gone unnoticed—a smudge on the newly painted door of Rachel Verinder’s room. Foreshadowing Holmes’ claim that his method is “founded upon the observation of trifles,”⁶³ Cuff declares, “In all my experience along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world, I have never met with such a thing as a trifle yet.”⁶⁴ From this smudge, he goes on to find out that the paint takes about twelve hours to dry, deduces, as a result, the time the smudge

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Boscombe Valley Mystery,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

⁶⁴ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*.

must have been made, and demands to see the laundry lists, claiming that the garment with the paint smudge would reveal the jewel thief. However, after a spurt of detective activity, where he not only quite literally airs the family's dirty laundry he faces significant setbacks when some of the major players refuse to submit themselves to interrogations. In the face of this dearth of confessional information, Cuff bases his final accusations on Rachel Verinder's non-cooperation and Rosanna Spearman, the young housemaid's attempt at hiding the stained nightgown (and her past record as a petty criminal), accusing the former of having stolen her own diamond in order to pawn it off to make money and the latter of having been an accomplice to this crime.

However, as the novel ultimately reveals, Rachel and Rosanna were both acting to protect Franklin Blake and Cuff is conclusively proved to have been wrong. While he is technically correct in pointing out that the person who has the stained night gown is the one who removed the diamond from Rachel Verinder's room—for indeed, it was Franklin Blake who had in a drug addled stupor taken the diamond—Cuff is never quite able to assign motive to action. He sees external signs and clues and derives meanings from them but is crucially unable to see into people's minds and gauge their feelings and desires accurately. This leads him to be unaware of why Rosanna Spearman may have attempted to hide a nightgown that was neither hers' nor her mistress' (she was in love with the charming Mr Blake) and this also keeps him from gauging why Rachel Verinder may refuse to confide in him and defend herself even when accused with the theft (she was in love with the charming Mr Blake). In fact, Rachel Verinder and Rosanna Spearman's silences—and especially Rachel's—becomes a formidable challenge to Cuff and also a major concern of the novel. Again, much like Bucket, Cuff, exhibits his skill of “sight,” but seems to lack “insight,” that which would allow him to know how to draw out what remains

within, hidden, undeclared and undisclosed. He, too, does not have sufficient mastery over his subjects' *minds*.

In fact, the inability to not just keep watch and find out information but rather get people to voluntarily divulge secret information separates Bucket and Cuff from Holmes. Indeed, the two of them are unable to break silences; much as they can *see* everything, they cannot get everyone to *speak*, particularly women, and women of a certain class. At the heart of both *Bleak House* and *The Moonstone* lies the problem of female silences and female secrets. Lady Dedlock's past which she will not speak about and that she has carefully obscured is the central problem that Bucket is hired to investigate and that remains a chief concern even after Tulkinghorn's murder, given that she then becomes a chief suspect. Similarly, in *The Moonstone*, Rachel Verinder's (among other women's) unwillingness to speak to Cuff and in fact, her decision to completely shut herself off divulging absolutely nothing to anybody becomes a major concern in the text up until the point she is confronted by Franklin Blake much later in the novel. What she knows and why she will not speak is something that entirely derails Cuff and in fact, leads him to insinuate that there may be an illicit, illegitimate reason Rachel Verinder is keeping silent about what he is convinced is her part in the crime. It is this accusation of Rachel Verinder, this insinuation that seals Cuff's fate, and he not only loses the trust and admiration of Betteredge and Franklin Blake but is summarily dismissed from the case by Lady Verinder, Rachel's mother. The secrets of women paradoxically become something that must be revealed yet protected. On one hand, Lady Dedlock's past and Rachel's reasons behind her mysterious attitudes looms large over the narrative and the plot pushes towards unravelling them for the sake of closure and illumination. On the other hand, there is a concerted worry over *who* this secret is revealed to, about keeping the secrets in the family, as it were, about avoiding scandals and

generally “protecting” a woman’s “need” for modesty and secrecy. It is Bucket’s inability to project himself as a “safe,” reliable, and discrete source of authority before it was too late that is at least partly responsible for his failure, while Cuff’s almost blatant disregard for such concerns earns him a much more unceremonious exit. Of course, class and social rank also deeply affect the way these characters are seen and it is clear that as far these texts are concerned, someone from the working classes could not be allowed to rise to the rank of confessor.

As D.A Miller aptly points out in his analysis of Bucket and Cuff, the chief reason they fail is that they appear more as threats than providers of security to the upper class Victorian household.⁶⁵ What these proto-detective texts called out for, then, was a figure who could control both the threats presented by the fast emerging urban landscape as well as those of the lord and ladies of the Victorian mansions. While it was important to find a figure who could establish mastery over the teeming throngs “out there,” there was equally a need for someone who could guarantee discretion and individual attention to the particular needs of a household and their privacy. This figure had to be one that could straddle both the private and public domains expertly enough that they not only could navigate the public but also keep it at bay from the private, rather than causing chaos and havoc every time they stepped across boundaries separating the two.

Particularly in *Moonstone*, as Miller points out, the novel *wants* the detective to be dismissed for his very presence connotes a possibility of guilt and the crime is ultimately solved from *within* the society in which it occurs, that is, without the intrusive presence of an outside detective. Miller demonstrates how, “Cuff’s failure and departure was precisely what the

⁶⁵ See Miller’s discussion of *Bleak House* in “Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and Bleak House,” and of *The Moonstone* in “From *roman policier* to *roman police*: Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*” both in *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). 58-106 and 33-57, respectively.

novelistic community *has wished for* because the detective is perceived as an alien, disruptive force in the community, just as crime is.”⁶⁶ Indeed, it is interesting to note that after Cuff’s exit from the novel the narrative responsibility is distributed among the main characters, as Franklin Blake decides that each person will provide a detailed, first-person, written account of their memories and experiences surrounding the events on the night of the theft. It is at least partly by piecing together the information gleaned from all these accounts that the text provides the complete mystery of the disappearance of the diamond. Thus, the novel is effectively solved by a series of confessionals made by a number of vital characters. And although Inspector Cuff makes a return in the climactic stages, providing some vital information that leads to the apprehension of the criminal, he, like Bucket, fails to independently provide the desired conclusion. In this respect, Bucket and Cuff, for all their super heroic powers, and in spite of the way both their characters are generously built up, may seem to be more akin to the competent yet bungling police officers that would later appear as often less than reliable assistants to the much more able and astute detective.

The Detective and the Police

However, the police and the detective were not in opposition, as is often believed. Indeed, Bucket and Cuff only show that the detective, if anything, came out of the police. Indeed, in the very first Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, we hear Holmes praise Gregson and Lestrade: “Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders...he and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot,” but rues that, “They are both quick and energetic, but conventional—shockingly so.”⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, in “Omnes Et Singulatim,” points out that “what 17th and 18th century authors

⁶⁶ D.A. Miller, “From *roman policier* to *roman police*: Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*,” *The Novel and the Police*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 37.

⁶⁷ Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*.

understood by police...is a governmental technology peculiar to the state—domains, techniques, targets where the state intervenes” and goes on to say that “The police include everything. But from a very particular point of view.”⁶⁸ In Foucauldian terms then, if the Newgate stories reflect the punitive, violent forms of punishment as ways of disciplining deviance, then the police represent a gradual emergence from that towards more subtle technologies of control, a subtle technology of control that would be perfected by the detective.

The detective aided the kind of control and power that the police were aiming at by broadening this particular point of view, by bringing the mind of the criminal within the list of things that the state was seeking to control and have knowledge of. What the detective represented was a way of introducing a purported knowledge of human psychology into criminal investigations, something the judiciary was initially reluctant to acknowledge. Indeed, while Holmes is a “private detective” in a vast number of his stories he is in fact acting as a consultant for the police. In his very first meeting with Watson in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), we hear Holmes declaring, “I’m a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is. Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent. They lay all the evidence before me, and I am generally able, by the help of my knowledge of the history of crime, to set them straight ... Lestrade is a well-known detective. He got himself into a fog recently over a forgery case, and that was what brought him here;”⁶⁹ Sure enough, later on in the story Gregson writes to Holmes about a case saying, “I have left everything *in statu quo* until I hear from you. If you are unable to come I shall give you fuller details, and would esteem it a great kindness if

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, “Omnes Et Singulatim: Toward a Critique of Political Reason,” *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, delivered at Stanford University, October 10 and 16, 1979, 246, 248, accessed July 26, 2013, <http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.omnesEtSingulatim.en.html>.

⁶⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*.

you would favour me with your opinion.”⁷⁰ “The Adventure of The Cardboard Box,”⁷¹ “The Noble Bachelor,”⁷² and “The Dancing Men,”⁷³ are just a few of the many stories where the police either actively seek out Holmes or forwards clients to his doorstep despite a constant purported rivalry between them.

However, though indebted to and definitely an aide to the police, the detective’s success lies in his distinctiveness from it. As such, the detective came to embody a knowledge-power system entirely more subtle and complex than the police force and the judiciary. The limits of the judiciary are pointed by Foucault in “About the Concept of the Dangerous Individual.”

Neither the “criminality” of an individual nor the index of his dangerousness, neither his potential or future behaviour nor the protection of society at large from these possible perils—none of these are or can be juridical notions in the classical sense of the term. They can be made to function in a rational way only within a technical knowledge-system, a knowledge-system capable of characterising a criminal individual in himself and, in a sense, beneath his acts; a knowledge-system able to measure the index of danger present in an individual; a knowledge-system that might establish the protection necessary in the face of such a danger. Hence the idea that crime ought to be the responsibility not of judges but of experts in psychiatry, criminology, psychology, and so on.⁷⁴

In fact, the juxtaposition of the short-sighted policeman who fails to see anything beyond the facts, always makes the wrong conclusions, arrests the wrong person and the detective with her/his far subtler insight into the workings of the human mind, may be attributed to the tussle between the judiciary and psychiatry in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

Foucault explains how the public prosecutors—who, in detective fiction may well be the state appointed police officers— “obstinately referred to the law...but no matter how hard they tried,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Cardboard Box,” *His Last Bow* (Project Gutenberg, 2008), accessed on August 13, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2344/2344-h/2344-h.htm>.

⁷² Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Noble Bachelor,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

⁷³ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Dancing Men,” *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, “About the Concept of the Dangerous Individual in 19th Century Legal Psychiatry,” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 1 (1978):13-14, trans. Alain Baudot and Jane Couchman, accessed July 26, 2013, http://schwarzemilch.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/foucault_dangerous_individual.pdf.

they could not avoid the question of motivation, for they knew very well that from now on, in practice, the judges would link punishment, at least in part, to the determination of motives....All the ingredients prove that in order for the punitive mechanism to work, the reality of an offense and a person to whom it can be attributed are not sufficient: the motive must also be established, that is, a psychologically intelligible link between the act and the author.”⁷⁵ What the detective provides, thus, by making the mind of the criminal, the client, and the suspect so important in the solving of a case, that is, by not only figuring out *how* the crime was committed and *by whom*, but also, and perhaps, most importantly, *why* it was committed, is “the integration of the act into the global behaviour of the subject that had become so important in the new kinds of legal structures of control and power that were forming in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe and America alike.”⁷⁶ Once “motive” becomes a crucial part of criminal investigations, the limits of the police and legal forces became more apparent—limits that would be compensated for by the literary private detective. Moreover, as I shall discuss later, the detective provides an opportunity for flexibility, discretion, reservation of judgement as and when required. And paradoxically, precisely by appearing to be a more lenient, less rigid version of legal and policing forces, the detective can execute their goals in a more effective way.

Population, Pastoral Power, and the City

Both the police and the detective in their own ways were, to a certain extent, answers to what was a problem of population. If one can trace the changes in the development of the crime story from the Newgate to the detective story back to changes in the governing systems, then these changes were also in large parts a response to a muted concern with the problem of dealing effectively with the public and the private—concerns that are already visible in *Bleak House* and

⁷⁵ Ibid, 9-10.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The Moonstone—especially since the public space was going through incredibly rapid changes. Arguably, this “problem of population” is evidenced in detective fiction by the increase in prominence of the city as a character in its own right. The 19th century saw the population in Victorian London increasing from about one million in the 1800s to almost six million just a century later.⁷⁷ The industrial revolution not only led to great economic expansion and the rapid development of the city, with new buildings, bridges, factories, etc burgeoning up, it also brought in an unprecedented number of people into the fast changing urban spaces. This, in turn, gave rise to the extremely wealthy and the extremely poor living in extremely close proximity creating new sets of fears among the upper classes regarding private property. Moreover, the early 19th century saw not only the establishment of the railways, but also the construction of the new buildings for the Houses of Parliament and the Big Ben. The Great Exhibition (1851) as well as the establishment of the Science Museum along with the Victoria and Albert Museums was during this time. Indeed, we have seen earlier in Dickens’ piece on Inspector Field how the museums put England’s colonial loot on display for all to behold and admire. In other words, London during the early 19th century became both the site of England’s empirical acquisitions, symbol of progress in science and technology as well as a location of wretched living conditions, crippling poverty, and a source of simultaneous pride and anxiety for the middle and upper classes.⁷⁸

In fact, it is in response to the problems presented by the burgeoning population that confession begins to become an increasingly important aspect of governance. In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* Foucault describes how a “continuous incitement to discourse and to

⁷⁷ “Victorian London,” *Britain Express*, accessed July 29, 2013, <http://www.britainexpress.com/London/victorian-london.htm>.

⁷⁸ See Liza Picard, *Victorian London: The Life of a City 1840-1870*, (London: Orion Books, Ltd, 2006).

truth”⁷⁹ emerged concurrently with an ever-expanding array of confessional techniques beyond those codified by the Christian church, and these “helped to give the confession a central role in the order of civil and religious powers.”⁸⁰ With the “evolution of the Catholic pastoral ... little by little, the nakedness of the questions formulated by the confession manuals of the Middle Ages... was veiled. ... Discretion was advised, with increased emphasis.... But while the language may have been refined, the scope of the confession... continually increased.”⁸¹ Confessional practices gradually crossed church boundaries and became widely dispersed in all sorts of secular, everyday practices. With religion decreasing in significance, confession began to permeate all other aspects of modern life from pedagogy to policing, psychiatry, medicine, and labour relationships, with each employing the confession as a central strategy to the working of power. The practice of confession put in place a system whereby subjects are encouraged to *voluntarily* seek out an authority figure backed by institutionalised knowledge or skill to divulge to them all that dare not be said or thought. While church practices of confession promised salvation of the soul in the next life, secular acts of confession supposedly ensured salvation in this life through taking care of a person’s mental and physical health and well-being. And this is how confession links back to the problems of surveillance, population, and the city. According to Foucault,

One of the great innovations in the techniques of power in the eighteenth century was the emergence of “population” as an economic and political problem: population as manpower or labor capacity, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded. Governments perceived that they were dealing simply with subjects, or even with a “people,” but with a “population,” with its specific phenomena and its peculiar variables: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, patterns of diet and habitation. All these variables were situated at

⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, 56

⁸⁰ Ibid, 58

⁸¹ Ibid, 18.

the point where the characteristic movements of life and the specific effects of institution intersected.⁸²

Foucault explains that the inducement to speak, particularly and especially about sex was increasingly important to manage the population on which England's economic prosperity was dependent. (In this respect, it is not surprising that it is constantly women and women's lives that receive stronger impetus and coercion to confess to the right authority.) And indeed, the detective became one of the many practitioners of this inducement to speak.

The Detective, Interrupted

Indeed, in the Holmes stories we notice that unlike in *The Moonstone* and *Bleak House* the services of the detectives are sought out rather than imposed from without. The structure of the typical Holmes story—where all of Holmes' intrusive detective work is preceded with the relatively peaceful, domestic, everyday setting of the 221B Baker Street apartment, complete with harrowed landlady and housekeeper—does a lot towards making Holmes' subsequent nosiness seem less invasive. After all, in story after story, it is Holmes' home that is first intruded upon by clients, which makes the subsequent invasive activities of Holmes seem specifically requested, called for, and desired. Unlike Cuff and Bucket, who break into the domestic space, often uninvited, or are reluctantly summoned as a last resort, Doyle has his detective's personal space broken *into*, at the beginning of almost every story. By making the apartment of 221B Baker Street the default preliminary safe space of the stories, regardless of the eccentricities of one of its tenants, by having strangers and outsiders burst into this space, breaking a quiet evening chat, or a leisurely weekend breakfast between two intimate friends, Doyle actually

⁸² Ibid, 25.

manages to make all of Holmes' subsequent infiltrations seem less obtrusive and normal, and even desirable. Consider the opening of "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist":

On referring to my notebook for the year 1895, I find that it was upon Saturday, the 23rd of April, that we first heard of Miss Violet Smith. Her visit was, I remember, extremely unwelcome to Holmes, for he was immersed at the moment in a very abstruse and complicated problem concerning the peculiar persecution to which John Vincent Harden, the well known tobacco millionaire, had been subjected. My friend, who loved above all things precision and concentration of thought, resented anything which distracted his attention from the matter in hand. And yet, without a harshness which was foreign to his nature, it was impossible to refuse to listen to the story of the young and beautiful woman, tall, graceful, and queenly, who presented herself at Baker Street late in the evening, and implored his assistance and advice. It was vain to urge that his time was already fully occupied, for the young lady had come with the determination to tell her story, and it was evident that nothing short of force could get her out of the room until she had done so. With a resigned air and a somewhat weary smile, Holmes begged the beautiful intruder to take a seat, and to inform us what it was that was troubling her.⁸³

Here, it is almost as if, Holmes has no option *but* to yield to his client's urgent need. Similarly, notice how the client is introduced in "The Adventure of the Five Orange Pips":

It was in the latter days of September, and the equinoctial gales had set in with exceptional violence. All day the wind had screamed and the rain had beaten against the windows, so that even here in the heart of great, hand-made London we were forced to raise our minds for the instant from the routine of life and to recognise the presence of those great elemental forces which shriek at mankind through the bars of his civilisation, like untamed beasts in a cage. As evening drew in, the storm grew higher and louder, and the wind cried and sobbed like a child in the chimney. Sherlock Holmes sat moodily at one side of the fireplace cross-indexing his records of crime, while I at the other was deep in one of Clark Russell's fine sea-stories until the howl of the gale from without seemed to blend with the text, and the splash of the rain to lengthen out into the long swash of the sea waves. My wife was on a visit to her mother's, and for a few days I was a dweller once more in my old quarters at Baker Street.

"Why," said I, glancing up at my companion, "that was surely the bell. Who could come to-night? Some friend of yours, perhaps?"

"Except yourself I have none," he answered. "I do not encourage visitors."

"A client, then?"

"If so, it is a serious case. Nothing less would bring a man out on such a day and at such an hour. But I take it that it is more likely to be some crony of the landlady's."

⁸³ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist," *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

Sherlock Holmes was wrong in his conjecture, however, for there came a step in the passage and a tapping at the door. He stretched out his long arm to turn the lamp away from himself and towards the vacant chair upon which a newcomer must sit.

“Come in!” said he.

The man who entered was young, some two-and-twenty at the outside, well-groomed and trimly clad, with something of refinement and delicacy in his bearing. The streaming umbrella which he held in his hand, and his long shining waterproof told of the fierce weather through which he had come. He looked about him anxiously in the glare of the lamp, and I could see that his face was pale and his eyes heavy, like those of a man who is weighed down with some great anxiety.⁸⁴

221B Baker Street is here a peaceful haven, safe from the travails of the weather outside, where Holmes and Watson cosily spend yet another evening in a laid back leisurely companionship.

The arrival of a client as an intrusion upon the free time of Holmes and Watson is once again emphasized. Here, like in many other instances, this initial intrusion by the client into Holmes’ chambers makes it seem as if Holmes is being imposed upon. When the diamond goes missing from the Verinder household, Lady Verinder reluctantly declares that she “has no choice but to”⁸⁵ invite Inspector Cuff. Bucket is appointed by an explicit outsider. However, with Holmes’ assurance at the utmost discretion, people voluntarily come to him from all walks of life revealing past marriages, children borne out of wedlock, past lives as criminals, et al. Just as in confession a pastor’s probing questions would seem less inappropriate, since after all, one has of his or her own volition sought out the priest expressing a desire to confess, or, a doctor’s or psychiatrist’s interrogation would be seemingly routine, here too, Holmes clients are presented as people helpless without his guidance, where Holmes is providing a much needed public service, thereby mitigating its intrusive nature.

THE PASTORAL DETECTIVE

⁸⁴ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Five Orange Pips,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

⁸⁵ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*.

According to Foucault “confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power [and has become] one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth”⁸⁶ and that these individualising power finds its modern day expression in pastoral power, in other words, ecclesiastical powers which have continue to exist in secular forms. This kind of power not only individualises, that is, moulds every person into behavioural and thought patterns that fits the purposes of the authority wielding the power, but also totalises, that is, mould every individual, simultaneously, into a unified body. This is the tricky “double bind” that this kind of power uses over individuals to control and mould their consciences and make them obedient citizens. It is thus a power that is supported and backed by the state and various state apparatuses and state run institutions, but normalised enough to be executed by other social institutions as well.

In this chapter, my aim is primarily to demonstrate that the rise of Sherlock Holmes is concurrent with the rise of this kind power and as such Sherlock Holmes is primarily a literary agent of pastoral power. Holmes is a complex, ambiguous figure and much has been written on the slippery nature of his morals and ideologies, with considerable debate over where his loyalties lie regarding state authority—whether Holmes represents a conservative form of discipline and morality, or whether he is an anarchic agent of justice that lies outside the norms of social mores and state prescribed legal binds. I would like contribute to this conversation on Holmes in particular and detective fiction in general by arguing that our understanding of Holmes and the (canonical, mostly white, male) detective will be fundamentally incomplete if we ignore the confessional and pastoral disciplinary social forces that he came out of.

⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*. 58.

In this next section, I shall analyse Holmes as an embodiment of pastoral power and argue that his seeming detachment from the state or the police force, his positing himself as one of the many other professional service providers of the modern city—doctor, lawyer, psychiatrist, etc.,—helped him enforce a special kind of, more insidious disciplinary power that Cuff and Bucket, with their professional obligations to the state and the law, and an over reliance on outward actions, could not. I would like to show how the Holmes stories not only sometimes operate as confessionals—with some stories being a mere ruse to describe a confessional account of a client’s/criminal’s life, but that confession is also something that lies at the heart of Holmes’ powers as a detective, being both Holmes relies on, and that towards which the stories aspire.

Studying the Holmes stories through the prism of confession and pastoral power helps us not only place him historically and understand his significance vis-a vis the city and the empire, and demonstrate the subtlety and complexity of the power relationships represented by the detective and his “others,” but it also makes us question the nature of the “truth” that the detective fiction so fetishistically aspires to. As I will argue in the chapters to come, detective fiction is heavily dependent on the confessional mode to assert its truths be it from the point of view of the confessor administering the confessions, or from that of the point of view of the confessor making the confession.

In “Subject and Power” Foucault describes pastoral power thus: (1) It is a form of power “whose ultimate aim is to assure... salvation”; (2) it is a power “that is prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock”; (3) “It is a form of power that looks after not just the whole community but each individual in particular”; and (4) it is a power that “cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without

making them reveal their innermost secrets.”⁸⁷ In the next section I shall examine Holmes against these four paradigms and see to what extent Holmes can be called as an agent of pastoral power.

Detective as Confessor

Pastoral power is a power that “cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets”⁸⁸ says Foucault, and as I argue, what makes the first truly successful detectives successful, and which sets them apart from their almost-successful-but-not-quite predecessors, is precisely their purported knowledge of the workings of people’s minds, and their ability to make people speak in a most revealing manner. This knowledge of the mind’s inner thoughts or that which is unrevealed or difficult to articulate is directly dependant on being able to induce confessions.

The criminal, in most detective stories, has an absent presence. Unlike the Newgate tales, which depend on long drawn out descriptions of the acts of criminality, in the Holmes stories, and indeed in the subsequent “Golden Age” stories, what is given to us is just the *result* of a criminal act—usually a dead body, or a missing person, object, stress due to blackmail, etc. We usually do not know who the criminal is, but s/he becomes the most important element in the stories by virtue of being the necessary “other” that the detective needs to combat. By their very absence, the criminal challenges the detective to engage with their mind, to reconstruct what they might have thought, what motives they could possibly have had, that led them to commit the crime. The plot of the detective story might well be a duel between the wits of the detective and the absent presence of the criminal.

⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (Summer, 1982):783, accessed July 29, 2013, www.jstor.org.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

This change in the detective story was reflective of a change in the early-19th century penitentiary system where there was a distinct shift, “from crime, to the criminal.”⁸⁹ In “Concept of the Dangerous Individual,” Foucault says, “legal justice today has at least as much to do with criminals as with crimes,” and goes on to explain, “Though for a long time the criminal had been no more than a person to whom a crime could be attributed, who could therefore be punished, today the crime tends to be no more than the event that signals the existence of a dangerous element...in the social body.”⁹⁰ This is exactly true for the structure of the typical detective story, where the crime must be committed in the first few pages only so that the detective can step in to solve it through his investigative process and rid society from the threat posed by the mysterious and unknown criminal. The story usually focuses solely on the process of finding out the criminal, which in the best of stories, is done by constructing an image of what kind of person the criminal could be—what her/his motives were, what were her/his actions like leading up to and following the crime, etc. The criminal mind, therefore, is now more important than ever.

Indeed, Sherlock Holmes sees the same clues as Watson or Lestrade does. But he succeeds over them because he can *think* like a criminal, that is, he understands the *mind* of a criminal, in particular, and of human beings in general. “Motive,” then, is now a key element in the detective story and this need to be able to read the mind of the criminal, to understand not just the crimes but the mental conditions that led to the crime, is denotative of what Foucault describes as an increasing “psychologisation” of crimes in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Foucault notes this change in dealing with crime and criminality, saying, “The terrifying example of torture or exile or banishment could no longer suffice in a society in

⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, “About the Concept of the Dangerous Individual in 19th Century Legal Psychiatry,” 13.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 2.

which exercise of power implied a reasoned technology applied to individuals. The form of punishments to which all of the late-eighteenth-century reformers and all the nineteenth-century legislators rallied...implies that punishment bears on the criminal himself rather than on the crime, that is, *on what makes him a criminal, on his reasons, his motives, his inner will, his tendencies, his instincts*” [emphasis mine].⁹¹ This is where a shift from a focus on “sight” to one on “insight” kicks in, with the detective and other practitioners of pastoral power now having to hone their intrusive skills to deal with the interiorities and depths of the human self.

In *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* Foucault provides us with a definition of confession, saying, it is, “a ritual discourse where the subject who speaks corresponds with the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual which unfolds in a relation of power, since one doesn’t confess without the presence, at least the virtual presence, of a partner who is simply an interlocutor but an agency that requires confession, imposes it, weighs it, and intervenes to judge, punish, pardon, console, reconcile.”⁹² Following his elaborations on his definition of confession in *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, we may also deduce that “confession is not to be narrowly defined as those speech-acts avowing wrong-doings. Rather, confessions as understood here are statements which claim to explain the being of the subject who is speaking...and which are told despite claims of repression, or with difficulty and shame. As such, even a declaration that, far from having done wrong oneself, one has been wronged—for instance, that one has been abused by a family member—or that one is in love, can be called a confession if the subject find it hard to say, looks inside herself to say it, and is changed by what she says.”⁹³ This definition of confession is useful in understanding the nature of the detective. This connection between

⁹¹ Ibid, 9.

⁹² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, 61-62.

⁹³ Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the Confessing Animal*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 8.

confession and the ability read minds, is most unambiguously stated by none other than the detective priest, G.K Chesterton's Father Brown, who, in his very first appearance in "The Blue Cross," when asked by his loyal reformed-criminal sidekick Flambeau, how he knew of all sorts of criminal "horrors," responds, "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil?"⁹⁴ However, as Foucault says, power is most effective there where it is invisible. Thus, for the purposes of this chapter, it would not make much sense to demonstrate my point of the detective as a confession inducing secular pastor by focusing on Chesterton's priest turned detective. We return, therefore, to Holmes.

Confession and the Detective

The all admitting confession of the criminal is obviously an important part of any typical detective story. Coming usually at the climactic stages of the story, it, on the one hand removes all doubt of the accused's guilt from the reader's mind, absolves all of the other suspects of their guilt, and more importantly, validates the investigations and deductions of the detective. However, while this confessor-confessant dynamic is rather obvious between the detective and the criminal, this same relationship is established by the detective, and more than anyone else by Holmes, with almost each and every character in the story. While Sherlock Holmes would often put criminals in such positions that they would not have any choice but to confess, the confessions that are by far more important in the Holmes canon takes place usually *before* Holmes has even set foot outside his Baker Street apartment. For, Holmes, and indeed generations and detective after him brings not just criminals to confess, but even *victims* of crimes, that is, his clients. In story after story, set in uptight Victorian England, no less, members

⁹⁴ G. K Chesterton, "The Blue Cross," *The Innocence of Father Brown* (Project Gutenberg, 2008), accessed August 12, 2013, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/204/204-h/204-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.

from all walks of respectable society turn up at Holmes' doorsteps to disclose their own or their family's most embarrassing or scandalous secrets. To provide just a few of innumerable examples, in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," Helen Stoner, a young, unmarried woman visits the living quarters of Holmes, a bachelor, to seek his help and Holmes has no qualms to ask her to "lay before [him] everything" and assures her that he is "all attention" which precipitates Helen's "confessions" about her family which include tales of illicit relationships, secret marriages and possible murders.⁹⁵ In the "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor," it is Alexander Holder of the banking firm of Holder & Stevenson of Threadneedle Street who visits Holmes seeking his help regarding a runaway bride.⁹⁶ In "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet," Holmes's "confessant" is no less than Alexander Holder, senior partner of the second largest private banking concern in the City of London. He comes and freely narrates to Holmes accounts of his "public disgrace" and "private affliction" upon Holmes's command, "let me have a clear account of who you are and what it is that has befallen you."⁹⁷ In story after story people from all walks of life arrive at Holmes's doorsteps seeking deliverance from a problem, often a result of their own or a member of their family's recent or past errors and indiscretions, and are immediately subjected to session of private confession, the only witness being Watson.

These initial scenes are such a regular, almost mundane part of the Holmes stories that it hardly ever attracts any scholarly attraction. But it is from these accounts that are laid before him that Holmes unearths stories, teases out connections, maps out histories that even the speakers did not know about themselves. As Foucault points out, the secularisation of confession leads to a change where confession transforms from being simply a disclosure of what the

⁹⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

⁹⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor," *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes*.

⁹⁷ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet," *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

confessant knew and wanted to keep hidden to something that “was hidden from himself, being incapable of coming to light.”⁹⁸ Seeing as the entire project of detective fiction is to bring things to light, to make overt what was covert, to establish a certain “truth,” it is not surprising, that the ability to manage confessions should be part of the mandatory skill sets of the investigator.

The confession scenes that follow the usually dramatic entrances of a new, troubled client are not simply important from the narrative point of view because they present the elementary aspects of the case—who the client is, what the problem is, what is the nature of help being sought etc. Rather, more than just setting the story up, these scenes are also sites of creation, a certain something happens here beyond the mere narration of one’s troubles, certain power relationships are created, certain subjectivities, formed, certain positions assumed.

One could suppose that it is the agent of the narrative, the speaker, who controls her/his account of things. Holmes, after all, does not even always ask questions, sometimes preferring to listen quietly. However, it is here that Holmes establishes himself as a figure of authority, as a wielder of a certain kind of power that will see him through the rest of the narrative, that will establish his position of power in relation to the other characters. Indeed, even in these scenes where Holmes listens in relative silence, “the confessional subject may speak a narrative...but cannot authorise its meaning. Instead, the confession emanates from the body, from the unconscious, and, most significantly, from the confessor who is entitled to define the speaker of the confession.”⁹⁹ And indeed, so much of Holmes’s aura depends on his ability to make not just people, but even objects, the very material being of things, speak. Dust on a the brim of a hat, teeth marks on a walking stick, the pattern of mud splatters on boots—all seem to open up to

⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, 66.

⁹⁹ Susan David Bernstein, “Confession and Gender: A Process of Power,” *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture*, 17.

him, allowing him to define his confessant, sometimes even before s/he has uttered a word. And once his confessants do lay before him all the details that he demands, it is he, not them, who can separate the irrelevant from the important, the incidental from the significant and breathe stories, histories, pasts, and connections into seemingly unrelated objects, incidents, people. It is Holmes who creates the stories of his confessants, and in a way, it is he, who almost recreates them, through his radical reinterpretation and rearrangement of the incidents, objects, and events of their lives.

And while Holmes, like other subsequent sleuths, devices many ways of drawing confessions out of criminals, generally in the climactic sections of the story, it is here, right at the very beginning of the adventures to follow that Holmes begins to exercise a power and a mastery over the narrative. It does not matter that these “confessions” are voluntarily given. In fact, it is the seeming freeness of these willingly provided confessions that, if anything, makes Holmes’ power seem so absolute—more so than any other detective that was to follow, or that came before, perhaps. After all, supremacy, domination, or control, “is complete when it requires no visible effort to reinforce itself.”¹⁰⁰ For all of Holmes’ energetic activity later on, it is in these early moments of silence at the beginning of each story, where he sits patiently listening to his clients speak, that Holmes is at his pastoral best and exemplifies how, often, “the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks...but in the one who listens and says nothing.”¹⁰¹

This almost ritualistic processes in these introductions to the adventures to follow—Holmes and Watson sitting in their apartments, chatting over breakfast, or after dinner, etc, and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 18.

¹⁰¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, 62.

an interruptive entrance by a client seeking help or advice with matters ranging from love and marriage to job security and money or to theft and murder, and Holmes promptly subjecting the client to a series of questions, urging them again and again to be very precise and accurate in their telling of their tale and to be careful to not leave out any detail, no matter how trivial it may seem to them—becomes sometimes almost a rite of passage, a necessary fee in return for Holmes' services. In "The Resident Patient" Holmes and Watson actually return from a client's house, refusing help to the distraught old man because Holmes gauges that he is not being completely honest with him. Consider the following exchange between Holmes and Mr Blessington:

"Good-evening, Mr. Holmes," said he. "I am sure I am very much obliged to you for coming round. No one ever needed your advice more than I do. I suppose that Dr. Trevelyan has told you of this most unwarrantable intrusion into my rooms."

"Quite so," said Holmes. "Who are these two men Mr. Blessington, and why do they wish to molest you?"

"Well, well," said the resident patient, in a nervous fashion, "of course it is hard to say that. You can hardly expect me to answer that, Mr. Holmes."

"Do you mean that you don't know?"

...

"You see that," said he, pointing to a big black box at the end of his bed. "I have never been a very rich man, Mr. Holmes—never made but one investment in my life, as Dr. Trevelyan would tell you. But I don't believe in bankers. I would never trust a banker, Mr. Holmes. Between ourselves, what little I have is in that box, so you can understand what it means to me when unknown people force themselves into my rooms."

Holmes looked at Blessington in his questioning way and shook his head.

"I cannot possibly advise you if you try to deceive me," said he.

"But I have told you everything."

Holmes turned on his heel with a gesture of disgust. "Good-night, Dr. Trevelyan," said he.

"And no advice for me?" cried Blessington, in a breaking voice.

“My advice to you, sir, is to speak the truth.”¹⁰²

Holmes’ outright refusal to help someone clearly in need seems even more surprising when Holmes reveals to Watson, on their way back, that he knows very well that Mr. Blessington, in fact, fears for his life. The man he just walked out on is at risk of being killed (and in indeed, the following day, he is found dead).

Similarly, in “The Problem of Thor Bridge,” Holmes abruptly terminates a meeting with his client, Mr. Neil Gibson, a rich American gold magnate who comes to Holmes seeking to exonerate his governess, Miss Dunbar, from the charge of the murder of his wife. As soon as Mr. Gibson comes in, he attempts to give Holmes an incentive to apply himself fully to the case: ““Let me say right here, Mr. Holmes,’ he began, ‘that money is nothing to me in this case. You can burn it if it’s any use in lighting you to the truth. This woman is innocent and this woman has to be cleared, and it’s up to you to do it. Name your figure!’”¹⁰³ Holmes, however, has no patience for this and quickly puts Gibson in his place indicating that he stop wasting his time and “get down to the facts.”¹⁰⁴ This is what follows:

“I think that you will find all the main ones in the press reports. I don’t know that I can add anything which will help you. But if there is anything you would wish more light upon — well, I am here to give it.”

“Well, there is just one point.”

“What is it?”

“What were the exact relations between you and Miss Dunbar?”

The Gold King gave a violent start and half rose from his chair. Then his massive calm came back to him. “I suppose you are within your rights — and maybe doing your duty — in asking such a question, Mr. Holmes.”

¹⁰² Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Resident Patient,” *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Project Gutenberg, 1997), accessed July 29, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/834/834-h/834-h.htm>.

¹⁰³ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Problem of Thor Bridge,” *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes* (Project Gutenberg Consortia Center, 2013), accessed July 29, 2013, <http://ebooks.gutenberg.us/WorldBookLibrary.com/cbhl.htm>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

“We will agree to suppose so,” said Holmes.

“Then I can assure you that our relations were entirely and always those of an employer towards a young lady whom he never conversed with, or ever saw, save when she was in the company of his children.”

Holmes rose from his chair.

“I am a rather busy man, Mr. Gibson,” said he, “and I have no time or taste for aimless conversations. I wish you good morning.”

Our visitor had risen also, and his great loose figure towered above Holmes. There was an angry gleam from under those bristling brows and a tinge of colour in the sallow cheeks.

“What the devil do you mean by this, Mr. Holmes? Do you dismiss my case?”

“Well, Mr. Gibson, at least I dismiss you. I should have thought my words were plain.”¹⁰⁵

Again, Holmes makes it clear; no confession, no help. Holmes does not soften his demand for full disclosure even when his clients are illustrious and powerful men. In the “The Adventure of the Second Stain” his clients are none other than “Lord Bellinger, twice Premier of Britain” and “the Right Honourable Trelawney Hope, Secretary for European Affairs, and the most rising statesman in the country”¹⁰⁶ who come seeking his help in retrieving a document of national importance. After subjecting them to his routine interrogation, Holmes insists:

“Now, sir, I must ask you more particularly what this document is, and why its disappearance should have such momentous consequences.”

The two statesmen exchanged a quick glance and the Premier’s shaggy eyebrows gathered in a frown.

“Mr. Holmes, the envelope is a long, thin one of pale blue colour. There is a seal of red wax stamped with a crouching lion. It is addressed in large, bold handwriting to——”

“I fear, sir,” said Holmes, “that, interesting and indeed essential as these details are, my inquiries must go more to the root of things. What WAS the letter?”

“That is a State secret of the utmost importance, and I fear that I cannot tell you, nor do I see that it is necessary. If by the aid of the powers which you are said to possess you can

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Second Stain,” *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

find such an envelope as I describe with its enclosure, you will have deserved well of your country, and earned any reward which it lies in our power to bestow.”

Sherlock Holmes rose with a smile.

“You are two of the most busy men in the country,” said he, “and in my own small way I have also a good many calls upon me. I regret exceedingly that I cannot help you in this matter, and any continuation of this interview would be a waste of time.”¹⁰⁷

Thus, in spite of trying their best to be evasive and discreet about state secrets, even the Premier of Britain and Secretary for European Affairs must ultimately give in to Holmes’ single minded inquiry and have no option but to reveal to Holmes exactly what the document is, further explaining that in the wrong hands it could cause war between England and another country.

Holmes correctly guesses this other country and reveals that he had a fairly good idea about what the document might have been even before he made them explicitly spell it out to him. His insistence on no secrecy is doubly interesting because later in the story Holmes refuses to disclose to the Premier the particulars about how *he* retrieved the letter, saying, “We also have our diplomatic secrets.”¹⁰⁸ Holmes induces confessions, but does not divulge information himself and safeguards the secrets he learns through these confessions he demands, using only what he needs for better management of the affairs he handles.

My point in providing these illustrations is to underline the importance Holmes places on these early meetings with his clients, and on their requirement to confess all. In most of these cases, it is obvious that Holmes already *knows* that which his client is not revealing and even *why* the client may have difficulty in articulating what he wants to hear. And thus, it is not merely on account of a paucity of sufficient information that Holmes refuses to help. For in all the above cases, Holmes, having correctly guessed the nature of that which is withheld could just as easily have gone on with his investigations. The stress here, thus, is on making the clients put

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

themselves in the position of a docile confessant in front of Holmes. Clearly, this ritual through which one must invoke Holmes' services, as it were, is not incidental. Confession is mandatory if one wants salvation from sins, deliverance from problems. And ever so often, confession is mandatory to reinscribe social and patriarchal subject positions.

In "The Adventure of the Second Stain," that has been just discussed above, Holmes figures out that Trelawney Hope, Secretary for European Affairs' wife is somehow involved in the loss of the document. While Trelawney Hope had kept the nature of documents a secret from his wife, (since they were after all, a matter of national importance, and therefore not to be shared with the female spouses) the said wife, Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope visits Holmes to inquire about the nature of these documents his husband had lost and leaves only after making Holmes promise that he would not tell her husband, Holmes's client, about her visit. Holmes, of course, true to form, refuses to divulge the secrets of another client but indicates that he would honor her wishes as well. It transpires that Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope was being blackmailed by one Eduardo Lucas over yet another document, specifically an "indiscreet letter" she had once written to a former lover. Eduardo, under threat of revealing this former relationship to her husband, had compelled her to steal the secret document from her husband and hand it over to him. Since then, however, through a convoluted sequence of events, Lady Hope had, through a bit of luck and a fair bit of courage and resourcefulness, already retrieved the dangerous document and presumably would either have returned it to her husband with a full disclosure, or simply put it back from where she had stolen it in the first place. Holmes figures it all out through a series of deductions and is relieved to realize that the document he sought had already returned home. "Come, friend Watson," he says, "You will be relieved to hear that there will be no war, that the Right Honourable Trelawney Hope will suffer no setback in his brilliant career,

that the indiscreet Sovereign will receive no punishment for his indiscretion, that the Prime Minister will have no European complication to deal with, and that with a little tact and management upon our part nobody will be a penny the worse for what might have been a very ugly incident.”¹⁰⁹ However, Holmes is not ready to leave matters at that. When Watson congratulates him for having solved the case, he responds that the “final act” of the story is yet to unfold. This final act is the all-important confession scene. What follows is a rather disturbing sequence where Holmes returns to Whitehall Terrace and inquires for Lady Hope and then essentially blackmails her into submitting a confession and the all-important document to him. When Holmes and Watson turn up at the residence of the European Secretary, Lady Hilda is quick to point out to Holmes how he is ignoring her express request to him for discretion and secrecy, and indeed, Holmes’ own promise to her of honouring her request. Her face, “pink with her indignation” she exclaims, upon seeing her unwelcome guests, “Mr. Holmes... This is surely most unfair and ungenerous upon your part. I desired, as I have explained, to keep my visit to you a secret, lest my husband should think that I was intruding into his affairs. And yet you compromise me by coming here and so showing that there are business relations between us.”¹¹⁰ Holmes responds by saying that, “he had no possible alternative” and pointing out that since after all, he had been commissioned to recover “this immensely important paper” he must do so, and bluntly asks Lady Hilda “to be kind enough to place it in [his] hands.”¹¹¹ It is worth looking at the scene that follows at length for only in a full reading of the scene is the abusive and forcible nature of Holmes’ demand for full disclosure and transference of power/knowledge fully apparent. Lady Hilda is visibly upset by the accusation:

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

The lady sprang to her feet, with the colour all dashed in an instant from her beautiful face. Her eyes glazed--she tottered--I thought that she would faint. Then with a grand effort she rallied from the shock, and a supreme astonishment and indignation chased every other expression from her features.

"You--you insult me, Mr. Holmes."

"Come, come, madam, it is useless. Give up the letter."

She darted to the bell.

"The butler shall show you out."

"Do not ring, Lady Hilda. If you do, then all my earnest efforts to avoid a scandal will be frustrated. Give up the letter and all will be set right. If you will work with me I can arrange everything. If you work against me I must expose you."

She stood grandly defiant, a queenly figure, her eyes fixed upon his as if she would read his very soul. Her hand was on the bell, but she had forborne to ring it.

"You are trying to frighten me. It is not a very manly thing, Mr. Holmes, to come here and browbeat a woman. You say that you know something. What is it that you know?"

"Pray sit down, madam. You will hurt yourself there if you fall. I will not speak until you sit down. Thank you."

"I give you five minutes, Mr. Holmes."

"One is enough, Lady Hilda. I know of your visit to Eduardo Lucas, of your giving him this document, of your ingenious return to the room last night, and of the manner in which you took the letter from the hiding-place under the carpet."

She stared at him with an ashen face and gulped twice before she could speak.

...

"Come, Lady Hilda. You have the letter. The matter may still be adjusted. I have no desire to bring trouble to you. My duty ends when I have returned the lost letter to your husband. Take my advice and be frank with me. It is your only chance."

Her courage was admirable. Even now she would not own defeat.

"I tell you again, Mr. Holmes, that you are under some absurd illusion."

Holmes rose from his chair.

"I am sorry for you, Lady Hilda. I have done my best for you. I can see that it is all in vain."

He rang the bell. The butler entered.

"Is Mr. Trelawney Hope at home?"

“He will be home, sir, at a quarter to one.”

Holmes glanced at his watch.

“Still a quarter of an hour,” said he. “Very good, I shall wait.”

The butler had hardly closed the door behind him when Lady Hilda was down on her knees at Holmes’s feet, her hands outstretched, her beautiful face upturned and wet with her tears.

“Oh, spare me, Mr. Holmes! Spare me!” she pleaded, in a frenzy of supplication. “For heaven’s sake, don’t tell him! I love him so! I would not bring one shadow on his life, and this I know would break his noble heart.”¹¹²

Once Lady Hilda is compelled to hand over the document, which Holmes places in the very box that it went missing from, Holmes continues to pressure Lady Hilda for all the details. It should be noted here that Holmes had already figured out that Lady Hilda was being blackmailed and that she had, having no other choice, stolen the document under pressure and handed it over to her blackmailer, and most importantly, *had already retrieved it*. The most essential information gained by Lady Hilda’s confession was the precise details about what she was being blackmailed about which was of no relevance to the case at hand, especially since the blackmailer was now dead, and the document back in safe hands. Thus the woman is made to articulate that which is difficult to, that is which is unspeakable.

Insisting that he is actually going out of his way to protect her secret (even though, as pointed out earlier by Lady Hilda, his very presence at her house, unannounced, puts her in jeopardy), Holmes indicates that as a return for this favour, in exchange for his benevolence as it were, it is only natural that the lady submit to him the intimate details of her past affairs:

“We have still ten minutes. I am going far to screen you, Lady Hilda. In return you will spend the time in telling me frankly the real meaning of this extraordinary affair.”

¹¹² Ibid.

“Mr. Holmes, I will tell you everything,” cried the lady. “Oh, Mr. Holmes, I would cut off my right hand before I gave him a moment of sorrow! There is no woman in all London who loves her husband as I do, and yet if he knew how I have acted--how I have been compelled to act--he would never forgive me. For his own honour stands so high that he could not forget or pardon a lapse in another. Help me, Mr. Holmes! My happiness, his happiness, our very lives are at stake!”¹¹³

We then get a harrowed confession from the unfortunate Lady Hilda, who falls to her knees and discloses everything about how she was blackmailed, how and why she had to steal the document, and then how she eventually recovered it after having discovered the gravity of her actions. As Foucault says, “when...not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body”¹¹⁴ and that is precisely what Holmes does here. His repeated assertions that he has “done [his] best for [her]” even though his efforts are proving to be “in vain” indicates a belief or at least a pretense in Holmes that the brutally violent way in which he snatches power and knowledge from her is somehow for her own good, for her own benefit, another example of his benevolence, his desire to help those who need it most, but there really is very little to support this theory. Now Holmes often comes up with less than straight forward methods to make criminals confess in order to get to the truth (In “The Dying Detective,” for instance, Holmes puts on an elaborate ruse and pretends to be dying in order to incite a confession from the criminal.¹¹⁵) However, in this case, Holmes is bearing down upon a *victim* of crime and in effect by threatening to reveal her secrets to her husband, essentially blackmailing her much like Eduardo, the villains of the piece had.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, 59.

¹¹⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Dying Detective,” *His Last Bow* (Project Gutenberg, 2008), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2347/2347-h/2347-h.htm>.

Holmes does attempt to provide a few reasons for such action. He indicates that since has been commissioned for the job of rescuing the letter, he should be allowed to do so (“I have been commissioned to recover this immensely important paper. I must therefore ask you, madam, to be kind enough to place it in my hands presumably;” “My duty ends when I have returned the lost letter to your husband.”¹¹⁶) Inability to do so would be damaging to his reputation. However, Holmes has on several occasions been more than happy to not claim credit for his role in the resolution of a case and stood by and let London police take all the praise, indicating, that as long as matters are put to rest, criminals apprehended and disasters averted, Holmes cares not if people or even his clients actually know his part in bringing things to a happy solution. Moreover, once Holmes is handed the document, he merely puts it back in the very place from where it had been lost, thus leading his client to believe that it had never been misplaced in the first place, and that in fact, he has not had to do any sleuthing at all. Holmes also hints that this is all for Lady Hilda’s benefit, as if only Holmes knows how to replace the letter in a manner that there would be no suspicion placed on her (“all my earnest efforts to avoid a scandal will be frustrated [if you do not give up the letter]. Give up the letter and all will be set right. If you will work with me I can arrange everything. If you work against me I must expose you.”¹¹⁷) The indication that Lady Hilda must turn the document over to Holmes since after all she does not have any plan of how to put it back in front of her husband without causing a scandal is outrageously unfair; after all, this is a woman who has *already* recovered this document of national importance from the resident of her blackmailer, and in order to do so, she has had to disguise herself, fool a police officer, break in to Eduardo’s home, locate the hiding place, and then escape without notice. Clearly, this is a woman of considerable mettle and ingenuity, and it

¹¹⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Second Stain,” *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

is not out of place to assume that after having come this far, she could have cleared up the matter by placing it in her husband's dispatch box—especially, since we find out that her husband has trusted her enough to leave a duplicate key in her care. It is from her that Holmes takes not just the letter but also the *key* with which to access the box in which he must put the it, thereby quite literally forcing the reins of control and access from the woman unto himself.

The only logical point of this “last act” of the story, then, seems not to ensure that the letter is safe and sound out of dangerous hands or an aversion of scandal, but for Holmes to exert complete mastery over all the minute details of the story and to discipline a woman who had dared to act of her own accord. The blackmailer and threat to British security had been murdered, the purloined letter recovered, and possibility of war averted. This “final act” then achieved nothing except hand Holmes the reigns of control from a subject who had one too many secrets, had exerted too much agency.

Holmes' power then comes not just from knowing people's secrets, but also from letting them know that he knows, by making them articulate it, in great detail, and in private, no matter how unnecessary to the actual solving of the case, or painful it may be. It is in scenes like these that the workings of pastoral power is at its most transparent. If the detective's motive is simply to provide a service that is selflessly geared towards protecting the interests of the nation and its subjects, ensuring that wrong doers do not go unpunished and that victims of crime are avenged, then one must question what precisely was achieved by this abusive confessional scene except making it a shaming tale for women who overstep their social, moral boundaries. The “truth” about Lady Hilda that Holmes creates then is that of a transgressive woman who must submit herself to male wisdom, knowledge, and authority, to attain salvation from past contraventions. Here the confession coincides with an explicit and literal transference of power and a violent

shaming not only because of her past pre-marital relations, but also for her self-sufficient venture outside of the domestic boundaries into the public sphere reserved for the likes her Right Honourable husband and Holmes, in order to independently retrieve what she had lost. Thus, even as Watson constantly remarks on Lady Hilda's "admirable" courage to mitigate some of Holmes violence subjugation of her and garner for her a degree of respectability, ultimately, the text had to quite literally bring her to her knees in front of the might of Holmes.

This kind of insistence, again, underlines the centrality of confessions in the Holmes canon. In fact, confessions from criminals and clients alike seem to flow freely when Holmes is around. In several of the Holmes stories, the criminals will often voluntarily or with little incitement launch into a detailed, all-clarifying confession of their crime, the situations that led to it, the specifics of its executions, the people they did it for, etc.

Of course, confession plays a functional role in the plot as well by providing readers with the sense of an ending, by tying up all the loose ends of the story. The entire thrust of the detective story is to get to the "truth" or at least *a* "truth" and a confession at the end validates the detective's intuitions and deductions. At the same time, it reinforces the power dynamics set up at the beginning of the story, when the clients come to the detective seeking help. The command the detective holds over events, objects, and people, his status as protector, is made precarious and under constant threat of being dissolved as soon as a presence of criminality is announced. The body in the carpet not only signals the need for the detective but also continues to mock him, challenge his command until the why, the who and how has been answered. The detective, for all his awe-inspiring abilities, is always under the threat of being undone as long as the criminal, the "truth," is not entirely in his grasp. The only two moments in the story when the detective represents an absolute, unchallenged power is at the very beginning, before a crime has

been announced, and the very end, when it has been solved. And the most important, most dramatic confession scenes are staged right at the very beginning and at the very end of the detective story, bookending the plot, as it were, signaling a shift and change in the power dynamics between the detective, the criminal, the client, and the world at large. In detective stories in general and in the Holmes stories in particular, confession, when uttered at the beginning of the story, signals the presence of guilt, whether in the speaker himself/herself or somewhere without. It calls on the powers of the detective, making his functions simultaneously more vital, yet at the same time posing a challenge to it. And it is confession again, extracted at the end of the story, that most satisfyingly announces the restoration of a state of innocence, of a deliverance from guilt/evil, and that most unequivocally justifies the powers of the detective and renews our faith in him.

The “Private” Detective

The emphasis on one’s internal life in pastoral power implies a certain individualised attention that keeps an eye on the public as well as the private. Pastoral power, apart from being reliant and focused on an individual’s private, secret thoughts, “is a form of power that looks after not just the whole community but each individual in particular, during his entire life.”¹¹⁸ Holmes’ services are, after all, meant to curb crime in general for the benefit of the entire society, yet he always works on one case at a time, promising discretion, individual attention and provides an essentially private service catered to the specific needs of the particular client or case. It is the “private” nature of the detectives—even as they remain engaged in a decidedly public service—that separates the detective from the police and enables the subject to trust the detective with his/her secrets.

¹¹⁸ Michel Foucault, “Subject and Power,” 783.

The “private” nature of the detective’s services also corresponds to the nature of the confessional. Privacy and an assurance of complete secrecy is one of the presumed tenets of the confessional, be it in the Catholic sense, where it is given inside a confession box, or in civic sense, in a doctor’s chamber, a lawyer’s office, a therapist’s couch, where the confessors are professionally obligated to grant their confessors complete assurance of discretion. Confession thus indicates a paradox; “What must be spoken must also remain secret,” is precisely “the contradiction that arises out of the...clos(et)ed space of the confessional discourse.”¹¹⁹ An incentive to confess is not always an incentive to come out in the open, as it were; rather, it is an incentive to *maintain* secrecy, but submit them to a very specialised form of authority—pastor, doctor, psychologist, and indeed detective—who not only helps create a more open secret by encouraging healthy and regular confessions, but also provides a particular service dependant on a management of the information divulged only in secret. That is, what is confessed “must not be spoken everywhere, but is privileged by the coupled place of the inquisitor-victim, confessor-confessant, analyst-analysand, master-slave”¹²⁰

The Holmes stories, and indeed most detective stories, present a world which is full of secrets, a world where almost everybody has something to hide. Holmes encourages regular and repeated confession, but at the same time keeps alive a need for a higher authority with a specialised form of knowledge to confess to, by assuring discretion and by protecting these secrets of his clients from each other. Indeed, as an inducer of confession Holmes oversees a world where everyone is caught up in a constant flux between secrecy and revelation, where everyone is lying to each other, but to him. Holmes’ job is paradoxically to at once induce

¹¹⁹ Frances Bartowski, “Epistemic Drift in Foucault,” *Feminism and Foucault: Paths of Resistance*, eds Lee Quinby and Irene Diamond. (Northeastern University Press, 1988), 44.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

secrets as well as to perpetuate them, to encourage a culture of confession which is at once a culture of secrecy and privacy. Confession, for all its emphasis of telling all, admitting all, is predicated upon a culture of extreme covertness. In the course of his investigations, Holmes invariably unearths family secrets, past affairs, secret feelings of love or hate, associations with secret societies in different continents in a past life, et al. (Indeed, Watson has to frequently assure readers of the discretion maintained by them by stating that the events described therein happened a long time ago, so much so, that it would no longer affect the parties involved, or, by withholding or changing the name of the family that was involved.) Consider what happens in “The Boscombe Valley Mystery”: Holmes investigates the murder of Mr Charles McCarthy in the community of Herefordshire in which the son of the deceased, James McCarthy, is strongly implicated and awaits trial in police custody. Once Holmes begins to investigate he unearths a series of family secrets. The crime takes place in the grounds of the estate of John Turner, a major landowner in those parts, who lived there with his daughter, Alice Turner. Charles and James McCarthy, too, were living in a nearby farm. Holmes soon learns from Alice, that on the day of the murder, James, the accused, had an argument with his father, the victim, when he refused to marry Alice. Holmes also deduces that Alice herself is secretly not against such a union, judging by the “quick blush” that “passed over her fresh young face”¹²¹—a sure sign of hidden affection, in most Victorian tales. On meeting the unfortunate James Turner Holmes learns that he, too, secretly reciprocates Alice’s feelings, but cannot marry her since he had foolishly married a barmaid when he was younger—something that he does not want his father and Alice to find out. It soon transpires that this barmaid, in whose “clutches” this idiot young man had “foolishly” gotten into, had already been secretly married to another man all along, so her marriage to James is automatically and rather conveniently void.

¹²¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Boscombe Valley Mystery,” *The Adventures Sherlock Holmes*.

Finally, Holmes discovers that the murder was committed by John Turner, and summons him to his hotel room. On learning that Holmes knows at least something about his past as a robber in Australia, he breaks down and confesses to him. In short, it turns out that the victim, Charles McCarthy, although a friend of his in the eyes of the world, was a former accomplice in his past life as a robber, and had of late taken to blackmailing him, trying to coerce him into marrying off his young daughter, the fresh-faced Alice Turner, to his son, James McCarthy, the unfortunately married man accused. Since John could not allow Charles control over his family's finances through his son's marriage to Alice, he resisted the union and after much pressure, was driven to kill Charles to preserve his freedom and spare his daughter.

He assures Holmes that had James indeed been convicted he had every intention of coming forward, but reasons that he is a dying man, and does not want to spend his last days in prison and more importantly, wants to keep his past a secret from his daughter. Holmes advises the murderer thus: "Just tell us the truth...I shall jot down the facts. You will sign it, and Watson here can witness it. Then I could produce your confession at the last extremity to save young McCarthy. I promise you that I shall not use it unless it is absolutely needed."¹²² Since James is ultimately acquitted on account of lack of evidence, this secret remains safe with Holmes. Thus, by the end of the story Holmes is guarding the secrets of a number of characters, all of whom are vehemently guarding these secrets from each other, but Holmes. This is a far cry from the world of *The Moonstone* where, the detective is dismissed and the case is solved at least partially from within, by people, in effect, confessing to each other. This is a world where people are never completely rid of their secrets, but there is a system in place that allows them to deposit those secrets to a special authority so the knowledge gained from them can be used for better

¹²² Ibid.

management and discipline for their individual lives. Confession, here, thus does not indicate an open world, but rather, a frantically private one.

While Holmes assures complete discretion to each and every client, though, guarding their secrets, often giving them advice, the Holmes canon taken together depict him as presiding over people from all walks of life in a fast urbanizing and fast industrializing London with a fast growing population. A cursory look at the Holmes stories tell us that he is not just a custodian of some elite few, but of a fast burgeoning working and middle class. Thus, in the *Adventures* alone we have Jabez Wilson, a pawnbroker (“The Adventure of the Red-Headed League”¹²³); a hotel attendant named Peterson (“The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle”¹²⁴); a hydraulic engineer, Mr. Victor Hatherly (“The Adventure of the Engineer’s Thumb”¹²⁵); a banker, Mr. Alexander Holder of (“The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet”¹²⁶), and a young governess seeking employment, Violet Hunter (“The Adventure of the Copper Beeches”¹²⁷). And the, he also attends to the occasional potentate (“A Scandal in Bohemia”¹²⁸) and lords and ladies, (“The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor”¹²⁹) and everyone’s specific problems are dealt with until the status quo is restored. In this manner, Holmes exerts a power that is simultaneously individualizing and totalizing, something that works on the individual, but with an eye towards the entirety of the society s/he must be integrated within.

This, in fact, as I have discussed before, is what links the detective, and specifically Holmes, to the effective management of population. The Sherlock Holmes stories represent a

¹²³ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Red-Headed League,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

¹²⁴ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

¹²⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Engineer’s Thumb,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

¹²⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet,” *The Adventures of the Sherlock Holmes*.

¹²⁷ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

¹²⁸ Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Scandal in Bohemia,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

¹²⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

wide range of affairs that depicted a fast changing and developing urban, social, and economic life. Indeed, implicit in the confessor-confessant relationship is also a class divide. In order for Holes be seen by *all* as a superior, it was not enough for him to be simply intellectually so. The confessor than, at least for now, has to be male, white, and at least somewhat upper class. Only then can he exert the widest reaching influence, as Holmes indeed does. By being not from the aristocratic classes, yet, by definitely not being from the lower sections of society, Holmes could be seen by most as a social superior, yet as someone with no ostensible links to the ruling classes, and thereby as neutral. By inducing his clients to speak about all their problems he manages the domestic, professional, and personal problems of a wide cross section of society, thus providing individualized service, but ultimately working towards and representing a kind of power that presides over all.

The Detective as Martyr

However, pastoral power is not simply one that individualizes and totalizes its subject. It is also “a form of power that commands, that is prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock.”¹³⁰ That is, not only does pastoral power entail ensuring the salvation of the flock, but it also requires a certain kind of sacrifice, a certain kind of self-denial. Now this is where the pastoral mask of the detective begins to peel off. Sure, the role of the detective does not come without its share of sacrifices. The private detective cannot be a “normal” person, leading a well-adjusted social life, like his subjects. All of the most successful detectives of the 19th and 20th century exhibit this trait, whereby, being a loner, an outsider almost becomes a professional requirement for the detective. Holmes, for instance, is a confirmed bachelor and in spite of his friendship with Watson, a self-confessed loner who sinks into severe melancholia from time to

¹³⁰ Michele Foucault, “Subject and Power,” 783.

time from which only his violin or cocaine and morphine can rescue him. Being not quite completely adjusted in society is something that seems to plague almost all subsequent detectives. Miss Marple is a lonely spinster; Poirot is a mysterious and misunderstood alien, a foreigner, and the hard-boiled detective, in spite of walking the mean streets as a common man, is emphatically not one himself.

The detective cannot be completely bound by social and domestic ties. It is a professional necessity for the detective to be somewhat of an outsider. While the detective does provide a reassurance to his “flock” by eliminating the out-of-the ordinary from the community, the detective does so by revealing certain out-of-the ordinary traits himself/herself. As a person whose job is to keep the extraordinary, the not-regular, the not-everyday, the not-mundane, out of society, it follows that to really his job, Holmes must abstain from the pleasures of the everyday, the ordinary, and the domestic himself. Thus, he operates from the margins of domesticity, never straying too far from the society he has to protect, but never completely entering into it either. I will discuss this inherent duality in Holmes that should make us sceptical of his status as a martyr, but I shall discuss that in conjunction with his status as a saviour, in the next section.

The Detective as Saviour

Pastoral power is a form of power “whose ultimate aim is to assure... salvation,”¹³¹ and while, in the Christian pastorals, this salvation was guaranteed in the afterlife, now, it was guaranteed in the present life. The “salvation” granted in detective fiction is obviously a deliverance from the effects of criminality, from, the particular problem that plagues a client be that regarding a suspicious job offer, a missing letter, ghosts from ones pasts, a dead body in the library, et al. If

¹³¹ Ibid.

the dead body signals the existence of crime, it also signals the presence of guilt, of suspicion, and by end of the story, the detective seeks to eradicate just that. Salvation is garnered by deliverance from guilt and from suspicion of guilt. It is guaranteed, but at a price—the price being submission to a confession and admission of the very sin described in the confession.

What is significant about confession as a means to salvation is that, in many cases, it becomes that which at once leads the subject to name their sin, thereby identifying them as a sinner, and absolves them of that sin. That is, ever so often, the act of confession itself is seen as that which will absolve the confessor from that which he confesses but also forever mark the confessor by what he confesses. In *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault* Chloë Taylor points out that over the centuries, as confession became more frequent and eventually mandatory in church practices, the punishments and penances attached to the sin confessed became less and less severe:

By the late Middle Ages...permanent forms of punishment such as lifelong abstinence found in canonical penance had long since been transformed into the long-term asceticism of penitentials and finally into light and repetitive penances such as prayers and monetary offerings. Similarly, public displays of truth had been replaced by introspection on inner sorrow and then into repetitions of formulaic regrets in the presence of priests. In short, slowly but surely, the chronicle of Christian penance is one in which forgiveness became easy so that confession could become mandatory.¹³²

In secular practices, similarly, confession in and of itself came to represent a kind of healing, a freeing of the soul, an automatic release of the inner truth of the person. One example of this can be seen in the “talking cure” prescribed by Freud in his early writings on psychology. As Taylor points out, in an early work, “Freud and Breuer thought that the very act of their patients confessing to them, and of their interpreting their patients’ confessions, with their clinical expertise, led to the patients being cured of their various psychological and hysterically

¹³² Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault*, 52.

physiological ailments.”¹³³ Taylor declares that even though “Freud would later reject this notion of medical confession as catharsis or abreaction and would realise that talking could repeat rather than heal trauma” this view remained influential in popular culture and pop psychology: “We believe that speaking is cathartic, or that it helps ‘to get things of our chests,’ that confession is ‘good for the soul.’ The popularisation of the notion that talking has a straightforwardly curative or medicinal effect is an enormous incitement to confessional discourse today, even though it was almost immediately refuted within psychoanalytic theory itself.”¹³⁴

Indeed, in the Holmes stories, in stark contrast to, say, the Newgate novels, punishment is much less important than the confessional admission of guilt from at least one person in the story. In many cases, in fact, the punishment is delivered off-stage, as it were, with the text focusing largely on the confessional accounts to provide a sense of closure. In fact, often, if Holmes is unable to, or deliberately does not apprehend the criminal, he seems comfortably reassured in his certainty that a life of crime would lead to no good anyway, and while he may not have been able to bring them to boot, sooner or later they will be suitably punished. Indeed, in “The Boscombe Valley Mystery” discussed above, Holmes trades in police punishment of the aged murderer in exchange for a full confession, telling the old man, “You are yourself aware that you will soon have to answer for your deed at a higher court than the Assizes.” Sure enough, we soon learn that “Old Turner lived for seven months after our interview, but he is now dead.”¹³⁵ “In “Five Orange Pips,” similarly, while Holmes is unable to capture the members of the KKK, the culprits die anyway when they get drowned in a shipwreck.¹³⁶

¹³³ Ibid, 70-71.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Boscombe Valley Mystery.”

¹³⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Five Orange Pips.”

In other instances, he himself withholds punishment based on his own judiciousness. In all cases, however, there is a confession extracted from at least one if not more of the parties involved. Indeed, in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, only a few of the stories involve legal punishment and its stand in—the police— or even a need for such. For instance, “The Man with the Twisted Lip” tells the tale of a nobleman who moonlights as a beggar under a brilliant disguise. Holmes finds him out and other than stern admonitions on having acted beneath his stature and caused his wife immense anxiety does not do much else;¹³⁷ in “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle” in fact, Holmes lets the criminal go, stating that harsh punishment for such a small crime for so young an offender would only lead to a lifetime of hardened crime, which Holmes could at the present moment prevent by administering a strong and stern warning to him in lieu of official punishment;¹³⁸ In “Adventures of the Beryl Coronet” Holmes saves a distinguished banker from scandal and infamy by recovering a coronet that disappears from right under his nose—Holmes does nothing to apprehend the criminal, which would doubtless have required the involvement of the police, content in his assurance that the offending party will no doubt “receive a more than sufficient punishment.”¹³⁹ In many of these cases, not only is the law and /or the police not equipped to deal with the nature of the “crimes” committed, but their involvement, by causing public scandal, would cause more damage to the clients involved than is caused to them by the crimes themselves.

This leads to the strange paradox that the detective, by being distinctive from the police, enacts the job of the police better than they can. The detective, by being willing to be lenient and/or look the other way when the crime is minor or committed under extenuation

¹³⁷ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Man with the Twisted Lips,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

¹³⁸ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

¹³⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventures of the Beryl Coronet,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

circumstances, can be provide a better surveillance of the citizens and thereby keep them in check. Thus, Holmes becomes a better agent of the state precisely by being willing to sever his ties/loyalties to it whenever required. Indeed, while Holmes does declare in *The Adventures* that he is “not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies”¹⁴⁰ he does precisely that by paradoxically extending his “jurisdiction” over delicate areas of everyday human life that the police, bound by the law, can never quite cover, and by the time we have *The Memoirs* not only do Lestrade and Gregson and other police inspectors become more regular characters, but Holmes can be heard stating, “Out of my last 53 cases 49 have been given full credit to the police and the rest to me.”¹⁴¹ No matter who gets credit for solving crimes and regardless of whether there is police involvement, Holmes never foregoes the need for confession, for complete admission to him of all the events surrounding the incident.

However, these are areas where the cracks in the professed logic of pastoral power begin to show very clearly. Now, for Holmes to be a martyr and a saviour, one must assume that his objective is simply to eradicate crime, to punish criminals, to avenge those wronged, expecting, as he has often stated, no reward, material or otherwise, in return, and with no ulterior motives. Indeed, moments before plunging to his apparent death in the Reichenbach Falls, he tells his arch nemesis Professor Moriarty that he would happily plunge to his own death, if that could also ensure saving England from the clutches of a villain like him. However, as can be seen from certain examples above, Holmes tends to use these skills to discipline and mould clients even where there is no earthly reason to. Indeed, Holmes seems dependent, even addicted to the kind of powers his profession affords him, even turning to cocaine when deprived of a case. When Holmes declares, “My mind rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the

¹⁴⁰ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

¹⁴¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Naval Treaty,” *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere,” it may seem like harmless restlessness of a bored genius, but when he goes on to say, “I cannot live without brain-work. What else is there to live for? Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-coloured houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers, Doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them?”¹⁴² then a more sinister and troubling aspect of Holmes’ professional obsession begins to emerge. Holmes *needs* crime and doesn’t just seek to solve it and/or prevent it. On it depends his very existence. By extension, he therefore, *needs* his clients and the information and challenges they present to him as much as he would like to avow *they* need him. There is a duality here, a paradox that haunts the detective right up to the bitter end. If Holmes’ methods are justified by the notion that they benefit those they purport to serve and society in general, then it is equally true that it might well be the other way around—it is his powers that are reliant on crime, criminality, confessions. This is in direct contradiction to the purported goals of the detective to administer confessions as the only way to serve a higher justice—the law, God, or his own moral sense of right and wrong. It is in instances like these where the more pathological, disturbing aspect of confession and pastoral power begin to show. If confession is required to rid one or society of guilt, crime, and sin, then something must be made of the way the enforcers of pastoral power and the inciters of confession seem to require confession—and by extension guilt, crime, sin, for their own very existence.

Moreover, there are evident cracks in the façade of pastoral power. Holmes is by no means even handed when it comes to retribution and salvation. This is evident, for instance, in

¹⁴² Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (The Gutenberg Project, 2008), accessed July 29, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2097/2097-h/2097-h.htm>.

his refusal or inability to , say, “heal” or provide salvations to those lost soul who return from Britain’s far flung colonies, damaged, broken, and sick, usually associated in the Holmes stories with copious allusions to beasts and bestiality and disease and decrepitude of the body and mind, all mingled with the fantastically exotic. For instance, in “The Crooked Man,” Holmes has no solace to provide for the titular character, a now disabled, diseased, and dying poverty stricken man, who turns out to have been Henry Wood a former soldier of the British army in colonial India. Wood had been driven into enemy lines by a fellow soldier of his own regiment during the so called Indian Mutiny of 1857 against the British army. This “crooked man,” then, is directly or indirectly a product of Britain’s colonial ambitions. However, all Holmes can do, after hearing his “confession”—where he narrates his tragic story in poignant detail— is just to declare the case to have been “a simple one after all”¹⁴³ and announced his and Watson’s work done. We are told nothing more about the eponymous character of the story and what becomes of him once Holmes has elicited the all-important confessional, all-explaining narrative from him. As far as Holmes is concerned, he suffered from a crime that occurred outside of his jurisdiction and therefore not his prerogative to manage. There is no scope to ponder on the correlation between Britain’s colonial designs and what happened to Corporal Henry Wood, or, say, the significances of this being set in the backdrop of the Indian Mutiny, one of the first revolts against British atrocities on the natives . This is doubly problematic since after all, Holmes, as an agent (however ambiguous and /or covert) ensuring the smooth workings of the State, is complicit in the chain of events that turned Henry Wood into merely an object of pity—to be discarded to prevent contamination of the “homeland,” the population that Holmes so keenly protects.

¹⁴³ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Crooked Man,” *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

A contrast to this can be seen in “The Speckled Band” where the outrageously villainous murderer Roylott’s character is explicitly linked to his time in India when we are told his “violence of temper approaching mania” had been “intensified by his long residence in the tropics” and Holmes connects his method of murder—a poisonous snake—explicitly to India and an “Eastern training.”¹⁴⁴ This story is distinctive by being one of the very few cases in the Holmes oeuvre where Holmes directly (albeit not entirely intentionally) causes a criminal’s death and moreover, significantly expresses no remorse. Here again, the danger presented is that of contamination, as if the colonies represent a disease that can be caught, carried back, transferred into the unpolluted mother land. Holmes never pauses to consider that the reverse might be true as well. That this fine example of Britain’s export to its colonies presented an endemic threat to the natives who came in contact with it, and that hence, his particular brand of evil may be seen, in other contexts, as a product of a Britishness that is wreaking havoc in India, is an idea that is not entertained. For instance, even though we are informed that Roylott in fact beat his native butler to death while in India, the implications of this act and of violence and loss caused by British presence in the colonies are not questioned. The horror in the story derives from the fact that this monster now roams in Britain, posing a danger to true British citizens, marking a challenge to Holmes’ powers. That this danger is Britain’s own doing is not something that we are meant to consider.

This is of course even more significant considering the stories also feature another such “reject” of the Empire, another lost boy—Dr John Watson. When we first meet Watson in *A Study in Scarlet* he too is smarting from his time spent in India, where not only did he almost get killed but was hurt by injuries that would never entirely heal, and was struck by illnesses which

¹⁴⁴ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Speckled Band,” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

were “the curse of” Britain’s “Indian possessions.”¹⁴⁵ Watson, at this point is drifting, aimless, friendless, and almost penniless not quite sure how to reintegrate himself back to society. His chance meeting, then, with an old friend who introduces him to Holmes comes at the nick of time. Holmes saves him, as it were, by repurposing his life around him, and refocusing his attention from his painful memories of the colonies to Holmes’ remarkable powers and his “science of deduction.” Watson however, remains practically the only exile of the empire who finds salvation and purpose in Holmes, and by becoming Holmes’ narrator, reintegrates himself, as it were, to “proper” British pursuits of rationality, science, and progress. But his narrative from time to time keeps betraying Holmes’s inability or unwillingness to account for the damages caused to those who cannot quite leave behind the traces of the Empire back in the colonies, and who carry them right into the heartland, like an open wound that Holmes could not or would not heal.

Confession, and the pastoral, then, is not blind and without prejudice. There are many that do not meet the minimum requirement to be able to reap its “benefits,” to be able to access the kind of salvation it ensures. Holmes may be master of all he surveys and he may be master of all the stories he collects. But after a certain point, the futility of the collector’s pursuits becomes only too apparent. These cracks in Holmes’ pastoral visage will only get wider in coming incarnations of the detective stories. In spite of the castaways and rejects that throng the margins of the Holmes universe, Sherlock Holmes remains, as the first truly successful literary detective, by far the most potent, the most pastoral, and thereby most effective manager of our souls.

¹⁴⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*.

CHAPTER 2

“HERCULE POIROT INTENDS TO KNOW”: CONFESSION AND TRUTH IN THE GOLDEN AGE

“Trust Hercule Poirot. He Knows”¹⁴⁶

Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot is often heard grandiosely referring to himself in the third person, claiming to *know*. His use of the third person gives what he says an air of divine ordinance, which, nevertheless is undermined somewhat given that it is he himself who insists that he knows. *What* exactly Poirot knows Poirot never quite makes explicit, but one can hazard a guess that he purports to know a truth, which, referred to in so abstract, grandstanding a manner, by implication becomes *the* truth. In the previous chapter, I argued that the rise of the detective, namely in the figure of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, represented the development of what has been described by Michele Foucault as “pastoral power,” a special kind of disciplinary power which depends largely on the encouragement, incitement, and management of confessions and makes us subjects in more than one sense. The emphasis on confession in Western thought precludes the assumption that confession can lead to or be tantamount to a pre-textual “truth,” and as such, the goals of the confessional seems to coincide with that of the detective story which has always been primarily concerned with arriving at the truth, an objective, verifiable and unrepudiable truth. It is “a deep-seated cultural practice in the West that involves a declaration and disclosure, acknowledgement or admission of a fault, weakness or crime and is expected to be the ‘truth’ that discloses one’s actions and private feelings or opinions.”¹⁴⁷ It pre-supposes an “authentic” self that can be accessed or “recovered” somehow through the confessional processes. As Foucault points out, Christian hermeneutics of the self

¹⁴⁶ Agatha Christie, *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (New York, Harper Collins, 2011), Kindle Edition.

¹⁴⁷ Tina Besley, “Foucault, Truth Telling and Technologies of the Self in Schools,” *Journal of Educational Enquiry* 6.1 (2005): 85, accessed July 26, 2013, <http://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/EDEQ/article/viewFile/503/372>.

imply “that there is something hidden in ourselves and that we are always in a self-illusion which hides the secret.”¹⁴⁸ Evil, according to this strain of thought, is essentially hidden and unstated in nature, and therefore, verbalizing or confessing one’s thoughts, actions, and intentions becomes “a mark of truth.”

The figure of Sherlock Holmes, then, not only indicates that the truth can be empirically arrived at, but seems to advocate the assumption underlining Western confessional practices that in confession one tells the truth about oneself. Indeed, in a large number of Holmes’ short stories, the denouement consists simply on the criminal/character simply narrating their story, which in turn unravels the entire mystery. Often, Holmes’ role is simply to be the figure that can command such confessional narratives which bring us to the truth of the story. His very presence seems to incite spontaneous confessions, disclosures, and revelations from one and all, as if his very aura compelled them to speak the truth about themselves. Holmes, in his avatar of a secular pastor, incites all-disclosing narratives from all kinds of people drifting through London, products of Britain’s far flung empires, seedy alleys of London’s underbelly or its landed gentry, and operates in a double nature: a private detective offering discretion and private solutions but at the same time a public servant of sorts, overseeing the management of the entire population.

The Holmes short stories have relatively little room for suspense, though, and as such, we are given a swift denouement with Holmes energetically following up leads and rounding up the characters who can “confess” the demystifying truth to the detective. As such, the relation between a confession and the “truth” is relatively direct and uncomplicated, as is the detective’s ability to draw one out. In fact, in most cases, an extraction of a confession automatically indicates a revelation of truth. More often than not, if Holmes sees no problems with one’s

¹⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the self,” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 247.

admissions, we are to make that assumption as well, and the question of proof as to the veracity of one's long winded narratives is never in question.

The detective's supreme and almost invincible ability to extract the truth, at drawing out secret motives, pasts, plots, and actions is also paramount in the detective stories of Agatha Christie, arguably the most popular in the sub-genre belonging to what is known as the "Golden Age" of detective fiction, that is, the detective fiction between the Wars, mostly in England. A concern with revealing the "truth" which is hidden is undoubtedly the quintessential preoccupation of the detective story. However, the Christie stories pose a bigger challenge to its detectives by presenting a *mise-en-scène* with a large cast of suspects (although a smaller, more closed off space in which they act), almost all of whom turn out to be guilty of concealing some secret or the other if not murder. The detective's ability to arrive at "the truth" is now much more complicated than it was ever before.

In this chapter, I would like to examine a duality in the Christie stories, focusing on some of the mystery novels featuring her detective Hercule Poirot, where, on one hand the narrative operates to provide a sense of reassurance and faith in the power of reason and order, embodied in the figure of the detective, but on the other it articulates a certain kind of anxiety regarding the nature of truth, the truthfulness of confessing voices, the authenticity of presented selves. While the Holmes stories reflected the supreme confidence of his age, with the British empire spreading far and wide, bringing in wealth and plunder from far flung colonies, with great progress made in science and technology, the detective in the between-the-Wars years has to combat a pervasive sense of pessimism and lack of faith in human ability and humanity in general. While the detective operates in this scenario to reinforce a sense of assurance and faith by guiding a guilt- and crime-ridden society to "the truth" with the help of reason, and by encouraging regular

confession to figures of authority, Christie's novels, ever so often end up calling into question the very categories it seeks to defend. This anxiety manifests itself in the detective stories as a terrifying multiplicity—a multiplicity of possible criminals, of endings, and of “truths” in general. In this scenario, the detective must restore a sense of faith and assurance by reducing the multiple into the singular, presenting a single version of the story, with a single criminal, a single ending, and a single, all-encompassing “truth.” This, the detective strives to do primarily by collecting, managing, and encouraging confessions, even though the confessions now have to be much more violently elicited than before and when all is said and done, is still fraught with a sense of doubt and uncertainty.

Christie's detective stories have always been seen to represent an idyllic, bucolic England full of nostalgia for a pre-war era, depicting a world seemingly untouched by the skepticism, pessimism, and lack of faith in humanity brought about by the unprecedented deaths and travesties of World War I, and the anxiety and anguish of the years leading up to World War II. Marjorie Nicolson, in her 1929 essay “The Professor and the Detective,” for instance, separates the detective from literature of its time calling it a “literature of escape” that offers respite not so much from life, “but from literature.”¹⁴⁹ What she means by this is that detective literature, unlike the other literature of its time was not attempting to depict existential anguish, pessimism, a questioning of accepted beliefs, etc., that, according to her, authors like James Joyce were working with. Rather, detective fiction, in its strict adherence to form, purposeful plot, glorification reason, and causal structure strayed away from the dominant trend of its time:

[I]t was during the same period when the upper reaches of literature were dramatizing the limits of reason ... that the lower reaches of literature were dramatizing the power of reason in such figures as Inspector Poirot.... Is it not natural to assume, then, that during

¹⁴⁹ Marjorie Nicolson, “The Professor and the Detective,” *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1947), 110-27.

this period when rationalism is experiencing some of its most damaging attacks, that intellectuals, who experienced these attacks first and most deeply, would turn for relief and easy reassurance to the detective story, the primary genre of popular literature which they, during the same period, were, in fact, consuming? The same people who spent their days with Joyce were reading Agatha Christie at night.¹⁵⁰

This view of detective fiction of the time somehow existing purely as a champion of reason, rationality, and truth, and moreover, as therefore associated with “light” reading, has persisted through the years. However, Christie’s detective world was very much a product of the post-World War I gloom and cynicism. In this chapter, I would like to argue that inherent in the rather rigid form of the Golden Age detective novel championed by Christie, lies a deep-seated anxiety with multiplicity of truth, and lack of singular, authentic selves which the detective attempts to dispel through confession, but which more often than not, ends up further compounding it.

Modernism, in literature, arts, and elsewhere, was set in motion by a series of huge cultural tremors, the biggest of them being the two World Wars. The First World War brought forth horrors of such unprecedented and unimaginable scale that it considerably changed people’s world view and fundamentally altered any misconceptions about the inherent humanity of mankind. This change manifested itself in literature as skepticism about traditional forms and styles in narrations and the correlation between narrative and truth. The notion that there exists a certain “truth” about the modern self that may be recovered was not entirely dismantled, but there was a pervasive sense that this truth, this authentic, unadulterated self was difficult to get at and required the unique creative energy of the artist or the author to bring it about. The artist/author figure marked with his superior skill and or knowledge could look at the world and people in new, complicated ways, from previously unexplored, unacknowledged angles. The cubist paintings of Picasso, for instance, provide a good example of modernism’s new take on

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

truth and the self.¹⁵¹ In his cubist abstract portraits the self is not quite presented as being entirely in pieces or disembodied. The subject, the self, is still unified and maintains a semblance of fidelity to a more “realistic” representation, but presents the somewhat terrifying possibility of no longer being accessible through a single perspective, a single angle. It is as if it has been sent through a prism and split into their constituent parts, revealing that what was previously thought of as singular and unified in fact contains within itself multitudes, multitudes that are invisible to the naked, unskilled eye. Therefore, the truth of the self can now no longer be arrived at easily and there is always the chance that whatever form of it one could access would at best be relative and incomplete. Hence the experimentation with different narrative techniques, the more difficult and obscure the better (James Joyce’s *Ulysses* for instance uses many different narrative styles to tell the story of just one day in the protagonist’s life¹⁵²). This only leads to an expression of lack of an easy faith in (Human) Nature or Being. Instead of a muted confidence regarding Progress and Development, a large part of modernist literature is characterized by images of decay (T.S. Eliot’s *Wasteland*, for instance¹⁵³) and the alienation of the modern individual (Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*¹⁵⁴).

Concurrent with this sense of decrepitude and alienation was a preoccupation with the inner self, a concern for the inner consciousness rather than pure action. This is evident in the use of techniques like the stream of consciousness (*Mrs. Dalloway*,¹⁵⁵ *Ulysses*¹⁵⁶), for instance, as well as the popularity of first-person, autobiographical narrative mode (*A Portrait of the Artist as*

¹⁵¹ See for instance, Pablo Picasso, *Dora Maar au Chaat*, Oil on canvas 1941.

¹⁵² James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2010).

¹⁵³ T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, ed. Michael North (New York: Norton, 2000).

¹⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ James Joyce, *Ulysses*.

a Young Man,¹⁵⁷ the confessional poems of Sylvia Plath, for instance). Thus, the inner spaces of the mind and the self took precedence over the world out there that must be conquered and ordered. As Poirot says, “It is the brain, the little grey cells on which one must rely. One must seek the truth within— not without.”¹⁵⁸ This focus on interiority of the self can also be seen in Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis as a way of gaining access to a complex, covert, inner self gaining popularity around this time. Confession, thereby, as a medium that focuses solely on the inner being, the interiors of the mind, can be called very much a modernist mode.

This interiority—usually marked by a difference between outward appearances with “truer” inner motives—lead to a sense of ambiguity, of a duplicity that forms the very quintessence of detective fiction. Detective fiction in general and Christie’s detective plots in particular celebrate within its form a certain kind of doubleness, a duality, a things-are-not-quite-as-they-seem-ness, if you will. At a very basic level, this duality is evident in the plot, where while one story line distracts our attention, a second or even third story line carries the actual clues. That is, while it, say, encourages us to pay attention to the story of the step daughter who was seen tinkering about with the bottle of poison, or that of the stranger in town who was seen leaving the victim’s house at two fifteen a.m., we learn at the end, that we should have been concentrating all along on the fact that Mrs So-and-So constantly wears her pearls, or that General So-and-So had the central heating on even on a warm day.

Unlike Holmes’s stories, in a Golden Age detective story the murder is the primary crime with the appearance of a dead body signaling the presence of a criminal in the closed society. A development in the crime writing of this time that is crucial to this study is the presence of a

¹⁵⁷ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994).

¹⁵⁸ *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (The Gutenberg Project, 2008), accessed on August 12, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/863/863-h/863-h.htm#linka2HCH0002>.

range of suspects all of whom are equipped with motive, and as it turns out, have at least a minor sin to hide. While earlier works like *The Moonstone* (1868)¹⁵⁹ or *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (1908)¹⁶⁰ did feature a range of suspects, the nineteenth-century short stories did not quite need this particular plot feature. A result of the extended plots of the detective novel or novella is that now the detective's supremacy over his terrain is disturbed and challenged for a longer period of time in each story. The detective/police now has to interrogate not just one, but an entire cast of characters about their location, actions, etc., at the time of the murder and their relation with the victim, which more often than not proves to be more confounding than illuminating, at least to the reader. Thus, what this set-up, then, by its very form implies is that confessions can rarely be taken at face value: the very fact that everyone interrogated seem to provide perfectly plausible accounts of their actions but the certain knowledge that at least one of them have to be the murderer, implies that it is possible that one does not automatically speak truth to an external disciplinary power, however beneficial that power may appear. Confessions, then, that is, what one says about one's thoughts, actions, motives, pasts, etc., are now made suspect in a way that the Holmes short stories never did.

The detective's task, therefore, just got harder. No longer will it suffice to reach the truth by commanding someone to speak, be it a client or a criminal. What the Golden Age novels, and especially those of Christie's imply, at least until the all-revealing climax, is that not only are things not quite what they seem, but people are not quite who they seem to be and as such, one cannot conflate a first-person, seemingly personal, frank account of the self with "the truth." The Christie novels then begin to cast suspicion not just on characters who are *silent* but also on those who *speak*—those who willingly offer information about themselves. In doing so, Christie's

¹⁵⁹ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*.

¹⁶⁰ Gaston Leroux, *The Mystery of the Yellow Room*, ed. Terry Hale (Cambridgeshire: Dedalus Ltd, 2003).

novels demonstrate that a confessional voice may not necessarily be an automatically honest voice that declares the “truth” about oneself. The confessional voice can as much construct a version of a self as reveal a pre-textual, true version of it. It can as much construct a version of the truth as is constructed by the confessor to whom the confession is submitted. Moreover, a person’s account of oneself or others may be susceptible to subjective opinion, slippages in memory, personal prejudices and biases, et al.

An equal sense of duality arises from the incongruity of the character of the detective himself which is meant to convey a sense of comfort and assurance in the certainty of restoration of order, and the fact that up until the very end his very presence indicates a society fraught with duplicitous characters, hidden motives, and fabricated personalities. The detective, in the Golden Age variety, is often, especially in the case of Poirot, at once one that is meant to inspire awe and that is held up for parodic ridicule. Detective fiction in the modernist age expresses a genuine admiration for what it sees as a remarkable personality, blessed with this special skill akin to that of an artist’s or author’s, for leading one to the difficult to ascertain hidden truth, but at the same time cannot quite resist having a bit of fun at his expense—at laughing at this funny little creature, usually old fashioned and/or portly with a host of quirky mannerisms and obsessive compulsive disorders. Hastings, the Dr. Watson to Poirot, describes the detective in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* as being “hardly more than five feet four inches” with a head that “was exactly the shape of an egg,” and a stiff, “military” moustache the tips of which stick out even when everything on his face was covered, to comic effect.¹⁶¹ Poirot’s annoyance at getting even a speck of dirt on his shoes, his amusing misuse of the English language, his sea sickness, his discomfort in airplanes, boats, fields, barns, and general fastidiousness, all contribute to cast

¹⁶¹ Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*.

him as a figure that appears not quite as towering as Holmes. This contradiction is also evident in the fact that Poirot, on one hand constantly purports to *know*, but must *constantly* reiterate this as if he, the other characters, and indeed the readers must from time to time be reminded of his knowledge, of his powers. Poirot is comically, constantly boasting, referring to himself in a grandiose third person, declaring to all who will hear that, ah, he is different, he sees all, knows all. But the mere fact that he must constantly repeat this information betrays a deeper sense of insecurity, an anxiety over representations, a concern over keeping up appearances (or, well, in this case, belying appearances), lest people begin to see through the façade of certainty and singularity to the confusion and uncertainties that must or may well lie beneath.

Poirot's self-aggrandizement is not really helped by the fact that he is afforded, much more than Holmes, an opportunity to act as a law unto himself, meting out more often than Holmes, his own brand of justice. The golden age detective's typical settings, tucked away in some little village, or indeed, in some cases, in boats, trains, even planes, indicates that Poirot, much more than Holmes must operate without police involvement. Operating in several stories—though by no means all of them—in closed societies or spaces which is at least temporarily out of the reach of the law and where he must therefore take over as the one—and only one—ensuring that truth is uncovered and justice is administered, Poirot can indeed scrutinize, condemn, as well as punish, all by himself. In other stories, though, Inspector Japp's (and other Japp-like figure's) presence and friendship with Poirot remind us of the ultimate link of this power with the law or at least to the kinds of disciplinary and surveillance mechanisms the law represents. This makes Poirot, again, much like Holmes, a figure who must and can “supply the failures” of the police, precisely by operating in areas and spaces outside the reach of the law, by bringing a personalized form of surveillance to bear on the narrow cracks and crannies of British

life. Poirot is in this scenario the specially gifted artist/author-like figure who, for all his “eccentricities,” is able to see the covert truth and the complicated self that no one else in his immediate closed surroundings can.

Thus, in Golden Age detective fiction, modernism’s cynicism and anxiety along with the still not deserted belief in the truth—albeit, a truth that is now more slippery and elusive and necessarily hard to get at—is apparent. On the one hand, the form of the detective story constantly underlines the difficulty of reaching a wholesome notion of easy truth, indicating that it can at best be recovered in a fragmented way, curried from different bits and pieces from the confessions of different characters and clues scattered through the text, but on the other hand, it cannot ever abandon its fetishistic search for a truth in quite the same way as subsequent postmodern texts would, for indeed, to do so would defeat the purpose of the entire genre. Thus, to read Christie’s novels simply as stories that reinforce the faith of the reader in human reason and capability and in universal truth and rational action would be to read her merely superficially.

That the confession can no longer be taken at face value is made clear in the very first Poirot novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, where the criminal actually uses confession strategically to help escape punishment. Here, the chief accused for the murder of Emily Cavendish is her much younger fortune-hunter husband, Alfred Inglethorpe. Now Inglethorpe does not quite confess to the murder, but deliberately lies at the inquest about things that could easily be proved to be false. For instance, he lies about having an argument with his late wife on the night of her death in spite of knowing there were several witnesses to said fight. This of course leads the jury to conclude that he is, by extension, lying about other aspects of his statement. That is, when he claims that he did not buy poison earlier that day and witnesses

claiming otherwise were mistaken, and that his signature on the chemist's book declaring his purchase of the poison was a forgery, the jury decides he is not to be believed since he has demonstrated himself to be a blatant fabricator. Thus, on grounds of his purchase of the poison, Inglethorpe is booked for murder.

He would have certainly been arrested had Poirot not intervened in a timely manner to prevent what he saw was something Inglethorpe actually desired. Sure enough, it turns out that Inglethorpe's plan was precisely to get arrested by lying at the inquest, but to strategically do so, so that it is *obvious* he is lying. By being shrewdly only selectively truthful in front of the jury, he plans to get arrested based on wrongful evidence—his signature on the register at the medicine shop—his goal being to get acquitted later. He was indeed truthful about not having bought the poison but counted on his one truth among a host of obvious white lies being dismissed as false. His “confession” to the jury was then a masterpiece in deception. Once legally acquitted on account of being convicted on the basis of false evidence, the law would not permit him to be arrested again for the same crime, thereby, enabling him to literally get away with murder. Inglethorpe had arranged for the wrongful evidence to be revealed soon after his arrest, allowing him to escape beyond the reach of the law once and if ever more concrete evidence against him was produced. This rather confusing and convoluted premise made for a somewhat artificial plot, but it also underlined right at the beginning that confession did not always automatically represent the truth.

In the end though, for all the complications, the detective leads us quite fluidly to what it declares to be the truth. As Poirot likes to say, “The truth, it has a habit of getting out” and get out it does no matter how convoluted the plot lines. This ability of the detective to hound the truth out even in a world where confessions are unreliable and not automatically “true,” Christie

takes on in *Five Little Pigs*, a novel where she departs somewhat from her standard format. The novel was designed to demonstrate how Poirot could solve a case even years after its occurrence purely on the basis of testimonies of those involved, that is, purely on the basis of confessions. The plot involves the murder of artist Amyas Crale for which the jury convicted his wife, Caroline Crale. Sixteen years later, Caroline Crale's daughter enlists Poirot's services in the hope of posthumously acquitting her mother of what she believes to have been false charges, based on a letter her mother sent her from prison before being put to death. Poirot's investigations in this case simply involves conducting interviews with the five other possible suspects, that is, the five people present at the time of the murder—Phillip Blake, a childhood friend of the couple; Philip's brother, Meredith Blake; Elsa Greer, Amyas Crale's young muse and mistress who he was openly flaunting in front of his wife and friends; Angela Warren, Caroline's younger half-sister, and Cecilia Williams, the governess. The primary challenge posed to the detective in this book is how to unearth the murderer when five different people provide five different accounts of the same incident. When Poirot informs him of his intentions of interrogating all five people present at the crime scene, Superintendent Hale exclaims, "Man, you're nuts! None of their stories are going to agree! Don't you grasp this elementary fact? No two people remember a thing in the same order anyway. And after all this time! Why, you'll hear five accounts of five separate murders!"¹⁶²

The text then, is essentially the description of one murder described from five different viewpoints, and moreover, of a series of confessional scenes. Divided into three books, in the first part Poirot collects information from the solicitors, policemen, and lawyers who had been involved in the case. Subsequently, he visits each of the five people present at the murder scene,

¹⁶² Agatha Christie, *Five Little Pigs* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2011), Kindle Edition.

inciting them to revisit the events of the day in their minds, asking them about their relationships with the murderer and the accused, their own memories of the day, what they had heard, seen, said, done, et al. The second part comprises of written, first-person, personal narratives from each of the same five characters where they, under instructions from Poirot, try and organize their thoughts in attempting to provide a written account of the events of the day in as much detail as possible. Poirot insists on these written accounts in order to complement what each character has already told him verbally, even though many of them point out the seeming redundancy of such an exercise. The last part of the book is the all-important “reunion” scene characteristic of Poirot novels, where he requests everybody involved to collect in a room and theatrically proceeds to reconstruct the crime, the events leading to it, the means, the motives, etc, usually ending by dramatically announcing the name of the murderer drawing loud gasps of disbelief from all present. In this book too, as in almost all Poirot stories, this bit of drama leads to the final all-important confession. The entire book, then, is simply a series of confessions, repeated confessions at that, from all of the main players in the text, revolving around the same event. In the end, Poirot, in spite of the challenges posed by the passage of time leading to partially remembered, partially recollected accounts, deliberately withheld information, conflicting account, et al, figures out precisely how Caroline Crale had been wrongfully convicted and who the real murderer was. By comparing and collating each conflicting “confession” against the other, Poirot teases out the white lies, the more nefarious ones, irons out the inconsistencies, puts snatches of conversation in their true contexts, reinterprets the meaning of mysterious looks, comments, or actions, accounts for differently remembered details of the same incidents, fills in gaps in one confession by details from the others, and ultimately

triumphantly supersedes the five different versions of the events by presenting his own grand version which has no fissures, no ellipses of memory, no details left out.¹⁶³

Thus, *Five Little Pigs* establishes how Poirot can discover the “truth” even when confessional accounts are demonstrably unreliable. Even while the narrative points to the fickleness of confessional voices and its culpability to losses of memory, personal opinion, history, and of course deliberate intent to obfuscate the truth, it reinforces the power of the disciplinary force represented by the detective that can collect, organize, and read between the lines of confession. Of course, the narrative does cheat somewhat. There are not really five different accounts of the murder—the different accounts diverge from each other mostly when it comes to their opinions of the people concerned rather than the actual events surrounding the murder. Thus, if Philip Blake thinks Caroline Crale wasn’t the injured innocent people thought she was but rather had a “kind of sweetness of manner that deceives people utterly” and essentially was a “cold, calculating planner... capable of being stirred to murderous lengths,” his brother, Meredith Blake felt that it was Amyas who put his devoted wife “in a perfectly unendurable position” and that she was a loving, loyal, strong woman, who suffered a great deal.¹⁶⁴ Other differences are subtle, such as differences over whether Angela put a toad on Amyas’s bed or marbles in his drink to antagonize him, whether Amyas’s paintings had any artistic merit, etc. Moreover, most of the characters conveniently remember obscure details, like throw away comments about the taste of beer, or snatches of arguments overheard at stairwells, the faint smell of valerian, etc, which seem implausible given that the murder took place sixteen years ago.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Five Little Pigs is a good example of how Christie simultaneously complicates the confessing voice, distancing it from the “truth” and reinforces the detective’s ability to reign supreme over them. The Poirot stoires then makes the readers oscillate between anxiety and assurance by creating a world where everybody may be simultaneously confessing and concealing their selves. If the detective does bring about alleviations of tensions, though, it is merely temporary, much like with the Holmes stories, just until the next murder announces the presence of evil amidst us, once again.

While *Five Little Pigs* purports to highlight Poirot’s uncanny skill with the truth, the one Poirot story that most blatantly toys with our belief in the reliability and authenticity of confessed narratives is undoubtedly Christie’s infamous *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.¹⁶⁵ In the face of it, the novel follows a standard plot structure. Set in the peaceful village of King’s Abbot, it opens with the narrator, Dr. Sheppard, telling the readers about the death of a Mrs. Ferrars, a wealthy widow, who, rumour has it, had poisoned her husband to death. Shortly afterwards, Roger Ackroyd, another wealthy, well-respected widower who had been expected to marry Mrs. Ferrars, reveals to Dr. Sheppard that not long before her death Mrs. Ferrars had confessed to him confirming the rumours that she had in fact murdered he husband. She had also added that she was being blackmailed by someone in the village. Before taking her own life, she had mailed a letter to Roger Ackroyd disclosing the name of the blackmailer. Unwilling to read the fateful letter in front of the good Dr. Sheppard, Roger Ackroyd requests to be left alone, and our narrator returns home, perplexed by the startling course of events.

Within a few hours, however, Roger Ackroyd is discovered in his study, stabbed to death. The cast of suspects include John Parker, the snooping butler; Caroline Ackroyd, the

¹⁶⁵ Agatha Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1954).

hypochondriac widowed sister of the deceased; Flora Ackroyd, the young and beautiful, daughter of Caroline Ackroyd; Geoffrey Raymond, Ackroyd's genial secretary; Major Blunt, Ackroyd's reserved and socially awkward friend; Ralph Paton, his young and handsome stepson; Miss Russell, the stern but competent housemaid; Ursula Bourne, the mysteriously disappeared parlour maid of the Ferrars household; and a mysterious stranger seen headed to the Ackroyd house moments before the murder. Also thrown into the mix are confusing love triangles, mysterious phone calls, misplaced chairs, lost sons, former convicts, et al. The biggest suspect, however, is the step son, Ralph Paton, since he goes missing right after the murder.

As luck would have it, as it so often does in the Christie stories, the funny-looking, marrow-obsessed foreigner who has just recently retired and moved to this village is none other than renowned detective, Hercule Poirot. Flora Ackroyd, the niece, commissions Poirot to solve the case in order to clear her cousin and fiancé, Ralph Paton. Dr. Sheppard, initially mistaking Poirot for a hairdresser, soon becomes Poirot's aide, remaining steadfastly by his side as he investigates, and helping Poirot sound off his theories (in his incomplete, mysterious manner) in much the same way that Poirot's usual sidekick, Hastings had (and Watson had, to Holmes). Sheppard's first person account of things becomes the chief vehicle through which we view the events surrounding the murder and the subsequent investigations. Much like his predecessors, he switches between expressing admiration and exasperation at Poirot's methods. In case the similarity between Dr. Sheppard and the Belgian sleuth's former side-kick was not already obvious, Christie rubs it in by having Poirot repeatedly address him as "my friend" or "*mon ami*" much as he would address his earlier recorder, and also by having him repeatedly say things like, "You must have indeed been sent from the good God to replace my friend Hastings...I observe that you do not quit my side" or, "You and I, M. le docteur, we investigate this affair side by

side. Without you I should be lost.”¹⁶⁶ Even Sheppard refers to himself as “the Watson to [Poirot’s] Sherlock.”¹⁶⁷

Shrewdly plotted by Christie, this novel’s format differs slightly from the standard Poirot novels. Instead of the one theatrical climactic “reunion” scene, where Poirot confronts all the secrets-keepers, here we have *two* such scenes where Poirot summons all of the available suspects and in neither does he extract a confession out of anyone—at least not immediately. The first of these “little reunions” occurs right in the middle of the book, after the inquest. At this point of the novel, Poirot has already made his preliminary investigations, asking people about where they were, what they heard, saw, etc., around the time the murder took place. Knowing that he needs to play the part of confessor to the hilt to get out all the secrets that lurks around this case, Poirot is at his theatrical best. Dr. Sheppard describes, “We sat round the table in the dining-room at Fernly—Poirot at the head of the table, like the chairman of some ghastly board meeting...When everyone was assembled, Poirot rose and bowed. ‘Messieurs, mesdames, I have called you together for a certain purpose.’”¹⁶⁸ Tapping into his best “Papa Poirot” impression, he first turns his attention to Flora Ackroyd requesting her to reveal any information she may have about her missing fiancé (Ralph Paton), saying, “See now mademoiselle...it is Papa Poirot who asks you this. The old Papa Poirot who has much knowledge and much experience. I will not entrap you, mademoiselle. Will you not trust me—and tell me where Ralph Paton is hiding?”¹⁶⁹ However, Flora Ackroyd refuses to be an obedient confessant and divulges nothing. Instead of breaking into an-all disclosing narrative, “the girl rose and stood facing him. ‘M. Poirot,’ she said in a clear voice, ‘I swear to you—swear solemnly—that I have no idea where Ralph is, and

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 119.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 165.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 150.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 150-151.

that I have neither seen him nor heard from him either in the day of – of the murder, or since.”¹⁷⁰ This outright and public refusal by a suspect to behave as an obedient confessant does not sit well with Poirot. He attempts to reinforce his position as disciplinarian and confessor, but unsuccessfully. However, his instruction to the suspects to speak is only met with silence.

He gazed at her in silence for a minute or two, then he brought his hand down on the table with a sharp rap. “*Bien!* That is that,” he said. His face hardened. “Now I appeal to these others who sit around the table, Mrs. Ackroyd, Major Blunt, Dr. Sheppard, Mr Raymond. You are all friends and intimates of the missing man. If you know where Ralph Paton is hiding, speak out.”

There was a long silence. Poirot looked to each in turn.

“I beg of you,” he said in a low voice, “speak out.”

But still there was silence...¹⁷¹

Not only does the detective fail at this point to get his subjects to speak, but what is supposed to be an all-important, all- revealing confession scene soon begins to degenerate into a chaotic fight with accusations flying back and forth between characters. Poirot ultimately attempts to garner some control over this miserably failed confession scene:

“Messieurs et mesdames,” said Poirot rapidly, “I will continue with what I was about to say. Understand this, I mean to arrive at the truth. The truth, however ugly in itself, is always curious and beautiful to the seekers after it. I am much aged, my powers may not be what they were.” Here he clearly expected a contradiction... “Messieurs et mesdames, I tell you, I mean to *know*. And I shall know—in spite of you all.”

He brought out the last words provocatively, hurling them in our face as it were. I think we all flinched back a little, excepting Geoffrey Raymond, who remained good humoured and imperturbable as usual.

“How do you mean—in spite of us all?” he asked, with slightly raised eyebrows.

“But—just that, monsieur. Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me.” He raised his hand as a faint murmur of protest arose. “Yes, yes, I know what I am saying. It may be something unimportant—trivial—which is supposed to have no bearing on the case, but there it is. *Each one of you has something to hide*. Come, now, am I right?”

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 151.

His glance, challenging and accusing, swept round the table. And every pair of eyes dropped before his. Yes, mine as well.

"I am answered," said Poirot with a curious laugh. He got up from his seat. "I appeal. Tell me the truth—the whole truth." There was a silence. "Will no one speak?"

He gave the same short laugh again.

"*C'est dommage*," he said, and went out.¹⁷²

Poirot attempts to regain power in this scene against the resistance he encounters by declaring even the silences as admissions of guilt. In this scene we have yet again a very clear declaration of the detective's goals. To *know*, to make people speak, not just about secrets related to the crime at hand, but equally about something unimportant, trivial, which is supposed to have no bearing on the case. Poirot's pursuit of "truth" comes across as almost obsessive, fanatic, like that of a passionate lover, a neurotic collector. His declarations have an almost religious fervor, like that of a fanatic devotee, or passionate, jilted lover: "*The truth, however ugly in itself, is always curious and beautiful to the seekers after it.*" It is here that we begin to get a glimpse at the mania behind the appearance of control, of an addiction, a zealous dependency on a need to collect confessions for its own sake, rather than for a purported higher purpose.

This scene also demonstrates the strange doubleness of Christie's detective stories—they simultaneously challenge the detective's claims to supremacy even as it keeps reinforcing it. While this particular "little reunion" of Poirot ends up at least technically being a failed confession scene, from this point of the novel, the plot presents what are essentially a series of confessions—some casual, some earnest, some forced—but each leading to the elimination of a suspect, and thereby leading us closer to the "the truth" about the case, thereby restating the presumed connection between confession and truth. This first "little reunion" scene occurs right at the middle of the novel, in chapter twelve, at the height of confusion and seeming chaos. After

¹⁷² Ibid, 154-155.

that chapters fourteen, fifteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-two are all titled after characters—“Mrs Ackroyd”, “Geoffrey Raymond”, “Parker”, “Charles Kent”, “Flora Ackroyd”, “Miss Russell” and “Ursula’s story.” In each of these chapters we discover what each one of these characters had been concealing, as per Poirot’s accusations. And these revelations occur not through the discovery of some damning evidence, or by someone being caught in the act, but essentially by confessions. It is almost like a delayed but inevitable response to Poirot’s command to speak.

Mrs. Ackroyd is the first to crack. Too guilty and embarrassed to make her confession in person, she makes it to Dr. Sheppard requesting him to transfer it to Poirot. As Poirot had expected, it is minor and of no consequence to the case. The indefatigably cheerful secretary, Geoffrey Raymond, is next, who simply, without drama comes up to the sleuth, saying, “I have got a confession to make.” After Poirot gestures him to sit down saying, “*En verite*,” he replies that he “pleads guilty” and that indeed he had “something up [his] sleeve.”¹⁷³ His confession, too, as Poirot probably already knew, turns out have no bearing on the case and simply reveals that he was in debt and the money Ackroyd left him was much required. As is customary in detective stories, he had suppressed the fact from the police, but finds himself unable to do so from Poirot, especially after his command to all of them to speak up. Subsequently, Poirot corners Parker, the butler, and extracts from him the confession about his past as a blackmailer, telling him that “It is useless to deny. Poirot *knows*.”¹⁷⁴ Sure enough, Parker immediately caves, declaring, “I’ll tell you anything, sire, anything you want to know.”¹⁷⁵ All of these confessions are examples of how Poirot needs to, much like Holmes, make people speak and confess even

¹⁷³ Ibid, 183.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 205.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

when he already *knows* what it is they hide, and when their confession will take him nowhere nearer the solution of the case. It also denotes, that Poirot, much like Holmes, does indeed have special almost super heroic capability of making people speak.

Next is Flora Ackroyd, the young lady who had dared defy him publicly in spite of Poirot speaking in his best “Papa Poirot” manner. Expectedly, as with other disobedient women, her confession is once again an almost violent, invasive one. As an unruly young woman, she “must [be] tackle[d]...right away.”¹⁷⁶ Poirot, along with the Inspector and Dr. Sheppard, storms into the billiard room where Flora Ackroyd was sharing possibly a private moment with Major Blunt. When the Inspector unsuccessfully questions her about the information she hides, Poirot takes over: “Mademoiselle,” he says, “the other day, when we sat round the table, I implored you to be frank with me. What one does not tell to Papa Poirot he finds out.”¹⁷⁷ This time, when Poirot asks her if she had stolen some money, she does, however, acquiesce, saying, “Mr Poirot is right. I took that money. I stole. I am a thief—yes, a common, vulgar little thief. Now you know! I am glad it came out” before providing an account of how her life, contrary to appearances, had been a treacherous one, always reliant on others for financial support, forcing her to beg and ingratiate herself to wealthier relations just for small amounts of money required to keep up appearances. However, even now Flora Ackroyd does not disclose the exact nature of her relationship with Ralph Patton, thereby being the only character in the novel who does not completely submit to the confessor. Given the way the (male) detective’s intrusive glare and/or patronizing concern seems to heighten when it comes to women, particularly young, “plucky” women, it is of some significance that Flora Ackroyd maintains at least a vestige of resistance to Poirot’s interrogations. Christie’s varied cast of two dimensional, parodic, stereotypical, comic characters

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 231.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 232.

spread across her innumerable stories presents every possible female “types” confounding feminists and critics as to her specific take on women and women’s role in the societies she presented.¹⁷⁸ For every generic gossipy old woman, vacuous young blonde, stiff old spinster, there is an equal number of discerning old ladies, brave enterprising young women, and intelligent young single mothers. Moreover, her stories also present plot developments which provide equal number of reversals and revelations that cause us to question our willing acceptance of the stereotypes she presents us with. While Flora Ackroyd must ultimately be reduced to a pool of hopeless tears before the might of the great Poirot, the fact that she quietly still holds on to one bit of information (even though Poirot does figure it out) makes her one of long list of women characters who are challenged by the detective’s patriarchal power and records a small yet notable victory of sorts.

After this, the remaining characters troop in too, one by one, to lay before Poirot the secrets and scandals of their lives, some more willingly than others. Miss Russel and Ursula Bourne, the housekeeper and the missing parlour maid, respectively, in fact come to Poirot after he has already made his mind up about the case (but not revealed so to the audience, of course), but Poirot nevertheless does not treat their disclosures with any less importance, being equally insistent and probing as he is with everyone else. Miss Russell “her iron self-control having broken at last” and her face rife with “terror and desperation,” within a matter of moments goes from insisting, “I am afraid I can’t help you at all” to begging Poirot to believe her story that the stranger that Poirot was asking her about was her long lost drug- addicted illegitimate son.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ See, for instance, Roberta S Klein, *Agatha Christie: A feminist reassessment* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), or Elizabeth Mehren, “The Mysteries of Agatha: How Could the Grand Dame of Crime Genre be So Forward-Looking But Backward, Too?” *L.A. Times*, September 13, 1990.

¹⁷⁹ *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, 245.

Poirot reassures her that he “will believe” but also states, “But I had to make you speak.”¹⁸⁰ Why Poirot *had to make her speak* is never explained and is something we are almost expected to take for granted. Again, when Miss Russell tells her story to Poirot, he claims that he already knows, saying, “Mademoiselle, it is the business of Hercule Poirot to know things,”¹⁸¹ thereby once again underlining that this particular confession scene was not quite necessary, at least as far as the actual murder plot was concerned.

Ursula Bourne, the missing parlour maid, shows up next, tricked by a deliberately misleading advertisement in the newspapers placed by the fiendish Poirot and discloses that she has been secretly married to the missing Ralph Paton this whole time (thus revealing what Flora Ackroyd had kept hidden). This confession takes place in the presence not only of Poirot and his “aide,” but also in the presence of the indomitable Caroline Sheppard. Poirot tells the hapless Ursula, distraught over having a secret husband be missing and be the prime suspect in the murder case, and ridden with guilt at the thought that it may have been her admonitions that had driven him away, “Be of good courage and trust Hercule Poirot”¹⁸² However, the most sage advice she receives that evening is probably from Caroline Shepard who instructs her to summarily stop beating herself up about any harsh comments she may have made to her coward of a husband who had been unwilling to make their union public: “Never worry about what you say to a man. They’re so conceited that they never believe you mean it if it’s unflattering.”¹⁸³ It might be worthwhile to mention here, that the shrewdly perspicacious and wise-cracking Caroline Sheppard foreshadows Miss Marple, Christie’s other famous detective, and one she created after she tired of the rather rigid Poirot. Caroline’s presence here, as an almost equal to

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 246.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid, 268.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 267.

Poirot shows Christie already gravitating towards a more instinctive female detective figure, who would not be afflicted with an unhealthy love for theatrics and an almost pathologic narcissism and lack of self reflexivity—something that is often associated in Christie with an egotistical masculinity.

The *Murder of Roger Ackroyd* then follows a plot structure, where, roughly from the middle point of the text, where Poirot publicly marks each and every individual in it as guilty, the narrative chugs along towards resolution aided by little more than what are essentially a series of confessions. W. H. Auden, in an essay entitled “The Guilty Vicarage,” describes how the detective novels depict not just one criminal who is guilty, but, by casting the light of suspicion on each and every member present in the closed society, marks each and every member as such.¹⁸⁴ Thereafter, the detective, by identifying the criminal and removing them from society absolves the guilt of the entire society. Auden goes on to say that the detective absolves not just the cast of characters in a given story of their guilt, but provides that same absolution and salvation to the *readers* of detective fiction as well. “The magical satisfaction [reading of the detective novel] provides is the illusion of being dissociated from the murderer... 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, a cure effected, not by me or my neighbors, but by the miraculous intervention of a genius from outside who removes guilt by giving knowledge of guilt.”¹⁸⁵ Guilt, according to Auden, is a subjective human feeling and he suspects “that the typical reader of detective stories is, ... a person who suffers from a sense of sin.... To have a sense of sin means to feel guilty at

¹⁸⁴ Auden, W.H. “The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, by an Addict,” *Harper’s Magazine*, May, 1948, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.harpers.org/archive/1948/05/0033206>.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

there being an ethical choice to make, a guilt which, however “good” I may become, remains unchanged. As St. Paul says: ‘Except I had known the law, I had not known sin.’”¹⁸⁶ Here, Auden perhaps unwittingly, points out some of the more covert, perhaps even unwitting functions of detective fiction, that is, to operate as a literary embodiment of a mechanism that assumes everyone to be guilty of something and thereby in need of subjecting to a confession.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, each of the chapters titled after the characters feature plot developments other than their “confessions” and as such the chapter titles signal the centrality of these characters’ confessions to the plot, inherently reducing each individual to their confessions. Each new confession made in chapters leading up to the climactic ones takes us literally closer to the denouement, the end of the mystery, the “truth.” So far, it would seem, that in this anxiety-ridden age, with wavering faith in human nature, a submission to a disciplinary force through regular confession is all the more important for maintaining whatever vestiges of faith in rationality and truth and human ability to master them remain.

The penultimate “confession” occurs in Poirot’s second “little reunion” scene where the Belgian sleuth, with his penchant for theatrics dramatically presents none other than prime suspect and missing-in-action-since-the-murder, Ralph Paton. On Poirot’s instruction, Paton discloses his cowardice, his secret marriage, et al thus bringing us that much closer to resolution, to “salvation” and a “state of grace.” With confessions from all major characters now complete, an all-important confession still remains—that of the murderer. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* has so far presented us with an odd situation where the moving finger of suspicion has rested on every one but not yet revealed the main culprit. Alost every character has been accused and redeemed of guilt but the all-important murderer is still elusive. Much to the shock and

¹⁸⁶ Ibid

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

amazement of all faithful readers of detective fiction of the time, it turns out that the murderer is none other than the figure we have come to identify with the loyal Watson, the affable Hastings, the one person on whose first- person account our entire access to this event depends—the narrator himself, Dr. Sheppard. In a text so repeatedly reiterating the importance of confession in order to unearth the truth, Christie throws the veracity of all confessions contained therein in jeopardy by demonstrating how easily the reader has been taken in by one, by having the entire story being ensconced in what turns out to be a cunningly misleading confession of crime. In the final chapters, interestingly entitled, “The Whole Truth” and “Nothing But the Truth,” Poirot, after unsuccessfully exhorting the criminal to confess, calls Sheppard to the side and reveals to him that he is aware that it is he who killed Roger Ackroyd, describing to him in characteristic detail exactly how he pulled the whole thing off. In a rather gruesome turn of events Poirot suggests that instead of taking the matter to the police, Sheppard take his own life, saying, “The truth goes to Inspector Raglan in the morning. But for the sake of your good sister, I am willing to give you the chance of another way out. There might be, for instance, an overdose of a sleeping draught. You comprehend me?”¹⁸⁸ Here we are presented with a rather uncomfortable scenario where the detective not only names the sinner and the sin, but also administers the punishment. Thus, Poirot’s injunction here, given under the guise of wanting to protect Caroline Sheppard from finding out that her brother is indeed a cold-blooded blackmailer and murderer, also serves the other purpose of maintaining his own status as sole knower of privileged information. As I shall discuss later, more often than not, Poirot’s accusations are famously circumstantial leading to almost convenient plotlines where the murderers either give themselves away or attempt to take their own lives. But it is in a handful of cases like these where we see Poirot taking such a direct role in the punishment of the culprit. Indeed, the fact that Poirot is a

¹⁸⁸ Agatha Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, 301.

much more “visible” and “obvious” source of power in the closed societies in which he operates, and indeed in the way he keeps repeatedly drawing our attention to it, betrays behind his pastoral front a vestige of a sovereign-like power. Instances like these, where he not only disciplines and punishes, but also executes (or at least, provides the tools for said execution) point at how close pastoral power is, after all, for all its emphasis on salvation and well-being of the soul, on a more sovereign, violent need to exert total control, reminiscent of older, more obvious forms of oppression.

In the final chapter, titled “Apologia” Sheppard reflects on the nature of his manuscript, admitting that he had begun it with the intention of publishing an account of the failure of the great Poirot, but somewhere down the line it turned into a revelation of his own guilt. Sheppard pauses to take pride in the way he manipulates the narrative, pointing out that he never technically lied, and in fact remained faithful to the events. The entire first-person narrative then, in retrospect, turns out to have been an elaborate exercise in equivocation, a carefully hidden confession of guilt. Towards the end of the novel, when Poirot comments on missing Hastings’ habit of documenting his cases, Sheppard submits the first twenty chapters of his document to Poirot for his perusal. Christie places this event—Hastings submitting twenty chapters of his first person account of events to Poirot—right among the series of “confession” chapters, thus sneaking in Sheppard’s confession in with that of the others’. Poirot’s reaction to the doctor’s manuscript was that it was “reticent” and that “it was strictly truthful as far as it went—but it did not go very far.”¹⁸⁹ This is exactly true of Christie’s text—especially in the first half, where it is a defiant, hidden in plain sight confession. The manner in which Christie handles this complicated narrative is by allowing Sheppard the character to lie to other characters, but by

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 286.

making Sheppard the first-person narrator be always technically truthful in what he admits, and granting him the discretion of editing his story where and how he sees fit. That is, while Sheppard repeatedly lies to everyone around him, he never once lies to the reader. Moreover, he takes liberties in focusing his attention on certain parts of the narrative but swiftly eliding over others.

For instance, one of the clues that seem to automatically eliminate Dr. Sheppard as a suspect is that he receives a phone call informing him of the murder and asking him to rush to the Ackroyd house. Here is how Sheppard tackles it:

It was a quarter past ten as we went up the stairs. I had just reached the top when the telephone rang in the hall below.

...

I ran down the stairs and took up the receiver.

“What?” I said. “*What?* Certainly, I’ll come at once.”¹⁹⁰

Here, Sheppard the character is putting up a show for the sake of his sister. The call is simply a fake call that he had arranged to be put through to his house. However, Sheppard the first-person narrator is being perfectly faithful to the sequence of events, and describing exactly what happened, simply choosing to describe the events from Caroline’s point-of-view, thereby omitting what was being actually said on the other end of the line. Thus, Sheppard the narrator makes his way through the text by never quite lying but by always managing to dodge the incriminating truth. Ironically, he does this precisely by being fastidious about his choice of words rather than being willfully careless.

When Sheppard reaches the murder scene and “discovers” the body, Sheppard the character sends the butler out of the way and removes the dictaphone (instrumental in his

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 48.

nefarious plan to escape suspicion of the crime) from the scene, but Sheppard the narrator/confessor simply says, “I did what little had to be done.”¹⁹¹ The readers—us or Poirot—are left to determine whether he is speaking in the capacity of a doctor examining a corpse and preparing it for the police or as a possible murder suspect looking to remove evidence. Describing his exchange with Inspector Davis, the local policeman, he says, “I narrated the whole events of the evening *as I have set them down here*.”¹⁹² [emphasis mine] Later on, when subjected to Poirot’s interrogation, he is equally deft. Enjoined by Flora Ackroyd to tell all to “the little man” Sheppard describes how he “plunged into a *careful narrative*, embodying all the facts I have *previously set down*.”¹⁹³ Thus, Sheppard shrewdly is truthful to the reader about how he is lying to Poirot. After all, all he tells us here is that he told Poirot exactly what he had told us so far. Nothing much at all. In as much as his manuscript stated, he was not lying at all. Only, what began as a confessional account which was meant to deliberately mask and obfuscate the truth, becomes a blatant admission of guilt because Poirot sees through it and instructs him to make his confession complete. Ultimately, this confession, also chillingly becomes a suicide note, as Shepard does indeed take his own life—or at least, that is what his own unreliable narrative tells us.

The ending of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* leaves us in a state of suspension. Read one way, the text could be a reiteration of Poirot’s refrain, that “the truth—it has a habit of getting out,” demonstrative of the detective’s ability to get to the bottom of things even when faced with such mind boggling levels of deceit. Read another way, it could be a shrewd parody of itself—of the arbitrariness of the reader’s faith in certain voices over others and of the form of the genre

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 50.

¹⁹² Ibid, 66.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 81.

itself, displaying just how suspect and subjective the first-person confessional narrative, as well as our response to it, can be. If *Five Little Pigs* asserts the supremacy of the confessor/detective figure by championing Poirot's truth-extracting powers by first demonstrating precisely how unreliable and contradictory confessional narratives can be, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* goes a step further by complicating our faith in the demonstration of the efficacy of the detective and the disciplinary powers he represents by having that contained *within* an unreliable narrative.

In *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?* Pierre Bayard conducts a close reading of the text only to reject the solution of Shepard as murderer and instead offers his own alternative solution, claiming Caroline Shepard as murderer, and pointing out what he sees as Poirot's delusions for focusing on unsubstantial clues and ignoring the obvious ones. Bayard's criticism of the detective being an implausible figure is true particularly of Poirot. The extent to which Christie sometimes makes Poirot almost seem like a parody of himself, with his every affect, his fastidiousness, his constant need for recognition and adulation, his genuine abhorrence for physical activity, his extreme discomfort in any unusual terrain, his cartoon like physical features, with every last detail exaggerated and held up for ridicule, one may wonder whether Christie herself was in on the joke, and at some level, whether we *are* meant to recognize the artifice that is Poirot, and thereby the artificiality of the sense of assurance and stability he represents.

Bayard argues that there are too many loopholes in the theory of Dr. Sheppard as murderer and surmises that if the good doctor ultimately accepted blame for the crime, it was to shield someone close to him, that is, his sister. Thus, Bayard's reading of the novel would indicate that we, the readers, have been fooled even by the final chapter, and the entire text, *including* the concluding "Apologia," is an exercise in deception, a deception that takes in the

detective as well. Now, whether or not one may agree with Bayard's alternative reading of the text, the point here is that *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* obviously opens itself up to such criticism because of its very nature that emphasizes its duplicity and artificiality. Bayard rightly describes the typical detective story plot as one, that up to end, allows the reader to participate in the act of investigation by presenting them with clues, encouraging them to make their own conclusions, varied as they may be, and the detective's task as depending on successfully eliminating the different possible solutions, and fixing on a single, true solution. Bayard's complaint is that sometimes the solution presented as *the* solution is difficult to accept due to its extreme artificiality and implausibility. Citing what he thinks are "massive improbabilities" in the text, Bayard insists that they "shatter the idea that with all the facts given on the final page, the text will come to a neat conclusion without the reader's participation. We see how this opens a door that will be difficult to close. In effect, if ellipses can be added anywhere—including within sentences—then what we were reading until now as a finite and coherent whole is merely an incomplete portion drawn from a much vaster text, and we run the risk of setting no limit on reading and interpretation infinitely multiplying the number of virtual solutions."¹⁹⁴

Indeed, the detective story, in the form popularized by the likes of Christie, has an odd habit of constantly pointing to the possibility of the multiple stories, multiple truths, but removing the cognitive threat posed by this multiplicity by having an almost not quite real, parodic, disciplinary figure mark one version as true, as legitimate, eschewing the others to the margins of the text. As such, the genre as a whole, vacillates constantly between anxiety and certainty, multiplicity and singularity, guilt and redemption. Each new story signals anxiety, multiplicity of truth, and presence of guilt. In each case, however, the anxious uncertainty

¹⁹⁴ Pierre Bayard, *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd? The Murderer who Eluded Hercule Poirot and Deceived Agatha Christie*, (New York: Fourth Estate, 2001), 40.

presented the terrifying possibility of multiple truths, multiple depositaries of guilt and sin, is banished in the end by restoring one version of events as “the” version of events, as the unwavering, unflinching truth. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, however, leaves open the anxiety posed by a world in which everybody is guilty and a possible criminal, an anxiety which is usually ultimately alleviated by the principal crime being tied down to one person in the end, and with no room left for alternative possibilities. Texts like *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* leaves us suspended in a cognitively dissonant abyss, causing us to re-evaluate our faith, not just in the detective, but even on that which he, and we, as readers, rely—confessional voices, truth, et al.

While *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* evokes multiple interpretations, the Golden Age detective’s preoccupation with a world which presents multiple criminals, multiple possible endings, and multiple truths is even apparent in the more standard Poirot stories, where our faith in the narrative is not so severely shaken and where indeed, Poirot seems to take us to a more reassuring, stable ending. This is most apparent in Poirot’s famous denouement scenes. These scenes, too, are in effect, confession scenes, for it is here that he draws the one criminal out of the many who is responsible for the worst of crimes, murder. It is here that he collapses the multiple into the one. These confession scenes are somewhat different from the ones we have encountered in the Holmes stories. They are seemingly public confessions, although in effect, still private ones. They are public of course in that this is no longer a private interaction between the murderer and the detective. However, they are private in that the “performance” of extracting confession is a closed one—the audience consists of the cast of the play itself. The multiplication of the number of people present in this final confessional scene is in keeping with the plot’s need to reduce a proliferation of guilty parties, a proliferation of possible endings, a proliferation of “truths” in to a much more stable singular one. A Poirot story may have a single

murder, but it implicates not just one, but everyone involved with the murderer in some way, presenting a closed society where any of them could have been the culprit, and as it turns out, where all of them have motive, opportunity, and in some cases, even intent. Thus, the final confession scene needs everyone to be present for in some ways it seeks to implicate *all* for some guilt or other, of some secret or other, however slight or negligible. It is a confession scene where a single crime has led to discovery of guilt and sin in everybody present, and as such, needs confession from all involved, before it can pin the actual crime on one, thereby absolving the others.

For instance, in *Five Little Pigs*, discussed above, Amyas Crale's killer turns out to be his young mistress, Elsa Greer. However, in the final "reunion" scene Poirot draws out the secrets and lies of almost all others present, one by one, accusing them of minor or major follies, even though some of them were not remotely connected to the murder. Thus, before we find out who the murderer is, Poirot draws out from Meredith Blake that as much he professes to care for Caroline Crale, he instead harbored feelings for Elsa; that Philip Blake's hatred for Caroline masked his desire for her, that Angela Warren had planned to tamper with Amyas Crale's drink, et al. Thus, by the time Poirot theatrically turns his attention to the actual murderer, Elsa Greer, we have already had lesser confessions of sorts from several others. These "reunion" scenes are the very quintessence of the Poirot stories (and interestingly, absent from most Miss Marple stories). Even before we learn who the murderer is we learn what everybody is hiding—who harbors romantic feelings for another, who secretly crept into a room to drug someone's tea, who was taking a walk near the murder scene at the time of the murder but did not come clean, who is not who s/he claims to be but someone's long lost son/daughter/niece/nephew, et al—it all comes out in these scenes, as Poirot builds up towards his main reveal.

However, with each new person Poirot confronts we also gradually can count the suspects down. As the secrets of each of the suspects unfold, we can also simultaneously count them out as the murderers; the multiple thus progressively reduces to the singular. The anxiety presented by a world where everyone may potentially be a criminal is gradually dissipated by each new confession that on one hand marks the confessant with their own major/minor sin or secret, and on the other, absolves them of the particular crime that the text is purporting to solve.

The way this confession acts itself out is also different from the Holmes stories. In a form that has rendered the confession of subjects suspect, it is no longer satisfactory to have the final truth about the self told in the tainted first-person voice. Thus, it is almost as if Poirot, in an act of ventriloquism, speaks *for* the confessant, reconstructing the thoughts, actions, and psychology of the criminal in extraordinary and sometimes even incredible detail; it is as if he is, in the absence of a spontaneous voluntary confession, imposing it *on* them, marking each and every member present there with their guilt, with their confessions. Thus, in the climactic scenes of *Five Little Pigs*, Poirot accurately describes the crime, almost as if he had witnessed it himself, or was himself the murderer even though he is investigating it years after the fact, and none of the original witnesses seem to have reliable, complete memories of the incidents surrounding it.

This is a particular trick that Poirot pulls off in novel after novel, and a glance at any Poirot story will demonstrate just how he amazes his audience by a very detailed reconstruction of often extremely elaborate crimes and the very precise kind of person who may have committed it. In *Evil Under the Sun*, for instance, he accurately reconstructs how the murderers planned a crime involving one of them masquerading as a dead body while impersonating another woman, resetting the watch of a possible witness, perpetuating a week-long ruse of martial animosity, removing incriminating evidences like tanning lotion bottles, taking baths at

unusual times, et al.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, in *Peril at End House*, he figures out, to the very last detail, how the murderer, the young Nick Buckley, staged an equally elaborate ruse, couching the murder of her cousin Maggie amidst a series of seeming attacks on her own life, so as to make it seem that the fatal attack on Maggie's life was a mistake, one intended for Nick, and thereby eliminating herself as a suspect. Of course, these versions of truth that Poirot unveils at the end are not seamless, no matter how much Poirot would have us believe to be so. His theatricality and pompous, overbearing arrogance only masks the fact that this version of truth is a composite one, created by piecing together smaller fragments, chipped off a vast number of narratives, all unreliable and contradictory. Poirot's theatrics at the end, then, go a long way in obscuring plot loopholes, unanswered questions, and forgotten threads.

These scenes, moreover, are theatrical performances calculated to extract the hidden truth by force, when not supplied by volition (Indeed in *Three Act Tragedy* this "reunion" scene actually takes place on a stage¹⁹⁶). The reactions to these imposed confessions are also suitably violent. The accused routinely display violent break downs, counter challenges to the detective to prove his evidence in court, accuse him of senility, make for Poirot's portly neck in a moment of unchecked anger at having being found out, make a hopeless attempt to run, or even attempt to take their own life—all of which, in the world of the Poirot stories are tantamount to admissions of guilt.

The "acceptance" of the confession imposed on them is indicated by a dramatic change in manner in the one "convicted" by Poirot—an innocent neglected wife (*Evil Under the Sun*¹⁹⁷), a

¹⁹⁵ Agatha Christie, *Evil Under the Sun* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2011).

¹⁹⁶ Agatha Christie, *Three Act Tragedy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2011).

¹⁹⁷ Agatha Christie, *Evil Under the Sun*.

defenseless orphaned heiress in fear for her life (*Peril at End House*¹⁹⁸), a doctor, friend and aide (*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*)—all turn out to be cold-hearted murderers, and transform, as it were, in front of our very eyes, their diminutive, good-natured persona melting away and revealing in their place fuming, snarling, teeth-gnashing villains who rage and rave against Poirot's impunity. Sniveling, passive wives, suddenly start spewing stern instructions to their husbands, admonishing them for their foolishness in getting caught (*Evil Under the Sun*), good natured, friendly young girls, victims of murder attempts themselves, suddenly start yelling in protest, screaming that everyone is surely mad (*Peril at End House*), and loyal sidekicks and verbose narrators, good village doctors, at that, turn cold and sarcastic in denial and defense. The confession then leads to a visible alteration; Not only does it reveal a true, hidden self, but it marks a change which is often even externally manifested in a drastic change in manner, speech, or facial expression. People shriek in defiance, make a mad dash for the door, or try to take their own lives. It is a transformation that gives the game away—simultaneously rejecting or resisting the confession imposed on them, challenging this authority who has so brazenly penetrated their carefully constructed image of the self, even while this outraged out of character resistance registers their admission of guilt and unwilling acceptance of the verdict.

That Mitchell and Webb Look aptly parodies this in a skit which takes on the many television and film adaptations of the Poirot novels by referring to “the evil voice” that the murderer seems to adopt as soon as s/he is accused.¹⁹⁹ The skit, set in one of Poirot's “reunion” scenes, begins with Poirot accusing a seemingly meek young woman of being the murderer, saying, “...and ze two shades of lipstick, were identical, which means, only YOU [dramatic

¹⁹⁸ Agatha Christie, *Peril at End House* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2011).

¹⁹⁹ David Mitchell and Robert Webb, “Poirot,” *That Mitchell and Webb Look*, Series 3, Episode 1, 11 June, 2009, accessed July 29, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9iQ1yU5Ops>.

finger pointing], Mademoiselle Brown, could have placed the cigarette case underneath the body.” Said Mademoiselle, mousy looking, sitting hunched in her chair, snivels, “surely Mousier Poirot, you are not accusing me of *murder*?” Poirot replies, “indeed I am, Mademoiselle, murder of ze most treacherous, and ze most ingenious.” After some more sniveling, however, the mousy creature suddenly throws her head up, thrusts her chest out and striking an arrogant pose, declares in a stereotypically vampy voice, “Yes!...Yes! I did kill Lord Carlington!...And I’d do it again!” This sudden transformation shocks all. “By God Poirot,” goes Hastings, stunned at how a thus far subservient woman morphs into an arrogant, defiant, seductress, “She is doing the evil voice!” Poirot replies, “I always know I have got zem when ze start doing ze evil voice,” going on to admit, “Once again, I had *no* evidence. It had been a *hell* of a week, to be honest with you. But, once zey have done ze evil voice, you know it is ze murderer!” When the accused tries to revert back to her sniveling, helpless woman routine Hastings goes, “No no, we all saw you do the evil voice. Only murderers do that,” with Poirot chiming in, “Too late, Mademoiselle, ze evil voice, it never lie. And besides, now you are smoking a cigarette out of an evil cigarette holder.” Sure enough, the camera cuts to her with her dress suddenly cut revealingly low and tight and to show that indeed, as Poirot points out, “she has become sexier, and now she has evil lipstick and her hair is growing evil.” After the murderer predictably tries to kiss her lover and shoots herself, Poirot deadpans, “It is better zis way. Some courts, ze do not accept ze evil voice as evidence.”²⁰⁰ The point here, however, facetiously made, is that this theatrically imposed confession brings about a visible transformation in the confessant, giver them away and acting as their acceptance of the verdict. If Poirot does indeed confess on behalf of his confessants, then his confessants complete, confirm these confessions by transforming into exactly who their confessor has described them to be.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

This theatrical scene, the public/private denouncement, imposition of confession, and rapid transformation of the accused as they resist/accept the verdict makes this confession scene akin to those described by Foucault as belonging to early modern Church practices of possession. The phenomenon of possession, according to Foucault, was a precursor to, or rather, an earlier version of the Church practice of confession. “The central character in phenomena of possession is the confessor, director, or guide,” which appears at Christianity’s “inner core,” when it “seeks to sink its mechanisms of control and its discursive obligations in the bodies of individuals.”²⁰¹ Foucault calls possession, “a spectacle of involuntary resistance to confession” and describes how, in possession, bodies “fell into convulsions, cursed their confessors, writhed at their feet...at once confessing and rejecting the direction of confessors, desiring and submitting to their confessor even while endangering them... torn between combating forces.”²⁰² Interestingly, possession, for Foucault, is also a problem of multiplicity. “The body of the possessed is a multiple body that is somehow volatilized and pulverized into a multiplicity of powers that confront each other.”²⁰³ The central task of the confessor in such a situation, then, is to theatrically reduce the multiplicity to a singularity, to dispel the multiple entities and collapse it into a rigid, singular entity. The task of the Golden Age detective is much the same—to be confronted with the terrifying possibility of multiplicity—of multiple answers, multiple truths, multiple culprits, leading to a cognitive chaos and anxiety, but to abate any such anxiety by pinning down blame and accusation finally and at least for the time being on one entity, thus expelling said anxiety and evil from that community. What the phenomenon of possession also underlines is that the impulse to confess is not something natural or intrinsic to human nature.

²⁰¹ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lecturés at the College de France, 1974-1975*, eds Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, tr. Graham Burchell, (Picador: New York, 2003), 206.

²⁰² Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault*, 3.

²⁰³ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal*, 207.

They are forced on us, imposed on us, may be fundamentally external to us and we may respond to it in complicated ways.

The phenomenon of possession featured in earlier versions of the pastoral confession, where the intrusive violence of the process is more apparent, and as such it is interesting that Poirot's methods tend to reference such scenes. Because of Christie's tendency, deliberate or otherwise, to parody the detective by exaggerating his traits to pompously grandiose proportions, we can sometimes detect the cracks in the pastoral façade in Poirot more evidently than in Holmes, which, in turn, point to its less than natural, much more violent underpinnings and histories. Poirot's penchant for the theatrical, his obsessive pursuit of the truth, his repeated insistence on the futility of resistance, and his megalomaniac belief in his own ability to hunt out the truth, are sometimes so comically overdone that they speak not only simply to the pastoral mechanism's insistence and dependence on total confession but also hint at the psychosis that drives such a power. Poirot, more than any other detective, perhaps, seems to be amusingly out of touch with, and hopelessly unreflective of his own obsession and quirks, of the masks he has on, and as such, reflects a certain pathology, a pathology obsessively seeking to find and narrate a singular, comprehensive truth, a truth it can access only through (often) forcible confession—a confession that, unfortunately, has been deemed unreliable by the very form of the texts he inhabits.

Thus, Christie's (conscious or otherwise) incorporation of modernist anxieties, skepticisms, and questionings of set notions of truth and narrative into detective fiction, creates a protagonist that unwittingly gives us a complex notion of truth, problematizing the notion of a single, comprehensive version of it, at any rate, and in subtle ways anticipates the more radical complications that were to be introduced by the postmodernists. By simultaneously inviting us to

marvel at and ridicule the figure who purports to lead us to it, at least in the Poirot stories, the Golden Age detective story begins to already question some of the very basic tenets of the genre.

CHAPTER 3

HARD-BOILED MISOGYNY: PHILIP MARLOWE AS THE CONFESSING DETECTIVE

I had concealed a murder and suppressed evidence for twenty-four hours, but I was still at large and had a five-hundred-dollar check coming. The smart thing for me to do was to take another drink and forget the whole mess.

--Philip Marlowe, *The Big Sleep*²⁰⁴

Concurrent to the rise of the “Golden Age” detective in England was that of another rather different kind of detective, across the pond, namely, the American “private eye” or the “hard-boiled dick.” The hard-boiled detective ethos was characterized by a tough-talking, terse, yet witty vernacular, a flagrant disregard for authority figures and institutions, and an autonomous, masculine sense of cynical yet sentimental alienation. Beginning to appear roughly in the 1920s, the popularity of the genre spanned all the way to the 1950s and beyond and possibly found its finest expressions in the works of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Emerging as it did in the 1920s, it had a rather complex historical, socio-economic, and cultural background. Indeed, Hammett and Chandler, both started their careers writing pulp fiction for *Black Mask* the same year that the United States declared Prohibition (1919)—“the most misguided piece of legislature of the American twentieth century,” which resulted into “turning hundreds of thousands of ordinary working and middle-class Americans into criminals and to create a society in which crime syndicates flourished in an effort to cater to an appetite that could not be contained.”²⁰⁵ Hammett’s first novel-length work, *Red Harvest*, appeared the same year as the Wall Street Crash (1929) which would soon after lead to the Great Depression. All of this of course only added to the tremendous social upheavals of the two World Wars. Thus hard-boiled

²⁰⁴ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*.

²⁰⁵ Dennis Porter, “Private Eye,” *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, 96.

fiction emerged out of a rather tumultuous urban American backdrop where “urban blight, corrupt political machines, and de facto disenfranchisement of significant sections of the population through graft and influence-peddling were part of the background in which crime of a new and organized kind had become endemic.”²⁰⁶ As Dennis Porter puts it, “The time was ripe for the emergence in a popular literary genre of a disabused, anti-authoritarian, muckraking hero, who...confronted crime and corruption on the increasingly unlovely streets of modern urban America.”²⁰⁷ The hard-boiled hero thus is one who necessarily must assume a masculine, alienated tough guy stance, since to be associated with the society, law, or the state, was no longer automatically associated with the morally lawful and just. There was therefore, more than ever before, a perceived need of a “private eye”—a single, autonomous surveillance system with its independent moral and ideological system, a vigilante force, that would, martyr like, dedicate itself to standing up against corruption and moral decrepitude even while having to immerse itself in the filth it sought to eradicate. Hard-boiled authors then, tried to infuse their work with a purported realism, since this hero was decidedly and often consciously on a mission of social reform—indeed their austere, tough lifestyle indicated the sacrifices, the almost martyr-like rejection of the comforts of a normative, comfortable existence, and the loftiness of their purposes, even if constantly undercut by a cynical, despairing self-awareness of the eternal futility of their project.

One of the most significant contributions of this genre, at least stylistically, to the development of crime fiction was a unique first-person narrative. As Walton and Jones say in *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*, “The hard-boiled detective novel is conventionally differentiated from other variants of the mystery story not just by its

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 96.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 97.

vernacular style, its professional investigator, and its broadly individualist and subjective perspective, but perhaps most strikingly, by its distinctive (though not exclusive) use of the first-person narrative voice of the investigator: the first-person narration formally unites these other elements, producing a ‘signature effect’ of the genre.”²⁰⁸ While not all hard-boiled fiction was necessarily written in the first-person voice, it was definitely one that was made popular by the genre. The hard-boiled detective’s first-person narrative (a direct descendant of Hemmingway’s pithy style—which was meant to convey an urban vernacular realism, directed against what it saw as the excesses and artificialities of a capitalist, wealth-obsessed culture) also proved to be for the detective often its best and only defense against his many opponents. Whether Marlowe is getting kicked around, punched in the stomach, or spat upon, and whether or not he can throw one back, he always has the last word—a sardonic one liner, a flip remark, or an ironic observation, directed either at his adversary or shared with his readers, that helps him at least keep up an appearance of superiority, to mask an injured ego, and convey an air of general unaffectedness. The hard boiled detective’s “I” then, is very much a major crutch to his image of a carefully cultivated toughness that protects him in his decidedly disenfranchised position.

The construction of the first-person voiced narrator that speaks in this cynical urban vernacular has been considered by the proponents of the genre to be a significant step in their search of this authenticity that they felt was so severely lacking from the society it found itself in and in the other popular literature of its time. Thus, while there have been exceptions to the norm, what the “I” stands for is a self-proclaimed loner who has chosen his profession out of a certain lofty, though cynical sense of honour and desire to right wrongs in the society he lives in. His choice of profession coupled with his personal pride entails that he remain poor and

²⁰⁸ Pricilla L Walton and Manina Jones, *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard Boiled Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 149-150.

unsuccessful and above all unattached, operating out of a dingy office in a run-down building, spending his spare time contemplating his life moodily in his bachelor apartment as he makes his cup of coffee or takes a drag of his solitary cigarette. Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, for instance—the private detective that I shall be focusing my attention on in this chapter—is constantly moving from one cheap rented apartment to another, thus not even settling in any one domesticated space for too long. In spite of his cynicism, he doggedly sticks to his futile mission, sometimes without compensation and out of his own sense of duty to a certain code, a certain ideology.

At a certain level, this affords the hard boiled hero an opportunity to return the intrusive gaze of the police, the state, and the law, to direct his narrative scrutiny accusingly towards the powers that be, the socially elite and powerful. This adoption of the “I” narrative by the hard-boiled detective also lends his narrative a more personal, direct tone, which is only fitting, given the hard-boiled detective's often extremely personal and intimate involvement in the cases he sets out to solve. More often than not, he gets involved in his cases in more than just a professional capacity, even becoming complicit in certain crimes and cover ups. Poirot's (and other classical detective's) introduction into a crime scene happened more often than not *after* the murder had already occurred. Thus, they were often engaged in reconstructing a crime that happened in the mostly immediate past, that is, prior to their entrance into the *mise-en-scène*. The crime/crimes in the hard boiled world, occurs as the detective moves along in the story, sometimes in front of his eyes, in spite or even because of his presence.

The private “eye” of the detective describes events as it sees them unfold before him, lending his stories a much more immediate, urgent tone. A major difference in this variety of crime fiction is where one can discover the presence of “guilt” and as it turns out, in hard-boiled

fiction, every now and then, it can be traced within the detective himself. Peter J Rabinowitz, in an essay on *The Maltese Falcon*, points out that detective fiction can be classified “according to the location of the guilt they uncover” going on to say that in Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*, “a key discovery is the discovery of the detective’s own guilt.”²⁰⁹ This makes the “I” of the hard-boiled detective an inherently confessional “I” that is supposedly revealing itself even as it is subjecting others to its vigilante gaze. The hard-boiled confessional voice presents itself as both the subject and object of its narration. Jameson, in an essay on Raymond Chandler, points out that his works have “not one form, but two, an objective form and a subjective one, the rigid external structure of the detective story on the one hand, and a more personal, distinctive, rhythm of events on the other.”²¹⁰ The “I” of the detective/narrator is charged with the authority of both the “objective” story of the crime, as well as the “subjective” story of the detective himself, making him a particularly complex narrator/confessor. The detective’s complicity in the crimes he describes or attempts to prevent/avenge coupled with the seemingly frank, direct, first-person voice in which he narrates his own failings, make his narrative, in effect, a confessional narrative. This chapter reads the detective’s first person narrative as an essentially confessional voice, one that wittingly or otherwise narrates its own collusion with the system it fights against.

While the hard-boiled detective’s narrative scrutiny purports to focus on the ills and corruption of the society it sees around it, it is focused most closely on women, particularly on the figure of the “femme fatale.” As Jopi Nyman, in *Men Alone: Masculinity, Individualism and Hard-Boiled Fiction* declares, that since “hard boiled fiction appears to be a form of fantasy that

²⁰⁹ Peter J Rabinowitz, “‘How did you know he licked his lips?’: Second Person Knowledge and First Person Power in *The Maltese Falcon*,” accessed July 29, 2013

<https://ohiostatepress.org/Books/Complete%20PDFs/Phelan%20Understanding/08.pdf>.

²¹⁰ Frederic Jameson, “On Raymond Chandler,” *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, ed. J.K. Van Dover, (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 82.

searches for a new or better space where the dream of power could be true” and “projects a fantasy of the autonomous and powerful masculine subject, a fantasy that is shown to be impossible to achieve but always aimed at in the world of the novels,” it is especially important for the hard-boiled hero to be “denied a better world, love, and relationships because they threaten his autonomy and masculine authority.”²¹¹ This need to repudiate anything that is perceived as feminine be it in the form of relationship, a marriage, or sex, which the hard-boiled hero seems to almost see as essential in order to maintain its alienated autonomous identity, ends up, more often than not, articulating itself as a deep-seated misogyny, betraying a deeper anxiety and vulnerability and a severely injured and insecure rather than a self-assured, confident masculinity. Indeed, for all its purported realism the kind of stylish, autonomous masculinity this genre presented was also a projected fantasy of masculine control in the face of increasing social, cultural, and economic odds.

The hard-boiled private eye’s ueber masculine stance is also a response to the shifting positions of women and gender roles in a changing society. The Depression and World Wars also led to loss of jobs and positions for hundreds of men, often causing them to give up their position as the primary bread winner and head of household. The World Wars, for instance, allowed many more women into the public sphere than ever before, a privilege they were not keen to give up in spite of deep public pressure on them to return to their more traditional roles once the Wars ended. Hard-boiled fiction was being written at a time of tremendous collective masculine anxiety regarding shifting gender roles at home as well as in the work space. Karen Anderson, in her chapter on “The Great Depression and World War II,” describes how, while the Great Depression removed a lot of men as the principal earner of the family, the war years brought a

²¹¹ Jopi Nyman, *Men Alone: Masculinity, Individualism and Hard-Boiled Fiction*, (Atlanta: Costerus, 1997), 7.

return of prosperity but also created a huge demand for women in unionized, well-paid jobs, due to the shortage of men. These altered gender roles created strains on families and relationships between men and women in general which were further exacerbated when women were told implicitly or explicitly through changes in federal regulations, advertising campaigns, union leadership, et al, that their war time access to traditionally masculine roles were anomalous and that they should resume their more stereotypical roles as mothers and wives.²¹² The hard-boiled ethos then emerged out of a context of pervasive cultural anxieties surrounding women as much as it did in response to the widespread corruption and greed it saw around it. Anderson's take on the role of women in the Depression and inter-war years is corroborated by Ginnelle Snorka who, in "The Evolution of the Femme Fatale: Female Archetypes from Poe to Chandler," connects it to the hard-boiled ideology, saying:

The years during and following World War I were ones that upset the domestic positions of women. During the war, women were needed to work in spheres that had previously only been occupied by men, especially industrial work. This drastically altered the expectations of women as homemakers and men as breadwinners. With the end of the war and the return of the soldiers, women did not want to quietly go back into the home. This ultimately led to confusion about the roles of women in society and the fight for women's suffrage. In 1920, the 19th amendment was finally passed, granting women a right they had not previously possessed: the right to vote. The question of how women were to fit into society was one that permeated the culture of the United States, and detective fiction is no exception. *Red Harvest*, *The Maltese Falcon*, and *The Big Sleep*, published in 1929, 1930, and 1939 respectively, were written in the middle of this "woman question."²¹³

If the hard boiled tale is a fantasy, a romance, because of the "noble" ideals of the central adventurer hero, it is equally a fantasy because it allowed the male reader to play out these anxieties by the removal of the threatening woman from the narrative. The hard-boiled "I"/ "eye"

²¹² Karen Anderson, "The Great Depression and World War II," *The Companion to American Women's History*, ed. Nancy Hewitt (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 366-381.

²¹³ Ginnelle Snorka, "The Evolution of the Femme Fatale: Female Archetypes from Poe to Chandler," accessed July 29, 2013, http://ginnellesroka.weebly.com/uploads/1/1/2/0/11202401/detective_fiction-femme_fatale.pdf.

was at least partly a defensive, injured reaction to a perceived blow to its masculine ego and sense of self-worth—injured not only by Depression and post-war economic conditions, but by having to compete with what had so far been perceived as a lesser, weaker “other” that had thus far afforded an opportunity for offering protection and patronage rather than posing a challenge both at domestic and work spaces.

It is the female body that becomes the screen onto which the hard boiled hero projects its most deep-seated anxieties. The female body becomes the site of desire as well as danger—a symbol of deep temptation and therefore a danger to the integrity of its stoic masculinity—that it must always avoid. The female body therefore becomes a screen onto which all of the corruption, greed, and excesses that the hard-boiled detective sees everywhere might be projected. In doing so, in locating in the feminine body all that it purports to fight against, the hard-boiled male finds justification to remove, control, contain, and dominate the feminine, thereby simultaneously safeguarding his masculine self-sufficiency.

The hard-boiled detective’s narrative voice, his reliance on a terse urban machismo, must therefore be studied as much in conjecture of his alienated idealism as well as his injured masculinity/sexism. In this chapter, I look at how the confessional narrative “I” of the hard-boiled hero conflates with the all-seeing, all-describing “eye” of the P.I to curious effects. The “I” continually seeks to disavow and repudiate certain feminine, sexualized others that the narrative “eye” can’t help but scrutinize and consume. What transpires then, in a genre and narrative that is geared towards a kind of social reform that emerged as a necessary if only literary response to social evils and corruption, is an implicit if not explicit promotion and sanction of a misogynistic masculinity as a remedy to the cultural and moral decrepitude. In

advocating a kind of hard masculinity as an antidote to prevalent social problems it also ended up normalizing a kind of violent sexism that it saw not only as inevitable but also necessary.

Thus, as I seek to argue and demonstrate in this chapter, the confessional voice of the hard-boiled detective is very much one that not only reveals itself, but whose representation of the self is inherently dependent on it turning its gaze outwards, projecting them onto threatening others, particularly women, that it must describe/deny and construct/contain. The hard-boiled hero's depiction of itself is reliant as much on its presentation of an idealistic autonomous lifestyle as it is on the description and control of effeminate, feminine others. In this, this confessional voice seeks to control, contain, discipline as much as it seeks to reveal itself. It depicts how the confessional voice can be used to not just self-knowing, self-revealing ends, but equally to self-evasive ends. Moreover, by a re-reading of Raymond Chandler's penultimate Marlowe novel, *The Long Goodbye*, I seek to argue that while the hard-boiled hero himself as well as critics of the genre sees the repudiation and removal of the feminine as a necessary fallout of the hard-boiled ideology, as vital to the hard-boiled alienated stance, in fact, it is precisely that which becomes this detective's biggest weakness, obscuring rather than enhancing the detective's main project—to get to the “truth.” I read *The Long Goodbye* as a work that visibly struggles to locate the corruption and sin it sees in the novel on the figure of the femme fatale, and even when it does, it does so tentatively at best, with the possibility of the failure of the detective's quest looming large over the text.

However, the hard-boiled detective's narrative voice is a great example how the “I” narrative, earlier, always the confessant to a disciplinary confessor, begins to operate as a disciplinary mechanism itself. The hard-boiled narrative “implies that the voyeuristic eye/ I of

the private eye's investigation is a site of power too—the power of knowledge, the power of articulation, and the power of the gaze.”²¹⁴

The Hard-Boiled Detective and The Triple Petunia Murder Case

The hard-boiled genre's sometimes obsessive need to protect and distance itself from anything it perceived as effete can be seen in the fact that it rather self-consciously styled itself as a response to the golden age style of detective fiction. In his seminal essay on the hard-boiled hero, “The Simple Art of Murder,” Raymond Chandler takes pains to distinguish the genre from those written by the likes of Agatha Christie or Dorothy L Sayers and attributes their success to “old ladies” who “jostle each other at the mystery shelf to grab off some item of the same vintage with such a title as *The Triple Petunia Murder Case*.”²¹⁵ It shows a marked disdain to what it supposes to be the weakness of the effete detective for caring about “exactly what time the second gardener potted the prize-winning tea-rose begonia” in “Cheesecake Manor.”²¹⁶ For Chandler, this effete nature makes for an inherently unrealistic and “fake” kind of fiction and he champions instead the “realistic”, gritty style of the hard-boiled hero.²¹⁷

Chandler also associates realism to a special kind “man.” The gender specificity of Chandler's description of the hard-boiled hero is rather evident in his essay:

He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money

²¹⁴ Pricilla L Walton and Manina Jones, *Detective Agency*, 157.

²¹⁵ Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder,” In *The Simple Art of Murder*, ed. Raymond Chandler (New York: Random House, 1950), accessed July 26, 201, http://lucite.org/lucite/archive/fiction_-chandler/chandler,%20raymond%20-%20philip%20marlowe%20-%20the%20simple%20art%20of%20murder.pdf

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. He talks as the man of his age talks—that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. The story is this man's adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure.²¹⁸

“Truth”, then, particularly the difficult to locate “hidden truth” is here quite distinctly linked to the “man” and his masculinity.

In the essay, Chandler goes on to align realism as a style itself with a certain kind of masculinity that must disparage and reject all that it sees as effete and feminine and therefore artificial. For Chandler, the all-divulging as well as all-seeing “I” of the hard-boiled hero was to bring to the quest of truth a certain kind of masculine vigor, a street-smart machismo, that would distinguish itself as vehemently as possible from the perceived femininity of the classical detective. As Walton and Jones put it, “When Chandler considered how Hammett's writing recovers and reshapes ‘the speech of common men,’ the gender specificity of his noun needed no emphasis.”²¹⁹ Chandler's repeated emphases on depicting a “real” voice through his hard-boiled hero in “The Simple Art of Murder” is intrinsically entwined with his anxious need to separate that figure from what he perceives are the effete heroes of classical detective fiction meant for “old ladies” rather than “real men.” Walton and Jones point out how critics have unproblematically accepted this conflation of the purportedly “real” with the aggressively masculine, like Kenneth Warpole, who “recognizes how the kind of life [the hard-boiled detectives] represent might alienate women readers” but justifies it by saying “it is still important to defend, critically, vernacular realism because of its narrative strength and popular accessibility to everyday life.”²²⁰ As Walton and Jones point out, “Yet it is also important to understand that

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Priscilla L Walton and Manina Jones, *Detective Agency*, 121.

²²⁰ Kenneth Warpole, quoted by Walton and Jones in *Detective Agency*, 121.

the language of vernacular realism suggested that ‘everyday life’—in effect, reality itself—was a masculine space.”²²¹

Philip Marlowe: Knight in Shining Trench Coat

The narrative voice Chandler creates for Philip Marlowe is also distinctive from that of other hard-boiled heroes in that it is imbued with a kind of sensitivity which is at odds with its cynical disinterest. This could be associated with Marlowe’s inability, in many of his cases, to affect any real change in the crime-ridden world he travels through. Several critics have assigned a certain existential ennui to Marlowe on account of the strain of self-reflective sadness that runs through several of his novels in spite of his terse, laconic, tough-guy sense of humour. In the end of his very first novel, *The Big Sleep* Marlowe retrospectively reflects on the course of events that led him to kill a man (albeit, a hit man), brutally beat up another, fail to “rescue” a damsel in distress from her evil mob-boss husband, and enter into deals with gangsters to cover up murders (to spare the feelings of a dying old man), saying, “me, I was part of the nastiness now.”²²² Marlowe takes a somewhat martyr-like comfort from the knowledge that he could spare a fellow man from the pain that would come from knowing truth, the truth that he may therefore endure alone. Ernest Fontana, in “Chivalry and Modernity in Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*,” reads the first Marlowe novel as a subverted romance and calls it “the written retrospective narrative of this subversion [of romance]” which, according to him, makes the story essentially a “confessional narrative.”²²³ As I shall argue later, this “confessional” sense of failure will be much stronger, and much less mitigated by nobler pretensions in the end of *The Long Goodbye*.

²²¹ Priscilla L. Walton and Manina Jones, *Detective Agency*, 124.

²²² Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*.

²²³ Ernest Fontana, “Chivalry and Modernity in Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*,” *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, ed. J.K. Van Dover, 165.

Marlowe's limited control over his surroundings in spite of his deliberate heroism, his frequent moralizing, and his dogged decisions to stay in a low-paying, tough, and potentially fatal job for the sake of an inexplicable, irrational devotion to his cause, has made it popular among critics to view him as a tragic hero of sorts, as a modern day knight with lofty values reminiscent of an earlier glorious age no longer applicable in the post-apocalyptic dystopian urban-scape he now inhabits. This is in keeping with a strain of criticism which sees hard-boiled heroes in general as "tragic overreachers who are betrayed by their dreams."²²⁴ For Ernest Fontana, Marlowe's narrative is indeed a confessional narrative, but not due to any shortcoming in the "modern knight" but because "the ideal of chivalry that Marlowe has attempted to live by is no longer relevant to the exigencies of personal survival in a world in which knighthood has been appropriated and debased by "'fags' ...and hoods."²²⁵ Similarly, Cawelti, in *Adventure, Mystery, Romance*, reads hard-boiled detective stories, particularly those featuring Marlowe, as a reversed romance where "Chandler's characterisation suggests that though the hard-boiled detective's world bears some resemblance to the bitter, godless universe of writers like Crane, Dreiser, and Hemmingway, his personal qualities also bear more than a little resemblance to the chivalrous knights of Sir Walter Scott," and while this modern-day knight is "not above seducing, beating, and even, on occasion shooting members of the opposite sex," he only metes out such behaviour "for those who have *gone bad*" and points out that "towards *good girls* his attitude is as *chaste as a Victorian father*"²²⁶ (emphasis mine). Cawelti sees the hard-boiled hero, and particularly Chandler's Marlowe, as a "marginal man," who in spite of being "a loner who must end his cases by returning to his dusty office in the broken-down office building," has his "unsullied isolation and failure maintain the purity of his stance as a man of honour in a false

²²⁴ Jopi Nyman, *Men Alone: Masculinity, Individualism, and Hard-Boiled Fiction*, 4.

²²⁵ Ernest Fontana, "Chivalry and Modernity in Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*", 164.

²²⁶ John G Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, Romance* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 150.

society,”²²⁷ as a “reluctant knight” who “seeks a grail, a moral justice transcending the tawdry and corrupt routines of society’s legality.”²²⁸ Thus for an overwhelming number of critics, Marlowe represents a tragic heroic, martyr like figure who had sacrificed his life to an almost futile yet noble cause.

The cue to read Marlowe as a knight-like hero was one provided by Chandler himself. In the very first scene of the very first Marlowe novel the detective begins the narration by aligning himself to a chivalrous knight trying to save a damsel in distress. As he stands waiting to be announced in the ornate living room in the palatial home of his client, General Sternwood, he takes in every detail of his surroundings with the trained eye of the professional sleuth:

The main hallway of the Sternwood place was two stories high. Over the entrance doors, which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants, there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn’t have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed the vizor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him.²²⁹

This alignment of Marlowe with the “knight” figure, places him squarely from the start as a protector of the weak. It also connotes a certain kind of chivalric code of honor and chastity when it comes to women, who may be rescued, admonished, but never become an excuse for straying from the path of knightly ideal. Simultaneously, it conjures up the duality and misogyny inherent in the chivalric code where woman was always object, fantasy, and even ideal, but hardly ever an entity with any real agency.

**“Let’s have, say, a full account of your movements since ten P.M. last night. I mean full”:
Marlowe on the receiving end**

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid, 181.

²²⁹ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*.

However, the Marlowe narrative is also complicated by the loss of real power by the knight figure itself, that is, Marlowe. From the very beginning, with the Marlowe novels, it is very clear that part of the “realism” of his situation is that he no longer even seems to have the automatic control or authority over the people, objects, and circumstances he finds himself surrounded by. While hapless men and women sought out Holmes in his living quarters, the Marlowe novels often begin with the detective calling on a prospective client having been summoned there, and Marlowe treats his readers to humorous accounts of the descriptions of the gaudy rooms he finds himself in:

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills. I was wearing my powder-blue suit, with dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars.²³⁰

Marlowe may be a knight, but he is a knight, who, by dint of the peculiar conditions of his particular situation must make house calls, worry about where his next drink or smoke will come from, and accept minor jobs for minimal pay, just to stay afloat.

Every so often in his encounters with clients it is Marlowe seemingly being interrogated, rather than the other way around, at least initially. For instance, when Marlowe meets General Sternwood at his greenhouse at the beginning of *The Big Sleep* it is the General barking questions to Marlowe, instead of Marlowe subjecting the General to a session of interrogation; it is the General assigning Marlowe the case, letting him know what is expected of him, what he can or can't do.²³¹ At other times, interrogation sessions prove far more damaging for Marlowe.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

In *The Long Goodbye*, for instance, very early on in the novel, Marlowe comes home to find two cops waiting in his apartment ready to question him about his friend. This is then a far cry from detectives like Holmes and Poirot who decidedly controlled the interrogation process as the confessor rather than confessant. Marlowe approaches these scenes of confrontation/confession decidedly from the position of the disempowered, from below. In such situations, Marlowe uses his machismo, his rugged language, and his tough guy wit to re-establish his authority. Thus, even when being questioned by General Sternwood, he lets him know that he “tests very high in insubordination.”²³² With the police he is more directly and deliberately confrontational. For instance, when he is being questioned in his apartment in *The Long Goodbye* he turns the table on them, questioning their right to question:

I got up slowly and went over to the bookshelves. I took down the bound copy of the California Penal Code. I held it out to Dayton.

“Would you kindly find me the section that says I have to answer the questions?”

...He said: “Every citizen has to co-operate with the police. In all ways, even by physical action, and especially by answering any questions of a non-incriminating nature the police think it necessary to ask.” His voice saying this was hard and bright and smooth.

“It works out that way,” I said. “Mostly by a process of direct or indirect intimidation. In law no such obligation exists. Nobody has to tell the police anything, any time, anywhere.”²³³

He pays dearly for it, sometimes. In this case, he is hauled to the cells and repeatedly tortured for days, with the police detectives spitting on him, beating him up, and repeatedly grilling him to make him yield to their questions and reveal what he knows about Terry Lennox’s disappearance. A Captain Gregorious tells a handcuffed Marlowe, “In here, mister, a dick license don’t mean any more than calling card. Now let’s have your statement, verbal at first. We’ll take

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* (New York: Random House, 1992), Kindle Edition.

it down later. Make it complete. Let's have, say, a full account of your movements since ten P.M. last night. I mean full."²³⁴ This recalls Holmes, commanding his client to lay before him everything, not leaving put any detail. However, in this case, it is the detective who is at the receiving end of such commands. Later in the cell Marlowe is once again at the receiving end of the disciplinary gaze.

In the corner of the cell block there may be a second steel door that leads to the show-up box. One of its walls is wire mesh painted black. On the back wall are ruled lines for height. Overhead are floodlights. You go in there in the morning as a rule, just before the night captain goes off duty. You stand against the measuring lines and the lights glare at you and there is no light behind the wire mesh. But plenty of people are out there: cops, detectives, citizens who have been robbed or assaulted or swindled or kicked out of their cars at gun point or conned out of their life savings. You don't see or hear them. You hear the voice of the night captain. You receive him loud and clear. He puts you through your paces as if you were a performing dog. He is tired and cynical and competent. He is the stage manager of a play that has had the longest run in history, but it no longer interests him.²³⁵

If this were Dickens's Rat's Castle or a "house of Irish Poores" in Victorian London, it would probably have been Inspector Field behind the light, keeping an eye on the seedier side of London, casting the harsh glare of his lamp on the wretched creatures who lie heaped on one another, "like maggots on cheese" and who "submit [themselves] to be scrutinized and fades away into the darkness" knowing "before the power of the law, the power of superior sense—for common thieves are fools besides these men—and the power of a perfect mastery of their character, they have no hope of escape."²³⁶

Marlowe, however, does no simply submit. Faced with the menacing Sergeant, with his hands tightly handcuffed and his face beaten black and blue, Marlowe, rather than speak and go free, retorts: "You probably didn't intend it, but you've done me a favor....You've solved a

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Charles Dickens, "The Detective Police," *Reprinted Pieces*.

problem for me. No man likes to betray a friend but I wouldn't betray an enemy into your hands. You're not only a gorilla, you're an incompetent. You don't know how to operate a simple investigation. I was balanced on a knife edge and you could have swung me either way. But you had to abuse me, throw coffee in my face, and use your fists on me when I was in a spot where all I could do was take it. From now on I wouldn't tell you the time by the clock on your own wall."²³⁷ If Marlowe is not the one to throw the last (or first) punch, he makes sure he is always the one who has the last word. And in doing so, he pulls himself back up in a position of at least moral superiority over his adversaries.

While Marlowe may not open up to the cops, he frequently speaks to his readers about his life, his choices, his opinions, constructing for us a clear image of the kind of man he is. And he reminds us from time to time that he is a man who has consciously and deliberately chosen a lifestyle that pays very few material rewards:

The other part of me wanted to get out and stay out, but this was the part I never listened to. Because if I ever had I would have stayed in the town where I was born and worked in the hardware store and married the boss's daughter and had five kids and read them the funny paper on Sunday morning and smacked their heads when they got out of line and squabbled with the wife about how much spending money they were to get and what programs they could have on the radio or TV set. I might even have got rich-small-town rich, an eight-room house, two cars in the garage, chicken every Sunday and the Reader's Digest on the living room table, the wife with a cast iron permanent and me with a brain like a sack of Portland cement. You take it, friend, I'll take -the big sordid dirty crooked city.²³⁸

Marlowe's voice—his language, his wit, his tone—whether directly addressing his many adversaries or the reader, thus also becomes his chief ally in the stories. It also seemingly collapses the distance between the detective and the reader, as we not only are privy to his tough-guy wisecrack-filled exchanges with the police, gangsters, and seductive temptresses, but also to

²³⁷ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*.

²³⁸ Ibid

his intimate moments of self-reflection back in his apartment. The hard-boiled hero's first person narrative is at its confessional best when we note how it adopts a softer, more vulnerable, self-reflective tone when it addresses itself/us in its moments of solitude:

I lay on my back on a bed in a waterfront hotel and waited for it to get dark. It was a small front room with a hard bed and a mattress slightly thicker than the cotton blanket that covered it. A spring underneath me was broken and stuck into the left side of my back. I lay there and let it prod me.

...

It got darker. I thought; and thought in my mind moved with a kind of sluggish stealthiness, as if it was being watched by bitter and sadistic eyes. I thought of dead eyes looking at a moonless sky, with black blood at the corners of the mouths beneath them.

...

I thought of lots of things. It got darker. The glare of the red neon sign spread farther and farther across the ceiling. I sat up on the bed and put my feet on the floor and rubbed the back of my neck.

I got up on my feet and went over to the bowl in the corner and threw cold water on my face. After a little while I felt a little better, but very little. I needed a drink, I needed a lot of life insurance, I needed a vacation, I needed a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun. I put them on and went out of the room.²³⁹

Even as Marlowe lets us travel along with him as his mind wanders he brings this subjective reverie firmly back on objective grounds. He thought a lot of things—but ultimately all he wants us to focus on, or what he wants us to see him focusing on is the very absolutely tangible and irrefutable: what he is and what he has—his coat, his hat, his gun, that is, the three markers of his hard-boiled detective-ness.

Women and Furniture: The Onslaught of Marlowe's Narrative Eye

This constant back and forth in the hard-boiled narrative voice—sometimes revelatory, sometimes sentimental, and sometimes doggedly hyper-masculine, is what makes his narrative

²³⁹ Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely*.

confessional voice so tricky and evasive. Stephen Knight says, “This narrative voice is at once the greatest aid and the worst impediment of our getting to the heart of Marlowe’s character.”²⁴⁰ If traditionally, in detective fiction, the power and authority has belonged not to the confessing voice but to the voice it is confessing to, Marlowe’s narrative voice is an example of how the confessing voice itself can exert a control over the texts and its subjects. It can control how it creates an image of its “others” for us, as much as it can create its own image through his self-narration. As it so happens, “what we, as readers, ‘see’ in a hard boiled story is always filtered through the detective’s perception.”²⁴¹ For all of the purported “realness” of the hard-boiled narrative, the world Marlowe describes to us is riddled by his own deep-seated biases and anxieties. Nowhere is that more apparent than in his descriptions of women and characters he sees as women-like.

Bethany Ogdon, in “Hard Boiled Ideology,” points out that “the largest amount of space in the hard-boiled detective story is devoted to description, not action,”²⁴² and this is possibly truer of the Chandler stories than that of any other author writing in the hard-boiled genre. Descriptions, long and detailed, of rooms, buildings, clothes, people, etc., are a vital part of the Marlowe narrative voice as much as his witty comebacks, his deflective humour. The importance of seemingly minute, useless objects—cigarette ashes, smudges on paint, the position of a chair, the colour of a lady’s coat on the night of the murder—is well documented in detective fiction. Among other things, they establish the supreme control the detective has on every last detail of the world around him, jam packed with signifiers. While Marlowe no longer has a Watson to astound by deducting whether a man’s wife has stopped caring about him just

²⁴⁰ Stephen Knight, “‘A Hard Cheerfulness’: An Introduction to Raymond Chandler,” *American Crime Fiction*, ed. Brian Doherty (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1988), 56.

²⁴¹ Bethany Ogdon, “Hard Boiled Ideology,” *Critical Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.1, March 1, 1992, 76.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 75.

from a glance at his hat, or, like Poirot, deduce what is amiss in a murder scene from the position of a chair, objects are important in the Marlowe narrative as well. It is the ease with which he can describe equally the inside of a prison cell and a wealthy oil magnate's living room, that Marlowe shows us that he is in control of his surroundings. He is not overwhelmed by what he sees around him, but rather, can subject them to his narrative scrutiny. Marlowe's all-seeing eye freely roves over the buildings, rooms, its furniture, windows, and moves seamlessly onto bodies, especially of women, thereby effectively reducing them to objects that he has an easy familiarity with. Here is Marlowe describing his first encounter with Vivian Regan, one of *The Big Sleep*'s several "dangerous" women:

This room was too big, the ceiling was too high, the doors were too tall, and the white carpet that went from wall to wall looked like a fresh fall of snow at Lake Arrowhead. There were full-length mirrors and crystal doodads all over the place. The ivory furniture had chromium on it, and the enormous ivory drapes lay tumbled on the white carpet a yard from the windows. The white made the ivory look dirty and the ivory made the white look bled out. The windows stared towards the darkening foothills. It was going to rain soon. There was pressure in the air already.

I sat down on the edge of a deep soft chair and looked at Mrs. Regan. She was worth a stare. She was trouble. She was stretched out on a modernistic chaise-longue with her slippers off, so I stared at her legs in the sheerest silk stockings. They seemed to be arranged to stare at. They were visible to the knee and one of them well beyond. The knees were dimpled, not bony and sharp. The calves were beautiful, the ankles long and slim and with enough melodic line for a tone poem. She was tall and rangy and strong-looking. Her head was against an ivory satin cushion. Her hair was black and wiry and parted in the middle and she had the hot black eyes of the portrait in the hall. She had a good mouth and a good chin. There was a sulky droop to her lips and the lower lip was full.²⁴³

Here, Marlowe's descriptive eye moves from the windows, mirrors, and upholstery of the room onto Vivian Regan's body in the same breath, thereby aligning her with an object, a piece of

²⁴³ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*.

furniture, an exaggerated, unseemly decorative piece only meant to be looked at. Marlowe deploys this curious strategy again and again in his stories.

Later on in the novel, Marlowe, bursts into a room after hearing a shot and enters to discover Carmen Sternwood—his client General Sternwood’s younger daughter and Vivian Regan’s sister—sitting naked on a chair. Geiger, the man he was trailing, is lying dead on the floor next to a camera aimed at Carmen’s naked body. Here is how Marlowe narrates the scene:

It was a wide room, the whole width of the house. It had a low beamed ceiling and brown plaster walls decked out with strips of Chinese embroidery and Chinese and Japanese prints in grained wood frames. There were low bookshelves, there was a thick pinkish Chinese rug in which a gopher could have spent a week without showing his nose above the nap. There were floor cushions, bits of odd silk tossed around, as if whoever lived there had to have a piece he could reach out and thumb. There was a broad low divan of old rose tapestry. It had a wad of clothes on it, including lilac-colored silk underwear. There was a big carved lamp on a pedestal, two other standing lamps with jade-green shades and long tassels. There was a black desk with carved gargoyles at the corners and behind it a yellow satin cushion on a polished black chair with carved arms and back. The room contained an odd assortment of odors, of which the most emphatic at the moment seemed to be the pungent aftermath of cordite and the sickish aroma of ether.

On a sort of low dais at one end of the room there was a high-backed teakwood chair in which Miss Carmen Sternwood was sitting on a fringed orange shawl. She was sitting very straight, with her hands on the arms of the chair, her knees close together, her body stiffly erect in the pose of an Egyptian goddess, her chin level, her small bright teeth shining between her parted lips. Her eyes were wide open. The dark slate color of the iris had devoured the pupil. They were mad eyes. She seemed to be unconscious, but she didn’t have the pose of unconsciousness. She looked as if, in her mind, she was doing something very important and making a fine job of it. Out of her mouth came a tinny chuckling noise which didn’t change her expression or even move her lips.

She was wearing a pair of long jade earrings. They were nice earrings and had probably cost a couple of hundred dollars. She wasn’t wearing anything else.

She had a beautiful body, small, lithe, compact, firm, rounded. Her skin in the lamplight had the shimmering lustre of a pearl. Her legs didn’t quite have the raffish grace of Mrs. Regan’s legs, but they were very nice. I looked her over without either embarrassment or ruttishness. As a naked girl she was not there in that room at all. She was just a dope. To me she was always just a dope.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

Geiger's dead body, who Marlowe suspects is homosexual, comes next:

I stopped looking at her and looked at Geiger. He was on his back on the floor, beyond the fringe of the Chinese rug, in front of a thing that looked like a totem pole. It had a profile like an eagle and its wide round eye was a camera lens. The lens was aimed at the naked girl in the chair. There was a blackened flash bulb clipped to the side of the totem pole. Geiger was wearing Chinese slippers with thick felt soles, and his legs were in black satin pajamas and the upper part of him wore a Chinese embroidered coat, the front of which was mostly blood. His glass eye shone brightly up at me and was by far the most lifelike thing about him. At a glance none of the three shots I heard had missed. He was very dead.²⁴⁵

Somehow, Marlowe feels the need to first describe what Geiger was wearing, for him markers of his homosexuality, before noting that he was dead. Even in death, Geiger is marked by what is for Marlowe his filthiness, that is, his aberrant, effeminate sexuality.

In all these instances, where Marlowe's narrative consumes the body of the women, taking in every detail of their clothes, their limbs, their hair, etc, these women shortly after, in one way or another, throw themselves at him (sometimes quite literally), giving Marlowe occasion to display his stoic masculinity by remaining unmoved and impenetrable. Vivian Sternwood, who attempts to pump information from him, is put in her place by a swift talking to from Marlowe when she admonishes him for his shocking lack of manners when speaking to lady:

I don't mind your ritzing me or drinking your lunch out of a Scotch bottle. I don't mind your showing me your legs. They're very swell legs and it's a pleasure to make their acquaintance. I don't mind if you don't like my manners. They're pretty bad. I grieve over them during the long winter evenings. But don't waste your time trying to cross-examine me.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

This draws out a “My god, you dark handsome brute!...I loathe masterful men...I simply loathe them!” from the diminished Vivian, and we as readers are conveniently notified that Marlowe is a “dark handsome” and “masterful man,” one who is unmoved by leggy brunettes.²⁴⁷

Similarly, when Marlowe describes Carmen’s naked body, he curiously declares her to be “not there in the room at all” as a “naked girl” even as Marlowe’s narrative voice goes to great length to describe the very person he pronounces to be not even visible to him. Marlowe spends the better half of the rest of the evening begrudgingly attempting to dress a dazed Carmen, slapping her around, and driving her home, all the while struggling to keep her head from slouching down on his lap. Carmen goes through this in a weirdly dazed stupor alternating between sucking her thumb, giggling hysterically, and repeatedly remarking on Marlowe’s height and cuteness. The novel, in fact, freezes frame on Carmen, naked, in front of the camera. The pictures Geiger were taking are stolen for purposes of blackmail and Vivian Regan recruits Marlowe’s services for retrieving them. To make her objectification complete, at a certain point when Carmen tracks down her own incriminating pictures, Marlowe in fact steps in to patronizingly deny her the pictures, keeping them, instead, for himself. Her naked body is then quite literally reduced to an object and transferred from one male to another, held as ransom, with Marlowe pursuing it to “save” it. Carmen’s unclothed body becomes a recurring motif throughout the novel and a central cite of anxiety. Marlowe’s probing description of Carmen at the very moment when we discover her being voyeuristically exploited by Geiger’s pornographic camera links “the voyeuristic gaze of traditional hard-boiled fiction” to a rather

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

“sadistic violence against women.”²⁴⁸ The narrative “eye” continues to consume the spectacle, subjecting it to its viscous scrutiny even as the confessing “I” keeps refusing and repudiating it.

In fact, later in the novel, Marlowe comes back to his own home one night only to find Carmen in a state of undress in his bed, beckoning him to join him. Marlowe, however, simply walks across to his chess board and moves the knight piece in what can only be read as a not-so-subtle reference to how Marlowe must, in this morally corrupt world, sometimes save women’s honours from even from themselves (even though, moments later, when Carmen refused to leave he realizes “Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn’t a game for knights”²⁴⁹). Having determined that this was a world where damsels in distress simply refused to be rescued, Marlowe despairs that “it is so hard for women to understand that they are not irresistible” and finally ditches his “chaste Victorian father” act and threatens Carmen:

I’ll give you three minutes to get dressed and out of here. If you’re not out by then, I’ll throw you out-by force. Just the way you are, naked. And I’ll throw your clothes after you into the hall. Now-get started.²⁵⁰

Despite his studied nonchalance in front of Carmen, Marlowe is severely agitated by this encounter and only after she leaves do we see how deeply he has been affected:

I went back to the bed and looked down at it. The imprint of her head was still in the pillow, of her small corrupt body still on the sheets.
I put my empty glass down and tore the bed to pieces savagely.²⁵¹

The violence meant for Carmen is here simply deflected onto objects that bear remnants of her body. Even the following morning, Marlowe is still reeling from this encounter:

It was raining again the next morning, a slanting gray rain like a swung curtain of crystal beads. I got up feeling sluggish and tired and stood looking out of the windows, with a

²⁴⁸ Priscilla L Walton and Manina Jones, *Detective Agency*, 158.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

dark, harsh taste of Sternwoods still in my mouth. I was as empty of life as a scarecrow's pockets. I went out to the kitchenette and drank two cups of black coffee. You can have a hangover from other things than alcohol. I had one from women. Women made me sick.²⁵²

This incongruity between what he says and what he describes creates a tension that points to a deeper apprehension and fear surrounding women, especially forward, aggressive women.

While Marlowe repeatedly insists on being unmoved by aggressive women, of not even seeing them, one cannot help feeling that our knight doth protest too much.

Indeed, women are consistently described in terms making them appear sub-human.

Carmen is described in animalistic terms, as someone with “little sharp predatory teeth, as white as fresh orange pits and as shiny as porcelain,” whose laughter reminds Marlowe of “rats behind a wainscoting in an old house,” and who is constantly emitting a “hissing noise” from her mouth.²⁵³ She is described on more than one occasion as “crawling on her hands and knees.”²⁵⁴ Her face is “like scraped bone, her eyes ... empty and yet full of some jungle emotion,”²⁵⁵ while other parts of her are mechanical, like her eyelashes which are “like theatre curtains” or her “artificial lips that had to be moved by springs.”²⁵⁶

Similarly, in a scene where Marlowe fights a petty gangster, Brody, and his partner, Agnes, Marlowe refers to Brody by his name, but constantly refers to Agnes who plays as significant a role in the novel as Brody, as “the blonde,” grudgingly progressing to “blonde Agnes” much later, as if he can only identify Agnes by her hair colour. In the scene where Marlowe confronts and then fights the pair, Brody “advised,” “grinned,” or simply “said” and on one occasion “snarled” but consistently “the blonde squealed” or “yelped” while her “nails scraped on her

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

knees”²⁵⁷ In a long scene spanning three chapters, not once is Agnes simply called Agnes even as Marlowe has no problems addressing Brody by name, and she is repeatedly described with adjectives likening her to a beast, as something less than human who, after Marlowe has beaten her on the head ends up being “as limp as a fresh-killed rabbit.”²⁵⁸ These are but just a few of many examples in Marlowe, where his descriptive glare becomes unreasonably harsh and sharper when it reaches women. Velma in *Farewell, My Lovely*, Eileen Wade in *The Long Goodbye* –are all described as somehow less than human, more akin to beasts, who can only scrape and claw and hiss, the narrative never quite allowing them to behave in more fully developed, human ways. At a certain point in *The Long Goodbye*, an exhausted Marlowe, looking for a bit to eat, goes into a diner with a sign outside saying, “Men Only. Dogs and Women not Admitted” that Marlowe says “suited [his] mood.”²⁵⁹ And indeed, in many ways, it summed up the way women tend to be treated in his narratives.

Epithets like knight, thus, are based on Marlowe the actor and not as equally on the perceptions of Marlowe the narrator, which subtly manipulates the direction we look in, the opinions we form. As is evident, Marlowe the actor/character repeatedly spurns the advances of sexually aggressive women, either seemingly unmoved or positively revolted. However, while Marlowe the actor disavows these women, Marlowe the narrator takes in every detail of their body, objectifying and consuming them through his narrative and holding them up for the same for his presumed male audience. If Marlowe is like a knight and a follower of a chivalric code, it is not because his values belong to a nobler age than the one which he finds himself in, but rather, because that chivalric code is probably equally misogynistic and chauvinistic as those of the world he belongs to. If there is in Marlowe and his creator, a tendency to express a longing

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*.

for the morals and codes of a previously age, it is because he belongs to an age where his masculine supremacy is constantly under threat, making him an example of rather than an exception to the kind of anxieties and fantasies harboured by the men of his time.

After Marlow hits Agnes on the head, he teasingly asks her, “Did I hurt your head a lot?” Agnes replies, “You and every other man I’ve met.”²⁶⁰ Agnes’s reply here indicates that this hero is not quite that different from the other man around him, no matter how much he holds himself in a loftier moral position. Agnes, points it out ever so subtly, but it is quite clear from Marlowe’s narrative that he might just be more representative of “every other man” than he lets on. Marlowe’s misogyny, his deep contempt of aggressive or even assertive women, his anxiety surrounding the overdetermined figure of the femme fatal in his novels betray an apprehension that was reflective of a larger unease surrounding gender roles, in contemporary society.

It is not surprising, then, that most women who are viewed relatively favourably by Marlowe are women who display an ability to be affectionate and caring—Anne Riordan in *Farewell My Lovely* enters the novel as a competent, level headed, “spunky” woman, who can train a gun on Marlowe, and keep up with him in a conversation, but ends up being a caregiver to Marlowe, nursing and feeding him when he is hurt. Silver Wig, the wife of mobster Eddie Mars is Marlowe’s object of interest in *The Big Sleep* and at least part of her romantic charm for Marlowe lies in her unwavering loyalty to her husband, and her refusal to betray him and run away with Marlowe. Similarly, Linda Loring, distinguished by being the first woman in the Marlowe stories who he has a physical relationship with, is introduced in the story as someone who holds a conversation with him as an equal, but in the end wants to become his wife. Of course what makes the Marlowe romance fantasies tragedies is that even with these women

²⁶⁰ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*.

Marlowe cannot find a long lasting relationship, spurning their domesticating advances, however begrudgingly, and then stewing in his own sense of the inevitable loneliness that comes from being the kind of man he is, who has chosen the kind of life he has.

By and large, women, especially aggressive women, almost always become the chief opponent in the Marlowe stories, whose departure, death, or capture provides some sense of cathartic closure to the stories. The Marlowe narratives may drift from an accusing scrutiny of fraudulent wealth, drug dens, fake health centres, et al, but it comes to rest on the body of the femme fatal, which becomes the screen onto which all the corruption and filth of the world without is projected and against which Marlowe's own autonomous masculinity can be seen in sharp relief.

The Long Goodbye: A Hard Boiled Bromance

In this next section I would like to re-read Marlowe's *The Long Goodbye* as a novel that articulates a deep sense of failure and uncertainty, much more so than found in any other Marlowe narrative. While there is an element of the self-reflective confessional in almost all of Marlowe's narratives, nowhere is his sense of failure as pronounced and unqualified as in *The Long Goodbye*. I would like to argue that there is an inherent flaw in the "verdict" of the novel, that is, in where it places the most incriminating guilt. Moreover, I would like to demonstrate that it is precisely the hard-boiled genre's inherent misogyny—a misogyny that it sees as necessary to its purported goals—that in this case ends up keeping Marlowe from confidently locating the "hidden truth."

The Long Goodbye is Chandler's last major novel of note, *Playback* having been a minor work, cobbled together hurriedly by Chandler from an older screenplay. It is also Marlowe's longest and most sentimental, depicting a much older, more cynical narrator at his self-reflective best. But it also demonstrates much more clearly and transparently how Marlowe's own personal biases can work against him, influence the way he approaches a case, and that ultimately, the hard boiled detective's confessional narrative is not something that simply narrates a "reality" about himself and the world around him.

The Long Goodbye is in many ways an unusual hard-boiled story because it is the story of a male friendship. It begins with a description of the first time Marlowe meets Terry Lennox and ends with a description of their last meeting. Marlowe's first words in his narration are "The first time I laid eyes on Terry Lennox he was drunk in a Rolls-Royce Silver Wreath outside the terrace of The Dancers,"²⁶¹ his last being, "He turned and walked across the floor and out. I watched the door close. I listened to his steps going away down the imitation marble corridor. After a while they got faint, then they got silent. I kept on listening anyway. What for? Did I want him to stop suddenly and turn and come back and talk me out of the way I felt? Well, he didn't. That was the last I saw of him. I never saw any of them again-except the cops. No way has yet been invented to say goodbye to them."²⁶² The narrative is also one that is bookended by two vital and almost identical confessions—one from Terry Lennox, accepting blame for killing his wife, towards the beginning of the novel; and the other, in the climactic stages, from Eileen Wade, accepting blame for the same murder. In both cases, the confession is accompanied by suicide, with Terry Lennox and Eileen Wade both (allegedly) killing themselves subsequent to their confessional notes. In many ways, Marlowe's chief objective in the novel is to disprove the

²⁶¹ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*.

²⁶² Ibid.

veracity of the first confession and extract the second. That is, to exonerate Terry Lennox and convict Eileen Wade.

Marlowe takes an instant and inexplicable liking to Lennox, perhaps because when he first sees him, he is being literally dumped on the side of the road by a beautiful blonde. The beautiful blonde being a classic signifier of evil and moral depravity in the Marlowe stories, he immediately feels sympathetic towards this man who was caught in the clutches of one. The woman, as we will later learn, is Terry Lennox's ex-wife, soon to become his remarried wife and shortly after, his dead wife, Sylvia Lennox. Like all other rich beautiful women that Marlowe encounters, she is characterized as cold, shallow, and unfeeling, "a bit of high class fluff that couldn't stick around long enough to make sure he didn't get tossed in the sneeze by some prowler car boys, or rolled by a tough hackie and dumped out in a vacant lot."²⁶³ Marlowe takes a drunken Terry Lennox safely home a couple of times and they strike up a friendship of sorts, periodically meeting in the afternoon in lonely bars over long-drawn gimlets, and bonding over hard-boiled conversations about masculine pride and their mutual distaste for the rich, women, and love. ("Alcohol is like love...the first kiss is magic, the second intimate, the third is routine. After that you take the girl's clothes off"²⁶⁴) Terry explains to Marlowe why he sticks with Sylvia even though "she is an absolute bitch,"²⁶⁵ and soon enough, he turns up at Marlowe's doorstep, gun in hand, asking to be driven to the airport to help him escape to Mexico. While Terry Lennox does not reveal much, it is amply clear to the reader and to Marlowe that Lennox is in some kind of trouble, possibly involving his wife.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Without wanting to know any details and in fact, in no uncertain terms forbidding Lennox from telling him if he indeed has committed or been witness to a crime, Marlowe drives Lennox to the airport where arrangements for his departure to Mexico had already been made. On his return from the airport, Marlowe is immediately borne down upon by cops who inform him that Sylvia Lennox is dead: “The dame is as naked as a mermaid on the bed and let me tell you he don’t recognize her by her face. She practically ain’t got one. Beat to pieces with a bronze statuette of a monkey.”²⁶⁶ Terry Lennox, her husband, is missing and as of now, the chief suspect.

Partly perhaps out of a sense of loyalty to Lennox and partly because he genuinely believes in his innocence, and mostly because of his contempt of authority, Marlowe endures incarceration, brutal beatings from the police, and other forms of torture for several days for refusing to divulge any information on Lennox. He is finally released when news arrives from Mexico that Lennox “wrote out a full confession ... in his hotel room and shot himself”²⁶⁷ in spite of which, Marlowe refuses to acknowledge, at least to the cops, that Lennox may indeed have been the killer.

Marlowe often becomes personally involved in his cases, but nowhere does he this blatantly appears to be helping a possible murderer. When Lennox comes to Marlowe seeking help to escape and tries to provide an explanation, Marlowe replies:

“Wait just a minute...It’s like this...Be very careful what you tell me. If you really want me to ride you down to Tijuana, there are two things I must not be told...One...if you have committed a crime or anything the law calls a crime-a serious crime, I mean-I can’t be told about it. Two, if you have essential knowledge that such a crime has been

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

committed, I can't be told about that either. Not if you want me to drive you to Tijuana. That clear?"²⁶⁸

Marlowe even reveals that he has reason to believe that Lennox's escape was not as sudden or spontaneous but clearly something he had anticipated and planned ahead for:

"The last time we drank together I was a bit rough with you, walked out if you recall. You irritated the hell out of me. Thinking it over afterwards I could see that you were just trying to sneer yourself out of a feeling of disaster. You say you have a passport and a visa. It takes a little time to get a visa to Mexico. They don't let just anybody in. So you've been planning to blow for some time. I was wondering how long you would stick."²⁶⁹

Not only does he *not* subject Lennox to the customary confessional, demanding to know all, but says, "I have to be careful about the questions I ask you," lest he find out something that would put him in an ethical conundrum. As Lennox sits at his coffee table in quite a state, it is Marlowe who comes up with a good "story" to tell the police:

"Now let's add it up and don't interrupt me. You came to me this morning in a highly emotional condition and wanted to be driven to Tijuana to catch an early plane. You had a gun in your pocket, but I needn't have seen it. You told me you had stood things as long as you could but last night you blew up. You found your wife dead drunk and a man had been with her. You got out and went to a Turkish bath to pass the time until morning and you phoned your wife's two closest relatives and told them what you were doing. Where you went was none of my business. You had the necessary documents to enter Mexico. How you went was none of my business either. We are friends and I did what you asked me without much thought. Why wouldn't I? You're not paying me anything. You had your car but you felt too upset to drive yourself. That's your business too. You're an emotional guy and you got yourself a bad wound in the war. I think I ought to pick up your car and shove it in a garage somewhere for storage....You took nothing but the clothes you stood up in and some money you had from your father-in-law, You left everything she had given you, including that beautiful piece of machinery you parked at La Brea and Fountain. You wanted to go away as clean as it was possible for you to go and still go. All right. I'll buy it. Now I shave and get dressed."²⁷⁰

Moreover, he even prevents Lennox from changing his mind about the whole thing:

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

“But I got thinking. Maybe it would be better if you called the police.”

“Call them yourself. I haven’t anything to tell them.”

“You want me to?”

I turned around sharply and gave him a hard stare. “God damn it!” I almost yelled at him.

“Can’t you for Chrissake just leave it lay?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Sure you’re sorry. Guys like you are always sorry, and always too late.”²⁷¹

Thus, Marlowe’s unflinching support for Lennox is not entirely because he believes him to be innocent, as he would later insist in the novel. At least to some degree, his initial reaction to Lennox’s sudden appearance at his doorstep asking for a ride to the airport indicates that he was either aware that Lennox had committed a serious crime, and/or that he was ready to help Lennox escape regardless of whether he was innocent or not. Later on in the novel, Marlowe will claim to genuinely believe in Marlowe’s innocence, but in this scene, his repeated instructions to Lennox to not tell him what he had done so he could claim ignorance to the cops, the fact that he notes that Lennox had probably been planning an escape for some time, we have to note that at some level he had to have believed he was guilty or at least possibly guilty, and moreover, that he was ready to help Lennox out in spite of that.

In a seemingly unrelated event, Marlowe is hired by a publisher named Howard Spencer on behalf of a staggeringly beautiful blonde, Eileen Wade, ostensibly to babysit her husband, the alcoholic author, Roger Wade, and to help him finish his novel without letting him inflict harm on himself or on his wife. Spencer intimates that Roger Wade might have physically abused his wife in one his drunken fits and there is need to offer Mrs. Wade protection from any future

²⁷¹ Ibid.

domestic violence. This is a second time that sceptre of domestic violence is invoked in the novel, with the first being the death of Sylvia Lennox (her missing husband being the chief suspect).

We are spared the customary description of the carpets, false ceilings and table mats as a prelude to the introduction of Eileen Wade this time, but Marlowe does introduce her by first treating us a to fantastic catalogue of the “different types of blondes” which bears repeating in some detail:

There are blondes and blondes and it is almost a joke word nowadays. All blondes have their points, except perhaps the metallic ones who are as blond as a Zulu under the bleach and as to disposition as soft as a sidewalk. There is the small cute blonde who cheeps and twitters, and the big statuesque blonde who straight-arms you with an iceblue glare. There is the blonde who gives you the up-from under look and smells lovely and shimmers and hangs on your arm and is always very very tired when you take her home. She makes that helpless gesture and has that goddamned headache and you would like to slug her except that you are glad you found out about the headache before you invested too much time and money and hope in her...²⁷²

This goes on for a good two more paragraphs with Marlowe checking off every stereotype that he can recall from his own narratives, before finally conceding, “The dream across the way was none of these, not even of that kind of world. She was unclassifiable, as remote and clear as mountain water, as elusive as its colour.”²⁷³

There is far too much in this little speech to be taken apart without seriously digressing, but it is worth mentioning that if Marlowe no longer feels the need to introduce Eileen Wade after first listing the furniture and drapery it is because by now he seems to have developed a sophisticated catalogue of exclusively blonde women, like a morbid collector of every bad

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

literary stereotype for women that have been scattered liberally across the pages of hard-boiled literature, including his own. It would have been tempting to read this as a moment of deliberate metatextuality, a knowing wink from Chandler/Marlowe to the readers of hard boiled fiction, an in-joke laughing self-deprecatingly at its own penchant for grossly underdeveloped, two dimensional female characters, which indeed look as if they have been lifted en masse from some cheap directory of misogynistic depictions and shoddily and unceremoniously plonked into the text, their sole purpose being to act as convenient others against whom the male hero's fears and anxieties can play out, and against whom the hardboiled detective can measure, mark, develop his own masculinity. However, Chandler's insistence, in his essays, about the authenticity and reality of hard-boiled writing probably indicates that we are meant to read this at face value—as the wisdom of an experienced male voice who knows women and their ways down to the last detail.

As is expected, the two plot lines begin to converge and after a couple of routine fights, gun shots, drunken brawls, stolen kisses, and midnight encounters with semi-clad women, it transpires that Roger Wade was having an affair with Sylvia Lennox and harbours a sense of guilt for having “caused the death of an good man.”²⁷⁴ Subsequently, Roger Wade is discovered in his study, shot dead, and it is unclear if it was suicide or murder (there was an occasion earlier where he allegedly fired a shot and Marlowe walked in on Sylvia wrestling with Wade to get the gun away from him). While the police accept the suicide theory, Marlowe accuses Eileen Wade of having been responsible for the death of both her husband and Sylvia Lennox. Marlowe reveals that Terry Lennox and Eileen Wade knew each other and were even briefly married before the war. He believes Eileen killed Sylvia out of jealousy since she had “lost” both the men

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

in her life to her, and that Roger Wade was killed for the same reason—for having been unfaithful to her with the same woman who she had lost Terry Lennox to. Additionally, Roger's violent domestic abuse was a rumour generated by Eileen Wade to make her fiction about needing protection from Marlowe, seem plausible. Thus, both men implicated for violent physical abuse on women are exonerated and the blame pinned neatly back on a woman, and by extension on all women (after all, women, for Marlowe are always part of a type).

“She had it coming”: A Hard Boiled Guide to Victim Blaming

In fact, the entire thrust of this story and indeed, most Chandler/Marlowe stories in general seem to be at some level geared towards exonerating men and redirecting blame for atrocities on women back on them. In *The Long Goodbye* it is sometimes easy to forget that the murder that sparks off the course of events is that of Sylvia Lennox. Marlowe's desire to exonerate Lennox almost overshadows any need in the novel to solve Sylvia's murder, which, the novel treats as merely incidental and inevitable. The “quest” in the novel is not to solve or avenge *her* death, but to clear Lennox's death as a result of it (which, as it turns out in the end, was faked). It is not to find out who brutally killed a young woman that Marlowe investigates in this novel, but to exonerate Lennox from the charge of her murder. The narrative seems to keep dismissing Sylvia's brutal murder and implies that given her rampant promiscuity, she met with a fitting end.

This is an underlying message in a lot of Chandler's Marlowe stories. Thus, in *The Big Sleep* when Carmen Sternwood, a minor, is found naked being photographed by the leader of a pornography racket, our sympathy in the novel is never meant to rest on her, depicted as she is as vile and less than human. In the end, it turns out it was she who killed Regan, her brother in law,

for *spurning* her sexual advances.²⁷⁵ Any sympathy we may have had for a victim of a sexual exploitation is, in a convoluted manner taken away by transferring the blame back on her as a young girl who cannot handle being scorned. The novel's convoluted message regarding Carmen and her sexual exploitation seems to be the all too familiar, misogynistic one: she was asking for it. As I have discussed before, Carmen's naked body becomes a central concern in *The Big Sleep* and Carmen is repeatedly shown, literally "asking for it" from Marlowe. Women, in hard boiled fiction are simultaneously victims and perpetrators of their victimhood; the narrative simultaneously strives to contain, subdue, and objectify them, loathing them for any signs of agency, desire for control, power or sexual expression that they may betray. The female body must be looked at, but loathed and rebuffed when it tries to return or appropriate the gaze they are subjected to. And ultimately, blame for any violence that they may incur as a result of that gaze has to be redirected back on them. It is almost as if they need to be punished for daring to come play in what is exclusively a male arena. It is not out of keeping with the tensions facing post-World War America, where women were constantly pressurized to return to traditional roles as mother, wife, and caregiver, vacating job positions formerly exclusively held by men.

Similarly, in *Farewell My Lovely* the central quest Marlowe takes up is the hunt for Velma, the lost love of one Moose Malloy, a towering muscular man, who has gotten out of prison after eight years. The final tragedy of the text is Velma, now married to a millionaire under a different name, simply doesn't want to be found by Moose, and predictably, turns out to have been responsible for almost the mysterious murders in the novel, all in an effort to have stopped Moose from getting to her.²⁷⁶ However, as "real" as Marlowe's narration of the people and places seem to be, the implications of a woman desperately trying to get away from a scarily

²⁷⁵ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*.

²⁷⁶ Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

violent man—who in the short length of time we know him kills not one but two people with his bare hands out of sheer anger and is now obsessively trying to track a woman down— is not entertained in Marlowe’s narrative. Moose remains the tragic Ajax like figure in the novel, fatally killed for his naïve, pure love for a woman who does not want his love, and does not deserve it. If he kills people, it is in a lovelorn fit, and because in his supreme naïveté he is unaware of his own superhuman strength. Marlowe’s narrative does not seem to be able to make room for any other reason for Velma’s desperation for being far away from a demonstrably super strong, fatally violent, obsessive man, than to make her out to be a gold digger, undeserving of devoted love.

This brings me back—having digressed somewhat—to *The Long Goodbye*. Here too, the chief tragic figure that Marlowe investigates on behalf of is Terry Lennox and not Sylvia Lennox. The message in this case is similar to that in *The Big Sleep*; if Carmen Sternwood “asked for it” then Sylvia Lennox “had it coming.” As readers, we are not allowed to ever interact with the character directly: whatever we know from her we must gather from scattered references—a brief scene in the beginning where she is seen unceremoniously dumping a grossly drunk Terry Lennox, a short phone call with Marlowe where she is enquiring about Lennox, and a series of characters, including Lennox, referring to her as “bitch” and “tramp” whose marriage to him was a front for a freewheeling lifestyle where each night she entertained a different man in her outhouse. The few times that Sylvia is spoken of, it is to remind us of the certainty of her nasty end.

When Marlowe sits in a bar alone, drinking gimlets, Lennox’s favourite drink, it is his lost friend he is mourning. Similarly, when Roger Wade is seen in the depths of anguish, he is

lamenting the fact that “A good man died for [him] once,” said good man being Terry Lennox. Sylvia Lennox was incidentally having an affair with Wade and whether she was murdered by Terry Lennox, Eileen Wade, or Roger Wade himself, this affair was central to the motive of the murder. Wade, however does not seem to be distraught that he caused Sylvia’s death. Only, that by extension Terry Lennox had to escape and kill himself, or as Marlowe believes, get killed. What is strange is that the narrative does not find this in the least bit odd. Sylvia Lennox was “a tramp” who got what she deserved. And even her sister and father seem to agree.

When Marlowe meets Linda Loring, who turns out to be Sylvia Lennox’s sister, at a bar, she is also nursing a gimlet. If she is here mourning someone, it is clearly not her sister, but her brother-in-law, possible murderer of her sister. Bizarrely enough, Marlowe’s narrative seems to forget to account for the fact that some people may mourn the death of this woman. Sylvia pretty much disappears as a symbol or motif from the novel, with Lennox becoming the central driving force for Marlowe. Not only her sister, but also her father, standard rich-old-man-unable-to-enjoy-wealth-due-to-health-and-promiscuous-daughters, Harlan Potter agrees. Linda Loring explains, “*Terry’s death was quite a blow to him.*” [emphasis mine] She does not clarify whether Sylvia Lennox’s death was an equal blow to him, instead, explaining, “*Father had written my sister off long ago...If she had to die, it was the best possible time for her to die. In another ten years she would have been a sex-ridden hag like some of these frightful women you see at Hollywood parties, or used to a few years back. The dregs of the international set.*”²⁷⁷ [emphasis mine] This information is later corroborated by the old man himself in a conversation he has with Marlowe dismissing his daughter’s death and expressing remorse for Terry’s (“I know my

²⁷⁷ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*.

daughter is a tramp and that any one of a dozen drunken bastards might have blown his top and pushed her pretty face down her throat for her, but that's incidental, old boy”²⁷⁸).

Absurd as it may sound, it almost as if Marlowe rages against Sylvia for letting herself get killed by being “such a tramp” and thereby causing trouble for Terry Lennox. As he states in unequivocal terms to Linda Loring, he is “not interested in speculating why Terry Lennox “beat his wife’s face to a bloody sponge.”²⁷⁹ What he is interested in is how to absolve his friend of blame, and that is what the central concern of his narrative is. Sylvia Lennox was a rich, beautiful, blonde haired woman who openly seemed to pursue pleasure and controlled her husband with money, and thus, for Marlowe, was the worst kind of woman—not only did she assert her own desire for pleasure, but she essentially effeminized her husband, a man Marlowe had begun to see as his double.

When Marlowe, in his solitary moments reflects on the events surrounding the case, the heartbreaks caused, the pains suffered, as he is wont to do from time to time, he is not thinking of Sylvia Lennox, the life she might have led, the kind of sordid end she had, but rather, about Terry Lennox: “I didn’t judge him or analyze him, just as I had never asked him questions about how he got wounded or how he ever happened to get himself married to anyone like Sylvia.”²⁸⁰ If Sylvia features in the novel’s emotional landscape, it is as peg on which to hang Terry Lennox’s troubles, caused directly by her unfaithful, wild, irresponsible ways. The only flicker of concern for the first murder victim comes from a drunken Roger Wade, who mutters, “She was a tramp all right. But you don’t beat a woman’s head in just because she’s a tramp.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

In this respect, it is telling that ultimately it is Eileen Wade who is accused for her murder; Eileen Wade, in many ways, is Sylvia Lennox's double in the novel—beautiful, blonde, rich, unfaithful to her husband, and romantically involved with the same two men that Sylvia was involved with—Roger Wade and Terry Lennox. By placing the violent death of the sexually promiscuous, rich, blonde haired woman on another sexually promiscuous rich blonde haired woman, Marlowe again redirects the blame for violence and abuse on women back on women themselves. Indeed, in Marlowe's confrontation/confession scene with Eileen Wade, he subtly holds her up as a representative of *all* women. Thus, when Eileen responds to their accusation with seductive smiles it is not just Eileen Wade's artifice, but rather "the half seductive smiles *that women are so good at*."²⁸² [emphasis mine]. When she speaks to them in soft, lilting tones, Marlowe grudgingly marvels not at Eileen Wade's specific craftiness but at "the tricks *they* [women] have."²⁸³ [emphasis mine] In the crucial scene where Marlowe confronts and accuses his main villain, he repeatedly aligns her with all of woman kind, thereby conflating her evil with what he sees as essentially feminine, womanly qualities. Thus, in its effort to shift blame for violence on women back on women themselves, Marlowe's narrative finds an able double of Sylvia in Eileen.

Thus, if Sylvia Lennox was beaten to death by her husband, lover or another man, it was her own lifestyle to blame, and the fact that she was killed by her double Eileen Wade only underlines the fact that it is women responsible for any abuse they may suffer. Eileen Wade, in fact is introduced to us as an abused wife, stuck with an alcoholic husband, plausible as this seems given Roger Wade's violent drunken tantrums, we are casually told, in a throwaway line post her suicide, that the police are now pretty sure she hurled herself down the stairs.. The

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

narrative spits out this information in a mid-paragraph sentence, and hurriedly moves on, not pausing to reflect its veracity or supply reliable proof to this claim. Once again, it is not her abusive, drunk, husband to blame for her wounds and scars, but she herself. Not just that, women's actions directly cause the deaths of the men in their lives, and it is up to Marlowe to rectify that.

The Hard-Boiled Detective and the Problem of Too Many Truths

In the final confrontation scene between Marlowe and Eileen (with Howard Spencer present as “witness”) Eileen pins the blame of Sylvia Lennox's murder on Roger Wade, claiming that she actually witnessed her husband killing Sylvia. Marlowe tricks her into providing details about the murder scene which he knows to be untrue, and this, for him, seems to confirm his suspicions that she is a liar and thereby the murderer. He gets her to say things like, there was a lot of blood involved, that the actual crime happened outside of the outhouse, etc., knowing full well that there was not much blood at all, and that Sylvia Lennox was killed in her bed.

A glaring flaw in this theory is of course, that if Eileen Wade *had* in fact killed Sylvia Lennox she would not have been *wrong* about details such as amount of blood flow and precise location of the murder. If anything, the mistakes in Eileen's “confession” prove that she could *not* have been at the murder location or the murderer. If it does prove that she is a *liar*, it also indicates her *innocence*. Now, a glaring loophole in the denouement is not new to murder mysteries. The Christie stories had quite a few, and indeed, most of Marlowe's previous solutions are based on flimsy at best grounds. In *The Big Sleep*, for instance, Marlowe deduces the murderer, the motive, and the means on the basis of the late night promiscuous visit by a naked Carmen Sternwood. Marlowe's entire case against Carmen is based on the fact that when

he turned down her advances she seemed to slide in to a revengeful rage, and just from that he concludes that Regan is not missing but actually dead, and that Carmen must have similarly thrown herself on him, and Regan must have rejected her, and therefore Carmen must have killed him. However, ludicrous as the premises of this solution are, it is declared in Marlowe's narrative un-hesitantly, almost arrogantly, and thereafter "proved" beyond doubt by having Carmen actually storm in with a gun trying to kill our hero.

The *Long Goodbye*, however, is marked with a palpable sense of unease over its conviction. Following Marlowe's confession/confrontation scene with Eileen Wade, she kills herself, leaving behind a suicide note, accepting blame for the murders of both Sylvia Lennox and Roger Wade. Here, we have a situation identical to the one established at the beginning of the novel, when Lennox was accepted as the murderer by the police and newspapers on the basis of a confession. Having spent an entire narrative in trying to indicate that a confession does not automatically denote the "truth" Marlowe's narrative now seems to struggle to establish another identical confession as the undisputed truth. This is denoted in the surprisingly large number of alternative solutions that the narrative throws up, and the equally large number of uncharacteristically confused discussions that surround the final confession. The narrative seems to keep going back and forth, as if unable to make up its mind, coming up with not one but several theories as to who killed Sylvia Lennox—all in an effort to clear the most obvious suspect, Terry Lennox. The final half of the novel is marked with scenes where Marlowe sits around with different male allies/friends/acquaintances discussing the relative merits and demerits of each theory, as if struggling to find a neat answer, a clean alternative to Terry Lennox as murderer, and to convincingly stick to its favourite theory of Eileen Wade as murderer. Again, a multiplicity of possible solutions is quite germane to murder mysteries. The

“golden age” variety of mystery story is in fact predicated on the possibility of multiple possible murderers. However, there, the *one* “true” answer among the various possible answers is usually delivered with a certainty that eclipses all other possibilities. And once delivered, the admission of the culprit is rarely as blatantly made suspect on account of a similar admission having been dismissed earlier in the text.

Unlike the classical detective story, the hard-boiled genre usually side steps the problem of a multiple suspects by confidently, albeit predictably, pinning the blame of the central crime on the figure of the femme fatal, and does so with almost arrogant conviction, without “unmanly” displays of doubt and uncertainty and lengthy reflections and discussions about the potential loopholes in its verdict. Once Marlowe decides who the murderer is, refutations and counter refutations rarely keep cropping up all over the text. In certain cases, there may be a final discussion to tie up any loose ends, as in the end of *Farewell, My Lovely*, where Marlowe discusses the case with Anne Riordan, but there is no sense of uncertainty over the verdict. *The Long Goodbye*, however, gives us a Marlowe narrative that is rife with a sense of unease over the predictable outcome, causing it to constantly throw up debates, either because it almost needs to convince itself of its plausibility, or to highlight the possibilities of alternative solutions.

The first theory provided by the novel is the obvious one: Terry Lennox, a man wounded in the war and carrying deeper emotional scars from his time in the trenches, finally takes it out on his promiscuous wife who was using him as a respectable front to her less than respectable lifestyle. His escape to Mexico, the fact that he had already made arrangements for such an escape, and then of course his own confession, seem to corroborate this theory. Once Marlowe finds out about the confession, there is never any rational explanation provided for why he

believes it to be false other than a feeling of loyalty or love towards his new friend. Neither can Marlowe's narrative find substantial proof to really clear his friend. Indeed, as Captain Hernandez, one of the many police officers in the novel points out, "The only thing against Lennox being a killer was that somebody thought he was a nice guy who wouldn't have done it and that there were others who could equally well have done it. But the others didn't take it on the lam, didn't confess, didn't blow their brains out. He did."²⁸⁴ Marlowe's contention, that Lennox did not seem to be the kind of man capable of such brutality is also repeatedly easily explained away, with different characters saying things like, "remember the man had been in a war, had been badly wounded, had suffered a great deal and seen others suffer,"²⁸⁵ and therefore could be capable of more violence, more darkness, than Marlow was willing to attribute to him. The absurdity of Marlowe's other theory—that Lennox did kill himself, but not out of guilt, but out of a sense of duty to the Potter family, to spare them from a scandal—is also pointed out by other characters. Linda Loring, for instance, says, "That's fantastic...A man doesn't kill himself or deliberately get himself killed to save a little scandal. Sylvia was already dead. As for her sister and her father-they could take care of themselves very efficiently. People with enough money, Mr. Marlowe, can always protect themselves."²⁸⁶

Indeed, when Terry Lennox turns up at the end of the novel with a new name and a new face, all it proves is that he did not *kill* himself. It still means that in effect he needed to escape, make himself scarce from the police, the journalists, et al. And even if the narrative does not spell it out, the revelation that Lennox faked his death does not absolve him of the suspicion of

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

murder. Marlowe declares at one point “Okay, I’m wrong about the motive. Maybe I’m wrong all down the line,” and indeed it seems at times that that is what his narrative is really about.²⁸⁷

The second alternative comes up when Roger Wade is found shot dead in his study: Sylvia Lennox was killed by Roger Wade in a fit of drunken rage. Terry Lennox bolted to escape prosecution and Roger Wade killed himself out of guilt for having caused the death of an innocent man. The novel keeps hinting that there is some deep-seated guilt eating away at Wade’s conscience. Early on in the novel, when Howard Spencer entrusts the author to Marlowe’s care he indicates the very same: “He can’t finish a book. He’s losing his grip and there’s something behind it... Something is very wrong... he is perfectly sane but that something is worrying him to death. A blackmailer, for instance. The Wades have been married five years. Something from his past may have caught up with him. It might even be—just as a wild guess—a fatal hit-and-run accident and someone has the goods on him. We don’t know what it is. We want to know. And we are willing to pay well to correct the trouble. If it turns out to be a medical matter, well—that’s that. If not, there has to be an answer”²⁸⁸ Now these are obvious red-herrings strewn by Chandler across the narrative to distract us from the “real” solution, but the fact that the novel takes its time to mull about each of these theories before confronting the criminal as well as after having pinned its verdict on Eileen Wade is what lends the text an uncertain, wavering tone. Intriguingly enough, in once discussion, Detective Bernie Wade indicates that he does not buy the Roger Wade killing himself out of guilt theory, and suggests the possibility of Eileen Wade as murderer. “The next thing I don’t like is he did it there in that room and left his wife to find him. Okay, he was drunk. I still don’t like it. The next thing I don’t like is he pulled the trigger just when the noise of that speedboat could drown out the shot. What

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

difference would it make to him? More coinddence, huh? More coinddence still that the wife forgot her door keys on the help's day off and had to ring the bell to get into the house."²⁸⁹

Marlowe however, does not seem to be able to find the alternative implied by Detective Ohl plausible, pointing out that according to Ohl's theory, Eileen Wade would have had ten minutes to have murdered her husband and re-entered the house, unseen by Marlowe, and that too, syncing the gun shot with the very moment Marlowe was watching a speed boat, so as to drown the sound of the gun shot was too much of a coincidence, since she possibly could have accounted for a speed boat to have been there in the first place. She would have had to have done the whole thing in "Ten minutes...that couldn't possibly have been foreseen, much less planned."²⁹⁰ Here, it is Marlowe who is rather convincingly dismissing the case for Eileen Wade as Roger Wade's murderer. Very shortly after this, Marlowe would himself be accusing Eileen Wade just as Bernie Ohl was, but at no point does he ever explain how or whether at all he had accounted for these loopholes he himself pointed out in the theory of Eileen as murderer.

After yet another lengthy discussion about the problems with the different theories with Howard Spencer—most of which pretty much duplicated Marlowe's discussion about the same with Bernie Ohl—Marlowe, along with Spencer, first confront Eileen Wade hoping to extract a confession out of her. Here, Marlowe does not directly accuse Eileen of killing Sylvia, as he wants to. Instead, he first accuses her of having known all along that her husband and not Terry Lennox, was the murderer, something that Eileen admits to, claiming she kept silent to protect her husband. Eileen then initially "confesses" to the version of the "truth" where Roger Wade is the killer of Sylvia Lennox:

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

“I was there. I saw him do it,” Eileen said calmly... “There are things no one likes to tell about an enemy, much less about one’s own husband. . .Your fine, talented, ever so popular and lucrative author is going to look pretty cheap. Sexy as all get out, wasn’t he? On paper, that is. And how the poor fool tried to live up to it! All that woman was to him was a trophy. I spied on them. I should be ashamed of that. One has to say these things. I am ashamed of nothing. I saw the whole nasty scene. The guest house she used for her amours happens to be a nice secluded affair with its own garage and entrance on a side street, a dead end, shaded by big trees. The time came, as it must to people like Roger, when he was no longer a satisfactory lover. Just a little too drunk. He tried to leave but she came out after him screaming and stark naked, waving some kind of small statuette... He was drunk, he had had sudden spells of violence, and he had one then. He tore the statuette out of her hand. You can guess the rest.”²⁹¹

In this very scene itself the fourth theory is floated: that Roger Wade did indeed kill Sylvia Lennox, something Eileen witnessed and thereafter, Eileen Wade killed Roger Wade, or tried to get him killed. There is lengthy discussions and refutations regarding this theory as well. But Marlowe suspects even more and in effort to “trap” Eileen and check her confession, Marlowe asks, “there must have been a lot of blood” when Roger killed (knowing full well that there was not. Eileen falls for it):

“Blood?” She laughed bitterly. “You should have seen him when he got home. When I ran for my car to get away he was just standing there looking down at her. Then he bent and picked her up in his arms- and carried her into the guest house. I knew then that the shock had partially sobered him. He got home in about an hour. He was very quiet. It shook him when he saw me waiting. But he wasn’t drunk then. He was dazed. There was blood on his face, on his hair, all over the front of his coat. I got him into the lavatory off the study and got him stripped and cleaned off enough to get him upstairs into the shower. I put him to bed. I got an old suitcase and went downstairs and gathered up the bloody clothes and put them in the suitcase. I cleaned the basin and the floor and then I took a ‘wet towel out and made sure his car was clean. I put it away and got mine out. I drove to the Chatsworth Reservoir and you can guess what I did with the suitcase full of bloody clothes and towels.”²⁹²

This is the piece of damning evidence that Marlowe has against Eileen Wade but Marlowe asks her a few more trick questions, just to make sure that she is indeed lying, and based on her faulty

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

knowledge of the murder scene and the reservoir she supposedly dumped the bloody clothes into, Marlowe declares that “She killed both of them.”²⁹³ Thus, the final verdict of the novel is one it delivers, that too, at the end of a weird, lengthy confession scene where not one but *three* theories are floated as to what happened, and ultimately, the verdict delivered is one with glaring loopholes.

That Eileen Wade, the femme fatal, was, in keeping with the expectations one has from the hard-boiled variety of crime fiction, responsible for both major murders in the text is a verdict that the narrative must inevitably arrive at, but clearly struggles to execute. Having given this pronouncement that the detective himself refuted not too long ago, however, the narrative struggles to confidently stick to it in a manner most un-hardboiled with several similarly lengthy weary discussions cropping up even *after* the femme fatale has confessed and killed herself.

Back in the police office, Captain Hernandez, Bernie Ohl, Dr. Loring, and Lawford, a deputy from the D.A.’s office, in a rather lengthy scene, once again debate the relative believability of the different “versions” of the “hidden truths,” specifically Eileen Wade’s confession. Lawford launches the first refutation against the Eileen Wade as murderer theory: “I’ve read that purported confession...And I don’t believe a word of it. You’ve got a background of emotional exhaustion, bereavement, some use of drugs, the strain of wartime life in England under bombing, this clandestine marriage, the man coming back here, and so on. Undoubtedly she developed a feeling of guilt and tried to purge herself of it by a sort of transference....I can’t speak for the D.A. but my own feeling is that your confession would be no grounds to seek an indictment even if the woman had lived.”²⁹⁴ The novel ends up throwing up arguments against

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

its own chosen version again and again almost as if it needs to convince itself, or, that it wants to somehow hint that perhaps the true “hidden truth” has not been arrived upon, and indeed that there are too many possible truths for the male, singular individualistic detective to narrow down on just one. Moreover, it is not just “the man” who sees problems with this theory. It soon appears that Marlowe himself is questioning his own pronouncement again.

In other scenes, for instance, in one where Bernie Ohl defends Marlowe’s final verdict, we can see even Marlowe still expressing doubts. After Bernie Ohl and Hernandez go over and over the accepted version of events trying to iron out any inconsistencies, it is Marlowe who still has questions, and it almost seems that Bernie and Hernandez are now trying to convince *him*: To Ohl’s summary of the final theory, Marlowe is still confused, saying,

“None of it explains why she wanted me around.”

“I could think of reasons. One of them is old stuff. Every cop has run into it a hundred times. You were the loose end, the guy that helped Lennox escape, his friend, and probably to some extent his confidant. What did he know and what did he tell you? He took the gun that had killed her and he knew it had been fired. She could have thought he did it for her. That made her think he knew she had used it. When he killed himself she was sure. But what about you? You were still the loose end. She wanted to milk you, and she had the charm to use, and a situation ready-made for an excuse to get next to you. And if she needed a fall guy, you were it. You might say she was collecting fall guys.”

“You’re imputing too much knowledge to her,” I said.

Ohls broke a cigarette in half and started chewing on one half. The other half he stuck behind his ear.

“Another reason is she wanted a man, a big, strong guy that could crush her in his arms and make her dream again.”

“She hated me,” I said. “I don’t buy that one.”

“Of course,” Hernandez put in dryly. “You turned her down. But she would have got over that. And then you blew the whole thing up in her face with Spencer listening in.”

“You two characters been seeing any psychiatrists lately?”

...

“What are you not convinced about?” Hernandez asked, snapping a rubber band.

“I’m convinced. The case is dead. She’s dead, they’re all dead. A nice smooth routine all around. *Nothing to do but go home -and forget it ever happened.* So I’ll do that.”
[emphasis mine]²⁹⁵

In the end, while having played a major role in precipitating Eileen’s suicide and confession, Marlowe himself seems to be accepting this version, almost in a passive defeatist manner.

“Nothing to do” is reminiscent more of Vladimir and Estragon from *Waiting for Godot*²⁹⁶ and hardly what one expects the macho hero, knight errant of the modern urban city to reduce to, even at his cynical, futile best. Interestingly enough, this is pretty much what Marlowe said after Lennox’s case was declared closed and final: “Nobody was going to explain the Lennox case to me. No explanation was necessary. The murderer had confessed and he was dead. There wouldn’t even be an inquest...If Terry Lennox had killed his wife, that was fine. There was no need to try him and bring out all the unpleasant details. If he hadn’t killed her, that was fine too. A dead man is the best fall guy in the world. He never talks back.”²⁹⁷

It is perhaps significant that when Terry Lennox comes back from the dead, as it were, or rather, comes back as Cisco Maioranos, he remains ambivalent about what happened, never quite saying in so many words that he did not kill Sylvia. Marlowe asks him:

“You know who killed Sylvia?”

He didn’t answer me directly. “It’s pretty tough to turn a woman in for murder-even if she never meant much to you.” [emphasis mine]²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Continuum International, 2008).

²⁹⁷ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

The novel ends with Lennox leaving Marlowe forever, and with Marlowe harbouring a deep sense of betrayal, his unflinching faith in Lennox having been broken on finding him alive, and his realization that he was not the martyr he had thus far thought him to be, and had thereby begun to identify with his. The sense of his own folly in having so unquestioningly believed in his idea of Lennox is pervasive and the confessional overtones of Marlowe's narrative are at its heaviest and most palpable here.

There are two identical confessions in the novel—and the reason we accept one over the other has more to do with our generic expectations from the misogynistic premises of the hard boiled variety of detective fiction, rather than any concrete evidence from within the text itself. It is purely Marlowe's uncomplicated and inexplicable "faith" in the kind of man he thinks Lennox to be, and an over reliance on a fictional masculine ideal and code that is the basis for discrediting his confession in favour of Eileen's, which itself is punctured completely at the end of the novel, thereby upsetting the already precarious case he had previously established.

Thus, the text's clear anxiety and uncertainty around its need to pin the blame on the woman and palpable sense of failure in the end when Terry Lennox returns, makes *The Long Goodbye* Marlowe's most "confessional" novel narrating a possible wrongful conviction of a woman for the purposes upholding a code that must, for its realization, necessarily focus on the repudiation/removal of the threatening female. While Marlowe does not admit outright to have been undone by his own blind masculine faith in another he saw as his own double, in no other novel is his confessional tone and sense of complicity as unqualified as here. My point here is not to claim an alternative reading for *The Long Goodbye*. The point here is not whether Eileen Wade is the murderer, and that the case against her is flimsy at best. Plot construction is hardly

hard-boiled fiction's chief concern; what is striking, however, and worth noting because of its distinctiveness is the way the narrative projects a deep sense of unease regarding this flimsiness, this rather routine, formulaic, almost obligatory punishment of the woman, and exhortation of the presumably wronged man.

In its struggle to transfer blame from a male position it ends up discovering not one, but multiple narratives, thereby struggling to pin down the text to just one stable version of "the hidden truth." *The Long Goodbye*, in many ways, takes hard-boiled fiction to its logical conclusion, projecting a sense of failure of its entire project. Marlowe's narrative voice has earlier been seen as confessional by some critics, and indeed it is so in tone and style. However, hidden within Marlowe's sacrificial tale of a hero who but must tarnish himself not *because of* but *in spite of* his value systems, is a narrative voice that uses the "I"/eye perspective to its advantage, directing our gaze to view those it views as "others," especially women, in expressly reductive ways, objectifying as well as disciplining them. For all of Chandler's claims of the "authenticity" of what Marlowe describes in his narratives, his conclusions are heavily tinted by his own deep seated anxieties, fears, phobias and biases, and his misogyny and chauvinism determines to a great extent where he discovers blame and guilt in the world around him. At least in *The Long Goodbye*, though, Marlowe's narrative seems to be consumed with doubt at his own project, struggling to confidently stick to his own formulaic guns, as it were. This lends his narrative an intimation of a sense of unqualified guilt—guilt not at having had to make deals with gangsters to protect dying old men, or for having failed to protect a confirmed, lovelorn killer from his own unworthy lover, but rather, guilt at possibly having been on a prejudiced, self-evasive path all along.

CHAPTER 4

THE GREAT FALL: THE POSTMODERN (MIS) ADVENTURES OF THE INCREDIBLE DETECTIVE

“There is no such thing as secrecy anymore; I *own* secrecy.”

—Moriarty to Sherlock in “The Reichenbach Fall,” *Sherlock*²⁹⁹

This is what James Moriarty tells Sherlock sitting in Sherlock’s Baker Street flat, in the last episode of series 2 in the BBC television series, *Sherlock*. Earlier in the episode, we watch as Moriarty proceeds to break into the Tower of London while simultaneously opening the vault at the Bank of England and unlocking all the cells at Pentonville Prison, seemingly all by pushing a button on his cell phone. Now, after having bafflingly eluded conviction following his arrest, he explains to Sherlock how he blackmailed each and every member of the jury by finding out exactly what was each jury member’s weakness: someone they hold dear, something they want to hide, etc. Over a cup of tea in Sherlock’s living room, Moriarty declares exactly why he is the biggest threat in the criminal world: not only can he control ordinary people by accessing what is to them private and precious, but he has a “key code,” a “few simple lines of computer codes that can break into any system”³⁰⁰ and will give him access to all of the nation’s secrets.

This would indeed be a challenge worthy of Sherlock Holmes. After all, it is *he* who has traditionally been the master confessor, inducer and controller of everyone’s confessions and thereby secrets. Thus Moriarty’s claim that it is now *he* who owns secrets could prove to be a threat that poses a personal as well as public risk. However, after presenting this seemingly ominous threat early in the episode, and leading Sherlock on a bit of a wild goose chase across

²⁹⁹ “The Reichenbach Fall,” *Sherlock: Series 2*, Originally aired on January 15 2012 by BBC, Directed by Toby Haynes and Written by Steve Thompson.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

London to recover it, in the climactic scenes of the episode (and the series) Moriarty tells Sherlock that he has no such code, that there never has been such a code. Even if it did exist—a single secret that would collapse the entire world—he does not *need* it. Sherlock is perturbed. If Moriarty did not somehow gain access to a master secret, then how did he manage to become such a threat? How did he gather the requisite information? “Daylight robbery,”³⁰¹ says Moriarty. That is, information, secret information at that, that one must keep hidden suppressed and reveal only in private, is really not that hard to obtain anymore. A little coercion, a little bribe, a little digging, is usually all it takes. It is easy to find “willing participants,”³⁰² that is, willing divulgers of secret information.

This almost anticlimactic revelation towards the end of the episode—that there is no such secret, that obtaining such secret information, once Sherlock Holmes’ area of expertise, is no longer really a big deal since all such information is always already readily available—seems rather obvious in retrospect, living as we do in an age where everybody is always already confessing, be it on Facebook, twitter, blogs, reality television, and always already watching each other confess. At a time where “culture is wholly taken over by image: everything is visible, everything is accessible, everything is online,”³⁰³ Moriarty’s bluff that he owns secrets seems empty not because it is an exaggeration, but, as he points out himself, because it is mundane. He represents a persistent problem for Sherlock in that he is faced with a world full of potentially dangerous secrets (with CIA agents, terrorist cells, spies, top secret research facilities, lost pen drives with top secret military plans, etc., inundating the plots of *Sherlock*) as well as one in which no secret is really inaccessible, easily and fluidly exchanging hands and being swapped

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Supriya Chaudhuri discussing Baudrillard in “The Murder of Reality,” in *The New Strait Times*, published on May 6 1997.

around from point to point. Thus, in a world where secret information can still be severely damaging, yet if secrets are no longer part of a privileged domain of experts, and thus if confessions requires no experts for it to be brought out, then what use is the detective? And how indeed does the detective position himself with respect to the rest of the world? How does the detective fare when the panoptic and pastoral models reach their logical extremes, yielding a deluge of information on a scale that is overwhelming and debilitating? In a landscape rife with a postmodern skepticism about “metanarratives,” how does the detective fare, especially if the notion of a rational, central “self” that has depth and complexity, capable of making relevant change in the world through rational thought and action, has also been revealed to be one such comforting metanarrative that we have been telling ourselves? Moreover, if the space that the detective must now navigate is more of a cyberspace, characterized with a kind of Baudrillardian depthless hyperreality? How does he arrive at interpretations in world that is increasingly full of semiotic chaos, as language no longer has stable signifier and signifieds, with meaning eternally deferred? After all, space, and especially the notion of the safe, sacred, closed space; the concept of knowable, unique self that has a certain depth; and the residence of that self in language are all concepts that are presupposed by the confessional. How does the detective operate in a landscape where almost all of the elements of the confession are so radically dismantled?

In this chapter I attempt to demonstrate how Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* and Orhan Pamuk’s *The Black Book* present the problems of the breakdown of more stable understandings of the self, space, and of language—all crucial presuppositions of the confessional and the panoptic and pastoral disciplinary mechanisms. I will then take a necessarily incomplete look at the as of now unfinished narrative of BBC’s *Sherlock* to see how the mainstream television show depicts and deals with some of these very questions.

***City of Glass* and *The Black Book*: The Premise**

Paul Auster's *City of Glass* features Daniel Quinn, a recluse mystery writer who pens his work under the pseudonym William Wilson (a reference to Edgar Allan Poe's classic tale about doppelgangers and the fragmented self³⁰⁴) in an effort to evade public scrutiny. Widowed and without a child (it transpires later that Quinn's son, Peter, died at a very young age) Quinn leads a solitary life in his Manhattan apartment without any friends or family to speak of.

Quinn's transformation into a detective happens purely accidentally but also deliberately and self-consciously. "It was a wrong number that started it,"³⁰⁵ Quinn tells us, as he describes how he begins to get phone calls at odd hours of the night from someone desperately seeking one Paul Auster, private detective, requesting his assistance. When he receives the same call, however, a third time, Quinn, instead of hanging up, claims to indeed be the detective Paul Auster and willingly takes on the case. His client turns out to be a Virginia Stillman who wants to hire Auster/Quinn to protect her husband, Peter Stillman, from his father, also named Peter Stillman, who is apparently out of jail after long years of internment. Virginia fears that Stillman will come looking for his son and try to kill him. Quinn jumps head on into the case, playing up the part of the detective to the hilt, chain smoking, kissing his client's beautiful wife, speaking with a "tough guy" wit when around his clients, et al.

The young Peter Stillman, however, can barely string a sentence together, his language and indeed his sense of self always on the verge of collapse. He constantly reverts between referring to himself in the first person and the third person, as if not quite sure who he is speaking about, or who, indeed, is doing the speaking:

³⁰⁴ Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson," *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*, (Kessinger Publishing: Whitefish, Montana, 2004).

³⁰⁵ Paul Auster, *City of Glass* in *The New York Trilogy* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 3.

“I know nothing. I am only poor Peter Stillman, the boy who cannot remember. Boo hoo. Willy nilly. Nincompoop. Excuse me. They say, they say. But what does poor Peter say? Nothing, nothing. Anymore....he ate with his hands. Excuse me. I mean Peter did. And if I am Peter, so much the better...Excuse me. I am Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. Thank you.”³⁰⁶

Regardless of the fragmented nature of Peter’s “confession,” Quinn manages to learn that Peter’s father, the older Peter Stillman had locked him up in a dark room for the first nine years of his son’s life in the hope of recovering through his child what he believed to be a pure, prelapsarian language lost to man at the Tower of Babel. Stillman senior was hoping that by keeping his son in isolation, away from the sullying influence of modern languages, he may be able to recover this lost language. The young child was eventually rescued and Stillman senior incarcerated in an asylum for the criminally insane. Auster/ Quinn’s task, then, is to tail Stillman senior once he gets out of prison and make sure he does no harm to his son. As Quinn sets off on his adventures pretending to be Auster, he constantly draws upon other fictional detectives, including his own creation, Max Work, modeling his actions and behavior on his fictional predecessors whose confidence and certainty of thought and action impresses him no end. He regularly admires how, in the neatly organized world of detective fiction, “the detective is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them,” and it is the detective who “looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him.”³⁰⁷

This kind of (pastoral) power, however, is something that Quinn can only aspire to and never achieve. As he steps out from the shelter of his Manhattan flat and the comfort of his anonymous life as a writer, what was initially a bit of fun adventure soon becomes a quest for

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 21-22.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 9-10.

finding precisely what is promised by detective fiction—a search for meaning and truth, a search that becomes Quinn’s undoing.

As Quinn travels through the urban grid of Manhattan, in a city far, far, away, Orhan Pamuk’s amateur detective, Galip, finds himself roaming the labyrinthine streets of Istanbul on a quest of his own. Galip provides an interesting parallel to Quinn even though they travel in cities placed in dramatically different geo-political contexts. While Galip is not entirely a western detective—as a citizen of Istanbul he is always painfully both European and Asian and neither European nor Asian—he, nevertheless, is influenced in this book decidedly by canonical male detectives and sets out into the city to solve it much in the way earlier white male detectives have done. The protagonist of *The Black Book* comes home one day to find his beautiful but aloof wife, Rüya, gone from their apartment with nothing more than a hurriedly written nineteen-word message in a torn piece of paper. Simultaneously, Galip’s cousin, the extremely popular newspaper columnist Celâl Shalikh (who also happens to be Rüya’s half-brother) goes missing. Galip figures that since there are no such things as coincidences in detective stories, the two events must be related and that finding Celâl will lead him automatically to Rüya. In order to find his wife and Celâl, Galip, too, leaves the relative comfort and security of their home in the posh neighbourhood of Nişantaşı Square to step out into the city in search for the truth.

Galip, too, consciously emulates the detectives from the books his crime fiction-addicted wife devoured, maintaining a notebook, taking meticulous notes, etc. It “made him feel like the hero in one of those detective novels...it was like standing on the threshold of a new world that reminded him of Rüya, a world where he could become someone else...Galip knew that he bore no resemblance to the hero of a detective novel, but the pretense soothed him; the thought that he could ‘become’ that sort of person made it just a bit easier to sit there in his cluttered office, lost

inside the tangled web that was his life.”³⁰⁸ Detective fiction and the fiction of a detective figure seem to provide for Quinn as well as Galip a sense of a stable, uniform centre. At the same time, they unwittingly become secondary images, imitations of a (fake) original, in their own stories. They keep at their detection doggedly, though, keeping their eyes set on the goal, ignoring any inkling that tells them that they may be setting themselves up for failure and doom:

Thinking he might have read the signs wrong, Galip paused. If he began to believe that his feeling could mislead him, the city would soon swallow him up; of this he had no doubt: It was stories that kept him going.³⁰⁹

Quinn, too, has to choose to brush off doubts at crucial points. As he sits outside Grand Central Station, waiting for Peter Stillman senior to show up, sure enough, a man matching his description approaches. However even before he can begin tailing him, he is confounded at what he notices approaching behind his target:

Directly behind Stillman, heaving into view just inches behind his right shoulder, another man stopped, took a lighter out of his pocket, and lit a cigarette. His face was the exact twin of Stillman’s. For a second Quinn thought it was an illusion, a kind of aura thrown off by the electromagnetic currents in Stillman’s body. But no, this other Stillman moved, breathed, blinked his eyes; his actions were clearly independent of the first Stillman...He, too, was carrying a single bag: an elegant black suitcase, about the same size as the other Stillman’s. Quinn froze. There was nothing he could do now that would not be a mistake. Whatever choice he made—and he had to make a choice—would be arbitrary, as submission to chance. Uncertainty would haunt him to the end.”³¹⁰

Despairing that “there was no way to know: not this, not anything,”³¹¹ Quinn arbitrarily picks one Stillman and tracks his every move, scrupulously taking notes pushing aside nagging doubts, convinced that it is “much better ...to believe that all his steps were to some purpose.”³¹²

Signs Taken for Wonders—Semiotic Chaos in the Detective Story

³⁰⁸ Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, tr. Maureen Freely (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2006), 107.

³⁰⁹ Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, 221.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 68.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Paul Auster, *The City of Glass*, 74.

As Stillman senior begins to walk through the city, slowly, haltingly, jotting things down in a notebook, Quinn begins to quite literally shadow him as he follows him, armed with his own pen and notebook, furiously taking notes that he would later find incomprehensible and redundant. Quinn's initial problems in being a good detective are purely of the practical nature, as he struggles with some minor but significant issues that never seem to plague detectives in books: how to trail someone and take note simultaneously; what to rest the notebook on; how to write while walking yet not lose one's target; how to keep words and scribbles from becoming illegible and your lines overlapping each other, etc.

Progressing from simply keeping tabs on his target's external actions to seeking out a "confessional" session with him does not help much either. Quinn manages to strike up a seemingly casual conversation with Stillman while actually intending to mine him for telling information. However, this leads only to a mostly nonsensical stream-of-consciousness like conversation that Quinn fails to make much meaning of. What is worse, is that instead of gaining insight into Stillman soul, instead of being able to plumb into the depths of his being—a depth that detective fiction and confession in general presumes the self has—and being able to establish himself in a position of power and authority over Stillman, Quinn is only confronted with an image, a mirror: all surface and no depth, reflecting his own likeness back on to him. Stillman's descriptions of his projects and actions only remind us of Quinn himself: Here is a man who has lost a son named Peter, much like Quinn has. He is an author, just like Quinn, and his current project, of walking through the streets of New York, taking notes, trying to find "truth" makes him uncannily similar to Quinn, given that Quinn is tailing him. In fact, in their first meeting, instead of being able to direct and instruct Stillman towards revealing his self to him, Quinn finds himself being interpreted by Stillman. It is Stillman that says about Quinn, "I

see. Yes, yes, I see. Quinn. Hmmm. Yes. Very interesting. Quinn. A most resonant word,” before rattling off for Quinn all the possible implications of his name and character, noting how his name “flies off in so many little directions at once.”³¹³ Subsequently, rather than extracting from Stillman a guilt-ridden confession or an all-revealing explanation Quinn merely finds himself agreeing with him replying with a resounding “Indeed” to Stillman’s insistence that “Anything for the truth. No sacrifice is too great” and sympathizing with him when he says, “The world is in fragments...and it is my job to put it back together again” and “No one has understood what [he has] understood. [He] is the only one.”³¹⁴

Quinn does manage to learn that Stillman’s obsession about a pre-lapsarian “whole” language lost to man has given way to an even broader, more elaborate project, which is what leads him to roam the city of New York, “the most forlorn of places, the most abject,”³¹⁵ collecting clues. Explaining his project, Stillman’s echoes a popular postmodern concern: “Our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos...the brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. You have only to open your eyes to see it.”³¹⁶ In this context, New York becomes “a junk heap” and Stillman goes about it with a bag collecting objects he deems clues— “from the chipped to the smashed, from the dented to the squashed, from the pulverized to the putrid”³¹⁷—with the intention of rechristening them, casting upon them names that will help them regain their wholeness.

³¹³ Ibid, 90.

³¹⁴ Ibid, 91.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 94.

³¹⁶ Ibid, 92-93.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 93.

His obsession to regain this intellectual, unfragmented sense of language, of the self, and therefore of the world, however, leads only to absurdly amusing theories linking perceived clues scattered across time and space:

“A lie can never be undone...Remember what happened to the father of our country. He chopped down the cherry tree, and then he said to his father, ‘I cannot tell a lie.’ Soon thereafter, he threw the coin across the river. These two stories are crucial events in American history. George Washington chopped down the tree, and then he threw away the money. Do you understand? He was telling us an essential truth. Namely, money doesn’t grow on trees...it’s unfortunate that the tree was cut down. That tree was the Tree of Life, and it would have made us immune to death...But the father of the country knew his duty. He could not do otherwise. That is the meaning of the phrase ‘Life is a bowl of cherries.’”³¹⁸

If Stillman’s goal is to recover an essential truth connecting events and people across time and space he does not seem to have come up with any coherent theory thus far.

Meanwhile, in Istanbul, Galip’s search for Rüya gets subsumed by his obsessive search for Celâl, which, in turn soon becomes a search for an all-linking, all-explaining grand truth. Galip ransacks every aspect of Celâl’s life. He looks for him in his office, haunts his abandoned apartment, and peruses his published and unpublished manuscripts. Galip pores over all of the extremely prolific Celâl’s columns which range in topic from the problem of the Bosphorous drying up, the coming of a prophet, lost polar explorers, old shops with now unusable mannequins sawed up and separated “from the whole that gave them meaning,”³¹⁹ crumbling, forgotten buildings, Sultans who roam their cities disguised as anonymous strangers, Crown princes who struggle to become themselves, executioners who can hear the wails of a chopped off head, lucid dreams, “Beyoğlu bandits, poets who have lost their memories, magicians, songstresses with double identities and lovers whose hearts never mend.”³²⁰ Scattered amongst

³¹⁸ Ibid, 103.

³¹⁹ Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, 263.

³²⁰ Ibid, 267.

the decidedly eclectic content of his columns is a promise of truth, a promise of what Celâl Shalikh claims is “the secret that engulfs us throughout our lives without ever knowing” which he either already has or will reveal in a column that either already has or will be his greatest masterpiece.³²¹ That is, Celâl seems to tantalizingly indicate that his columns and articles carry vital clues which reveals a grand truth, a truth which he will one day string together and put in perspective to reveal a grand truth, foretelling, perhaps of a return of a Messiah, perhaps of the meaning of the mystery that is invisibly written on everyone’s faces, and that, when deciphered, will reveal the biggest mystery of all times, or perhaps, something else altogether. Celâl, thus, fashions himself as an intellectual, historical, almost mystical detective of sorts, promising his readers the reward of meaning and truth, if only they stick with him to the end.

Soon, though, even the search for Celâl is subsumed by Galip’s quest to unearth this grand truth for himself. And in order to uncover this Galip’s travels through text and time, through the pages of books and through the streets of Istanbul, which keeps leading him to people and objects redolent with the promise of meaning, of a grand, all-unifying, all-explaining meaning. Be it secret sects like the Hurufîs who believe in hidden meanings in letters; or the Bektâşîs, a secret cult that spent years disguised as yet another order, the Nakşîbendîs, and then several years secretly disguised as Marxist-Leninists, so secretly, in fact, that even some of their own cult members were unaware of what they really were a part of; or fables about ancient executioners who sense that the “enigma of the world was linked in some way with the enigma of the weeping face,”³²² Galip becomes one of the many in *The Black Book* who desperately hold on to a belief in secret meanings and hidden truths that will connect different aspects of Istanbul together. Galip is soon overcome with a desire to become a master confessor of sorts—

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid, 289.

to make all of existence reveal itself to him, confessing all of its mysteries and paradoxes that it engulfs within itself. Galip begins to see himself as the master interpreter, the one and only almighty figure capable of making everything and everyone speak to him, and thereby let him arrange them in their ontologically proper place in his journey towards the grand secret.

Unearthing the mystery of the universe, though, is no mean feat. As Galip sharpens his detecting gaze, the sheer number of clues he can see, the number of signs he can read, seems to explode exponentially. His travels through Istanbul in search of Rüya, Celâl, the truth, throw up not just one or a few stories, but hundreds upon hundreds of them, stories within stories, confessions within confessions. Jostling for space and significance with the recursive stories, characters, and events that appear in Celâl's columns are stories and memories from Galip's childhood and his early married life, along with stories he hears from pretty much every character he comes across in his quest—cranky, old-school journalists, shop owners who helpfully wrap dirty magazines with the daily crossword puzzle, old flames who make sudden comebacks, fanatic readers of Celâl's columns, a BBC news crew who are in town to interview Celâl, forgotten novelists, leftists professors researching conspiracy theories, movie star look-alike prostitutes endlessly re-enacting scenes from old movies, men in cabs who look like they have stepped out from a film noir, etc.—all of whom seem to be not completely yet tantalizingly connected to each other in a diaphanous, almost ethereal way, pointing to a meaning that Galip can only detect from the corner of his eyes, but that floats away when he attempts to look directly at it.

At a certain point, Galip seems to think he can read even strangers in the streets like open books, and begins to view them, their appearance, the symbols in the bags they carry, street signs, images of mosques, et al, as clues:

As he walked across the bridge, gazing idly into the Sunday crowds, he was suddenly certain that he was on the verge of solving a riddle that had been vexing him for years without even being aware of it... He passed soldiers on leave, men throwing fishing lines into the sea, families rushing for ferries. Though they didn't know it, they all resided inside the mystery he was about to solve...The moment Galip solved the mystery, they too would see the thing that had shaped their lives for so long”³²³

He believes that every person, every place, every object he encounters is just waiting for him to have its/their secrets revealed.

Almost everyone on the bridge was carrying plastic bags. They were bulging with paper sacks and newspapers and plastic and metal. He started at them as if he were seeing them for the first time, carefully reading their logos. For a moment it seemed to him that *these* were the words and letters that would lead him to the other world, the true world, and his heart leaped...Galip went on reading them: PUDDING SHOP...ATAKOY...TURKSOY...DRIED FRUITS...TIME FOR...PALACES.

When his eyes lit on an old fisherman—when he saw that there were no letters on his plastic bag, just the picture of a stork—it occurred to him that he could read pictures as easily as letters. On one bag he saw a happy family—a perfect family, with a mother, a father, a daughter, and a son—smiling hopefully out at the world; on another he saw two fish; he saw pictures of shoes, maps of Turkey, silhouettes of buildings, packs of cigarettes, pieces of baklava, black cats, roosters, horseshoes, minarets, and trees. All contained the key to the mystery, but what was the mystery?... All he needed then was to see an apprentice walk apprentice walk past the Suleymaniye Mosque carrying a picture of that mosque in a beaded frame: if the words, the letters, and pictures, and plastic bags were signs, then so too were the signified. The garish colours in the picture were more real than the mosque itself. This too had secret meaning. But only he could see it.”³²⁴

This newfound “sight” and “insight” is also accompanied, as it was with Stillman with a feeling of being exceptional, with a notion that, “no one gave a damn, no one but him.”³²⁵

Thus, only he was able to discern that “the pliers signified *vigilance* while the olives in that small jar signified *patience*, the happy driver in an ad for car tires stood for *almost there*; together they told him that he was almost there and should be vigilant and patient as he

³²³ Ibid, 214.

³²⁴ Ibid, 215.

³²⁵ Ibid.

proceeded to his destination.”³²⁶ Galip seems to, like Stillman senior, arbitrarily assign any meaning to any sign to construct for himself whatever story he needs to feed himself at the time.

However, being able to “read” even the most seemingly mundane of signs, only points him to other signs he cannot read, causing a crippling semiotic crisis:

He was surrounded by other signs that refused to divulge their meanings: telephone wires, traffic signs, detergent boxes, shovels without handles, a sign advertising circumcisions, illegible political slogans, numbered electric service designations, shards of ice, traffic arrows, blank sheets of paper.... Maybe if he waited, all would be clear, but it was so confused, wearisome, noisy. How different from the cosy world of Rûya’s detective novels, where authors never vexed a hero with more signs than he needed.³²⁷

Through it all, Galip, like an untiring knight refuses to give up his search for meaning in these different fragments of Istanbul he garners like an obsessive collector of myriad oddities.

Thus, rather than being the one controlling the various people and objects around him and confidently assigning meaning to them, Galip begins to be controlled by the mystery he perceives in everything he sees or touches. *The Black Book*, at a certain level, seems just like a way of stringing together endless stories, about people, places, lost souls, dreamers and drifters. In a way, this is not too different from say, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, which, read a certain way are just a way of stringing together fantastic stories about people and places that throng the streets and suburbs of Victorian London. But while the Holmes stories showed the detective’s mastery at being able to induce, interpret and control these stories, reading them expertly to unearth the truth, or at least a truth, Galip seems to drown under the deluge of clues, stories, confessions that gushes out of Istanbul, and seems to keep crashing over him in alternating waves of delight and desolation.

Home and the City—Disorienting Urban and Domestic Spaces

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid, 216.

Quinn and Galip's problem, however, is not simply semiotic. Their disorientation is accentuated by the disintegration of both public and private space. Space is crucial both to confession and detection and therefore doubly so to the confessor detective. The confession box testifies to the sanctity of a closed, small, space as a safe, sacred area required by both confessor and confessant. Indeed, Holmes' Baker Street living quarters operated as both his chambers as well as a confession box, in the presumed privacy of which people from all walks of life could come and submit to his superior knowledge. While the detective must necessarily opt out of the comforts of a traditional normative family life, nevertheless, Holmes' chambers on Baker Streets and his quasi family in Mrs. Hudson and Dr. Watson helped create a secure, safe space for Holmes where he could first establish himself as master confessor before venturing out into the city, emboldened by the information and power that this enclosed space had afforded him. The return to 221 B Bakers Street after every adventure similarly signaled the restoration of social and spatial order, of normality, of that status quo. No matter how unorthodox a domestic setting Holmes' living quarters made for, with Holmes practicing shooting on the wall, conducting odd experiments at odder hours, being an overall appalling roommate and a general mess, the easy companionship between the two friends and Mrs. Hudson's crotchety but occasional mothering presence did ensure that it remained a significance source of Holmes powers. It is the knowledge gained in the confession scenes in his own chambers that helps Holmes later on. It is at 221 B Baker Street that Holmes establishes himself as the leading and guiding male figure, even before he has stepped out into the big bad city. And it is the return to this space, the retrospective chit chat with his friend and flat mate in front of the fire or over breakfast, that signals that all is right with the world again and one may call upon him any time to seek his services.

For the “golden age” detectives like Poirot, the closed space—the parlour, the library, the manor, the hotel, the holiday home, or even the vicarage, etc.,— becomes their area of jurisdiction, their success depending to a large degree on their ability to contain the crime and criminals within the given closed off space. Locked rooms, libraries, manors, gardens, operate not only as scenes of crime and confession but as readable texts for the detective to scrutinize and establish his authority over, thereby creating the detective as much as being created by the detective. Misplaced chairs, dust on the mantelpiece or lack thereof, muddy footprints on the library floor, blood stains on carpets, matching vases, et al, can open themselves up to detectives like Holmes or Poirot and provide meaning, direct towards the truth.

For the hard-boiled detective his domestic quarters—spare, manly, and untouched by the stereotypically domesticating hand of a woman or a wife— reflected his autonomous masculine sense of self, and doubled as a quiet abode for a spot of sentimental reflection on his romanticized alienation and the futility of his lofty ideals. Much as Marlowe drifts through L.A beating up thugs and getting beaten up by cops, it is when he is in his bare bachelor apartment that his narrative is at its most reflective, most confessional. At key points of the story, Chandler’s prose lingers over Marlowe’s everyday rituals of making coffee, or washing his face, as he contemplates on his chosen life path, his ethically ambiguous actions, his own complicity in the crime and filth that surrounds him, before letting his sleuth reach for his gun, coat, and hat, and venture back into the hostile city space.

Quinn and Galip though, both seem to quickly lose the comfort and certainty indicated by the closed, domestic space of their homes. When we first meet Quinn, he is living a life of voluntary solitude in his Manhattan apartment, writing his novels under a pseudonym to avoid even the limited recognition that the life of an author could bring. However, as the story

progresses and he steps out from the shelter of his home into the city, it seems as if it becomes more and more impossible for him to return to that stable space of certainty and comfort. Indeed, at a certain point in the story Quinn begins to live in the alleyway opposite the young Stillman's house consumed by his obsessive need to take his job—to protect young Stillman—to its logical extreme and put his client under round-the-clock surveillance. Once the case begins to disintegrate, Quinn returns to his apartment only to find someone else living there and all his belongings gone, as if he never even existed. "Everything had changed. It seemed like another place altogether, and Quinn thought he must have entered the wrong apartment."³²⁸ With his home gone and all his money spent, Quinn makes his way to the apartment of Virginia and young Peter Stillman. There too, however, all that greets him is an empty, deserted apartment. No cigarette ashes from which to glean if someone had been there, no wine glasses on the table to point to how many people had been there, no dead body on the carpet pointing to the presence of a criminal, not even a beautiful woman lying on a bed waiting to be kissed, and no indication of any client arriving at any moment seeking help and deliverance, ready to lend themselves to a session of confession.

Galip, in Istanbul, suffers similar losses. While unlike Quinn, Galip had his wife with him in his Nişantaşı Square apartment, his life was probably lonelier, as he was never quite able to be the man he presumed his detective fiction obsessed wife wanted him to be, always feeling left out of the secret world of mystery stories that his wife inhabited and that Celâl had mastered. However, even this less than ideal domestic life is really torn asunder when Rüya disappears leaving behind a vague message with no explanations whatsoever. Before moving his search into the city, Galip begins by trying to look for traces of Rüya in the space now deserted by her, much

³²⁸ Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, 147.

as a detective searches for clues in a crime scene. He “spent most of the night going through the old chest of drawers he had...turned into a museum of his own life.”³²⁹ His search quickly proves to be in vain, but he presses on, nevertheless. “There was no faster way to shatter his illusions than to go through these drawers, but he still carried on, digging fruitlessly to the bottom of every box he could find, checking under his beds, and then, one last time, going through every pocket of every piece of clothing Rüya had left behind—each still had her scent, each held out the empty promise that nothing had changed or ever would.”³³⁰

By paying attention to the hundreds of “clues” around the house Galip does figure out a few details, but unlike Holmes, or Poirot, none of what he deduces proves helpful in any way:

Before leaving his apartment, Rüya had used that terrifying insect killer...and sprayed it all over the bathroom, the corridor, the kitchen. (The stink was still in the air.) She’d turned on the electric *chauffe-bain* (probably without thinking, and needlessly, because Thursdays were not hot-water days in their building); she’d spent some time reading *Milliyet* (its pages were wrinkled); she’s even done a bit of the crossword with the lead pencil she must have taken with her...She’d had breakfast (tea, white cheese, bread) and done the dishes. She’d smoked two cigarettes in the bedroom, another four in the sitting room.³³¹

On the one hand, objects and signs, rather than reveal wondrous secrets only points to the mundane and redundant. On the other hand, each object he touches rekindles in Galip a host of memories of his past with Rüya, that rather than illuminating his course of action for the present and future, only brings back a rush of emotions spanning a lifetime that leads to further pain and loneliness. If these objects do open themselves up to him and reveal the mundane or nostalgic stories and secrets they carry, Galip finds himself unable to make any meaning out of them, to discern any kind of truth from them no matter how thoroughly he searches:

³²⁹ Ibid, 49.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid, 50.

He went over and over the search in his mind (had he looked into the box at the back of the drawer?...Yes, of course he'd looked, he must have looked, perhaps he hadn't looked, no, of course not, he's forgotten to look, he was going to have to go through everything once more). Then he'll start all over again. Some way into this new bleak hunt, as he stood fingering the empty case of the long-lost pair of sunglasses, or grappling with the memories awakened by the buckle of one of Rüya's old belts he'd see how hopeless, how pointless it all was (and how implausible the detectives in all those books, not to mention the kindly authors whispering clues into their ears!) ³³²

In the end, when everything has come crashing down around him, Galip does return to his apartment one last time, but rather than be a comfortable return to the safety of the domestic space, this visit is only a painful reminder of what he has lost forever, what he perhaps never ever had, and what he can never regain. The loss of the domestic space then represents the loss of a kind of stable "outside" or "above" the city, a vantage point from where the detective can stand in relative stability and survey and contemplate the rest of the world.

The effect of the loss of the domestic space can also be felt in Quinn and Galip's inability to chart their way across the city without getting lost in it. The city has always played an important role in detective fiction, not only in creating the detective, but also, to a certain extent, in being created by the detective. Indeed, as pointed out by Foucault, it was primarily to deal with the problem of population, the problem of teeming millions from different social, class, professional backgrounds sharing the same closed space, that the confessional disciplinary tactics inducing people to speak in detail about their private lives were first developed. Sherlock Holmes (and indeed other detectives before and after him), proved to be a master manipulator of this urban space—crossing back and forth over real and imagined boundaries that mark the city, equally comfortable hiding out in opium dens as sitting in the luxurious chambers of lords and ladies. The detective expertly hopped across different social spaces but never allowed the one to contaminate or break into the other. Not only was foggy Victorian London, bustling with its

³³² Ibid, 51-52.

Baker Street Irregulars, policemen, enterprising governesses, lawmakers, beggars, ruffians, engineers, pawnbrokers, landowners, lords, ladies, bankers, et al, a backdrop for the Holmes stories, but it was that which Holmes presided over, keeping each in its socially designated space. It was his uncanny knowledge of its streets and alleyways as well as the people that thronged them that helped him be a truly panoptic and pastoral detective. As Swope points out, “The detective figure stands out within this schema in that his function involves delineating or reinscribing the position of all subjects; his primary task, accomplished through surveillance, is to reestablish order, or to return every object and subject to his, her, or its ideologically appointed space.”³³³

This is true for the hard-boiled detective as well. Los Angeles is a key part of Marlowe’s narrative, presenting a sometimes fantastic, sometimes misty, sometimes seedy and dark almost Arthurian backdrop against which Marlowe can style himself as a modern day knight of sorts, getting disillusioned and bitter and weary on his quest but never quite getting lost. As Marlowe shifts from one cheap apartment to the other, moving between the mansion of the rich in the hills and the dingy bars offering cheap booze and inedible steaks in the valley, he constructs a version of the 20th-century urban space that he is in total control of representing, in that it is entirely through his subject position that we view it. As Marlowe drives through the hills of LA he is the central (male) “I”/“eye” that “sees and deciphers the signifiers of that labyrinth of populated spaces and buildings which forms the modern metropolis.”³³⁴ Thus, much like Holmes, not only does the hard-boiled detective in a sense create the version of the urban space that we encounter, but his image as a stable, male, autonomous entity in control of his surroundings is created by the

³³³ Richard Swope, “Supposing a Space: The Detecting Subject in Paul Auster's City of Glass,” *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 2.3 (2006), accessed July 26, 2013.
<http://reconstruction.eserver.org/023/swope.htm>.

³³⁴ Ralph Willett, *The Naked City: Urban Crime Fiction in the USA*, (Manchester: Manchester University, 1996), 3.

urban spaces he travels through. Thus, “both its nineteenth and twentieth-century manifestations the detective figure epitomizes the post-Enlightenment (thinking) subject who produces a rationally ordered social space and is in turn produced by that space.”³³⁵

However, the postmodern city is a phantasmorgia. Quinn and Galip’s quest makes them travel much like Holmes in London and Marlowe in L.A in circuitous routes in their respective cities—New York and Istanbul—so much so that their stories become stories of these cities. Unlike Holmes or Marlowe though, rather than be able to display a mastery and control over the geography of the urban space they inhabit, their city streets and alleys turn into deadly mazes, throwing up false clues and disorienting them completely.

Once Quinn begins to trail Stillman, for instance, it is Stillman’s whims and wishes that controls how and when he travels through the city. While Quinn’s earlier walks were described as “aimless motion,” and “wandering,” it was Quinn’s own whims that had guided him earlier. However, once he begins to trail Stillman, even aimless wondering becomes “a privilege denied to Quinn”³³⁶ and he seems to miss his earlier rather anonymous, fruitless travels around the city as detecting doesn’t quite turn out to be what he had hoped it would. As Quinn follows Stillman on his daily walks, he sketches little maps of the routes he takes, only to discover that Stillman seems to be tracing out a letter on each walk, ultimately spelling out the word, “Tower of Babel,” which as has been mentioned before, is where, according to Stillman, mankind lost their “pure” language. Instead of bolstering his confidence though, this discovery only leads to Quinn becoming overcome with crippling doubt, “which came, as if on command, filling his head with mocking, sing-song voices.”³³⁷ Having traced out what Stillman’s walks seemed to be spelling

³³⁵ Richard Swope, “Supposing a Space: The Detecting Subject in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*.”

³³⁶ Paul Auster, *City of Glass*, 74-75.

³³⁷ Ibid, 86.

out, Quinn is hardly jubilant with self impressed certainty like, say, Holmes or Poirot would have been; Instead of rejoicing with conviction at his discovery, he finds himself thinking, “The letters were not letters at all. He had seen them only because he wanted to see them...Stillman had nothing to do with it. It was all an accident, a hoax he had perpetrated on himself.”³³⁸ Later on, in a doubt induced anxiety dream Quinn “found himself in the town dump of his childhood, sifting through a mountain of rubbish.”³³⁹

Towards the end of the story, while Quinn is still on the case but when it has already started unraveling, disappearing as it were, with, all of a sudden, Stillman Sr. seemingly nowhere to be found, and Virginia Stillman no longer answering Quinn’s phone calls, Quinn, in a rare moment of aloofness begins to walk across the city as aimlessly as before, stopping to look at street performers, venturing into cafes for a bite to eat, pausing to gaze at seagulls, sitting down at benches and taking in the scenery, and for the first time since he started on the case, he finds himself writing things down in his red notebook that has nothing to do with the case, and somewhat ironically, only now noticing things he has apparently never taken note of before: “Today, as never before: the tramps, the down-and-outs, the shopping-bag ladies, the drifters and drunks. They range from the merely destitute to the wretchedly broken. Wherever you turn, they are there, in good neighborhoods and bad.”³⁴⁰ Quinn sits and tries to make sense of what he observes in his walk across the city, about how to, detective-like, organize, rearrange, place all these new people he now becomes aware of—the unwanted, the undesired, the unhomed of the city—but fails to do so. It is after this walk—his last in the narrative—that Quinn himself voluntarily becomes homeless, beginning to live in the alley, sleeping in a rubbish bin, looking

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid, 87.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 129.

up at the skies from the streets. Thus, Quinn's detecting hasn't given him the kind of towering, almost panoptic, perspective over the city that we have seen earlier detectives maintain. He cannot, like Inspector Bucket, climb a fictional tower in his mind and observe all that moves in the city nor can he, like Inspector Field, pin the beggars and thieves lying in heaps in the city's dark and dingy corners into submission, blinding them with the glaring light that only he can cast over them. Neither can he, like Holmes, after lying in disguise in a seedy alley or in an opium den trot right back home: Instead, Quinn literally *becomes* the homeless, the disempowered, the disenfranchised. Once he leaves the relative comfort of his Manhattan apartment, Quinn is never quite allowed the bird's eye point-of-view that allows him to place all the different elements and spaces of the city in a non-disorienting perspective. His perceptions of the city are always characterized by surface descriptions—awkwardly sketched maps, mirrors, and lists. It is this lack of perspective, this depthlessness of the way in which he must experience the city that becomes truly disorienting for him. Richard Swope points out that “while Quinn's efforts to construct a text of the city produce a multi-layered jumble, Auster's fictional account of New York City, the urban text we read is impenetrable because it is all surface, as if nothing exists beneath the glassy veneer.”³⁴¹ Similarly, Ralph Willett notes that Auster's “cityscape itself is flat, uniform, without depth, its repetitions and lack of features creating what Edward Relph called the ‘placelessness of place.’”³⁴²

This particularly postmodern problem haunts Galip as well as he makes his way around his city. When Galip begins to travel through Istanbul, though, it is not just one surface, one palimpsest that he has to navigate. Pamuk's Istanbul is not simply Istanbul in the present. What Galip has to deal with is Istanbul the historic, political, and geographic. The city that Galip has to

³⁴¹ Richard Swope, “Supposing a Space: The Detecting Subject in Paul Auster's City of Glass.”

³⁴² Ralph Willett, *The Naked City: Urban Crime Fiction in the USA*, 57.

navigate is not simply Istanbul the “real” but also Istanbul the mythical, the fictional, the fantastic and the nostalgic, and Pamuk makes no effort to let us know which is which. Pamuk’s Istanbul is a like a painting crafted in excruciating detail, yet that is aware of its two-dimensional existence, that is conscious of its own flat surface and makes no attempt at providing any depth perception. The image of Istanbul comes to us filtered through stories, anecdotes, tall tales, secret histories, factual accounts delivered by people who are themselves either earnest researchers, zealous journalists, jaded historians, or simply fakes, frauds, impersonators, or just copies of each other, simulations and simulacra. The Istanbul that spreads out around Galip is, in a way, in spite of its complexities, much like Auster’s New York, depthless, flat, and created purely out of images, out of copies. That is, *The Black Book*, instead of being a story of Istanbul’s history, is a story about stories about Istanbul’s history; instead of narrating Istanbul’s mythology is a story about stories of Istanbul’s mythology; instead a nostalgic account of a lost Istanbul, is a story about Istanbul the nostalgic and fantastic, and so on. Indeed, with regards to a political murder we are told that “Celâl was drawn to it because, this being a country where everything was a copy of something else, the splinter group charged with the murder had, without even realizing it, replicated the plot of a Dostoyevsky novel (*The Possessed*) down to the last detail.”³⁴³

Like Quinn, Galip, too can therefore only describe the city in an endless series of lists, as if he can only encounter the city in an empty ritual of endless naming, a mere repeating of names of object. Thus, a junk dealer is identified only by listing of the objects he is selling: “two elbow-shaped pipes, assorted records, a pair of black shoes, a broken pair of pliers, a lamp base, a black phone, two bedsprings, a mother of pearl cigarette-holder, a broken wall clock, a stack of White Russian banknotes, a brass faucet, a figuring of a Roman huntress—the goddess Diana?—an

³⁴³ Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, 244.

empty picture frame, an old radio, a pair of doorknobs, a sugar bowl.”³⁴⁴ Galip does not know how else to “place” them, to order them, other than just repeat their names. Even as Galip inundates his narratives with lists, with an endless naming of objects, what he finds “shocking,” is that “they made no secret of their...meanings.”³⁴⁵ Thus, while Galip is constantly spurred by a desire “to enter the secret world of second meanings,” he is only confronted by endless flatness, and surfaceness, recursive loops, and therefore ultimately abandons his quest altogether.

The Problem of the Inauthentic Self

“I must be myself, I must be myself, I must be myself.”—Celâl in *The Black Book*³⁴⁶

The postmodern detective’s inability to master space proves severely damaging to his sense of the self. The fragmentation of the sense of self—a concern commonly expressed by scholars, most notably, by Fredrick Jameson in “Postmodernism”—is indicated in *City of Glass* and *The Black Book* primarily by the sheer number of doubles, others, or doppelgangers of the detective that spring up all over the text.

When we first encounter Quinn he is already working under the pseudonym William Wilson (which itself is a name borrowed from an Edgar Allan Poe story about doppelgangers). He also identifies in a strange way with his fictional detective, Max Work. Thus, already our singular hero is a “triad of selves.”³⁴⁷ Once he begins to work as Paul Auster, however, he becomes a double not only of Paul Auster the author writing the book, but also of Paul Auster the character in the story. Quinn initially finds this multiplicity of selves—this ease with which he could slip in and out of selves—comforting, even liberating:

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 217.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 180.

³⁴⁷ Paul Auster, *City of Glass*, 5.

The effect of being Paul Auster, he had begun to learn, was not altogether unpleasant. Although he still had the same body, the same mind, the same thoughts, he felt as though he has somehow been taken out of himself, as if he no longer had to walk around with the burden of his own consciousness. By a simple trick of the intelligence, a deft little twist of naming, he felt incomparably lighter and freer. At the same time, he knew it was all an illusion. But there was a certain comfort in that. He had not really lost himself; he was merely pretending, and he could return to being Quinn whenever he wished. The fact that there was now a purpose to his being Paul Auster—a purpose that was becoming more and more important to him—served as a kind of moral justification for the charade and absolved him of having to defend his lie. For imagining himself as Auster had become synonymous in his mind with doing good in the world”³⁴⁸

However, soon enough, Quinn begins to feel the burden of this fragmentation as more and more doubles begin to show up all over the text and of course, his very target, Peter Stillman senior, turns out to be an eerie double of sorts for Quinn. When things begin to spiral out of control Quinn seeks out the “real” Paul Auster—the detective that Virginia Stillman was actually seeking the night she phoned Quinn by mistake. This however, does not help, especially as this Paul Auster turns out to be an author and not a detective, just like Quinn, and therefore, yet another double, of what Quinn once was, of what he could have been—happy, with a beautiful wife, and son. The novel posits no original, then, only a series of similar selves all recursively pointing at each other.

At one point, late into the story, Quinn fails to recognize his own reflection in the mirror on the façade of the building: “Feature for feature, he studied the face in front of him and slowly began to notice that this person bore a certain resemblance to the man he had always thought of as himself...He tried to remember himself as he had been before, but he found it difficult. He looked at this new Quinn and shrugged. It did not really matter. He had been one thing before, and now he was another. It was neither better nor worse. It was different, and that was all.”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 61-62.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 143.

Quinn, at this stage of the narrative, is no longer holding on to any illusion of authenticity or harbouring any desires to reflect a unique self.

Soon afterwards, Quinn quite literally disappears from the text, from the world, leaving behind no traces that can be read like clues, no signs leading to illuminating meaning. Once he emerges from the alleyway, he not only learns that his home is gone and the Stillmans' apartment is empty but that Peter Stillman senior has killed himself by jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge, and Virginia and the younger Peter Stillman are not just gone from their apartment, but have quite literally disappeared without a trace. At the final count then, Quinn is left without a home, without money, his client who assigns him the case vanishes without a trace, and the man he was obsessively shadowing has chosen to self-destruct. It is not only that everything vanishes and disintegrates, but it is almost as nothing had ever been there, to begin with. At the empty apartment of the Stillmans', when the extent of his loss is clear to him, Quinn even takes the clothes off his back, throwing them out of the window in a symbolic gesture of his disintegration. He realizes, "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."³⁵⁰ And indeed, hereafter, Quinn too, in a final act of mimicry, disappears from the narrative leaving behind no more clues of his existence than some illegible scribbles in a red notebook—like an already fading memory of a dream one had had the night before.

Meanwhile, in *The Black Book*, Galip also struggles to dominate the narrative like most literary detectives would. In a problem not unlike Quinn's, Galip's quest for identity and his attempt to soothe his sense of loss, is however, further complicated by his inability to maintain

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 149.

his sovereignty as other detectives/doubles keeping cropping up all over the narrative, challenging, mocking, as well as threatening him.

As Galip wonders around the city, seeking meaning amidst the throngs, the alley ways, the movie theatres, he is increasingly aware of another “eye” constantly watching him.

As he sat on the Eminonu bus, he felt the package on his lap grow strangely heavier, and stranger still, he felt as if there was an eye hanging over him, watching everything he did. But it did not belong to a fellow passenger, for they were all gazing absently at the crowds in the snowy streets as the bus rocked back and forth, back and forth, like a steam boat in a stormy sea. Alaadin had wrapped up his political periodicals in an old *Milliyet*, and now, as he looked down at it, he saw that Celâl’s column had ended up on top; and there was Celâl, staring up at him from his picture. It was the same picture he had seen every morning for years and years, but this was the strangest thing of all: Today it was looking at him in a new way. I understand you perfectly, the picture told him. I am watching your every move! Galip put his thumb over the picture, hoping to save himself from this eye that could read his soul, but throughout that long bus journey he still felt its presence and its all-seeing gaze.³⁵¹

Indeed, as the novel progresses, the mysterious Celâl’s absent presence becomes increasingly foreboding. As a columnist recording his ambling, disorganized, haphazard observations on Istanbul, its streets and buildings, its people, its history, its myths, its fictions, its secrets and mysteries—some, that are only visible to him— and promising his readers hidden meanings, all-encompassing revelations, Celâl Shalikh establishes himself as the other detective-figure in the novel.

As a daily deliverer of meanings to Istanbul’s various mysteries, the presence of Celâl Shalikh severely compromises Galip’s struggle to establish his own self, his “eye”/ “I” as the centre of his world. This is exacerbated since Celâl’s columns actually appear as every alternate chapter in the book, so for almost half of the narrative, it is actually Celâl’s voice that is directly speaking to us. Pamuk writes about Galip in the third person, but in Celâl’s columns, Celâl

³⁵¹ Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, 23.

speaks in the first person, that is, in his own voice. Thus, the confident, all-knowing, “I” within the novel is Celâl’s and not Galip’s, something that undermines rather than bolster Galip’s own struggle to find a “his own true self,” so much so, that soon, Galip figures that the best way for him to be himself is to be somebody else, specifically Celâl. It is this quest that leads him, ultimately, to take up habitation in Celâl’s now abandoned apartment, where he begins to wear Celâl’s clothes, eat his food, shave with his razor and eventually, to ghost write his columns. Even as Galip becomes Celâl’s double he encounters yet other doppelgangers, chiefly in the form of a fanatical reader who contacts him, mistaking him for Celâl. It turns out that he, too, like Galip, had been seeking Celâl, had minutely studied all of his works, and had spent the last few days roaming the city of Istanbul, following the same paths that Galip had, observing Galip while he observed the city and its people. In a some heated exchanges over the phone, this fanatic reader of Celâl’s writings accuses Galip (thinking he is Celâl) of being a fraud, of selling fake mysteries through his columns and thereby creating false hope of salvation among his followers. He even threatens to kill Celâl/Galip, thus quite literally endangering Galip’s existence:

“No, I am going to kill you because you deceived us all, deceived the entire nation with your bold lies..., elegant turns of phrases, and endearing antics—for years and year, you even fooled me....You seduced us, deceived us, degraded us all! Oh, when I think how much faith I put in you!...Do you know how it feels to find out that you’ve been made to believe something by a nonbeliever? To know that the man who has converted you does not believe in his own words? My complaint is that you have kept me from being myself.”³⁵²

Ironically, while he is challenging Celâl of being a fake, he has no idea that the person he is talking to is quite literally a fake Celâl, and also his own double. With so many Celâl/Galip/detective/figures floating about, each trying to establish their own voice, soon

³⁵² Ibid, 388.

enough things fall apart and the centre no longer holds. The changing world around the detective, with its skepticisms regarding authenticity, a stable centre, and an identity, frustrates Galip's attempt to establish himself as a panopticon and purveyor of pastoral power of his own making. Whatever sense of self Galip can find is second-hand, borrowed from Celâl. This is doubly ironic since Celâl himself turns out to be inauthentic, his writings plagiarized, and all his promises of hidden meanings in his columns false, a mere ruse to keep his readers engaged and devoted. What is even more ironic, though, is that even in spite of this, Galip feels like his own "authentic" self only when he completes writing his first story *as* Celâl, that is, when he first, in a way, successfully *becomes* Celâl, and triumphantly declares, "Yes, yes, I am myself!"³⁵³ Selfhood thus, comes not by just by being, but by being like somebody else. This ease with which Galip and Quinn seem to become other characters is once again indicative of the superficiality of selves—it is as if their selves have no depth, much like the city—and without a self that has an interior, a past, a unique story, there is really nothing for the detective to draw out.

Identity is then characterized by a surface-ness, indicated by the ubiquity of mirrors or reflective surfaces in *The Black Book* and *City of Glass*: with the appearance of depth, but with only a depthless exterior that reflects a copy of a copy back at you. Galip and Quinn may well echo what Celâl writes in one of his columns: "we found ourselves caught between two full-length mirrors. We stood there stunned, watching our reflections multiply, watching them grow smaller and smaller and vanish into infinity."³⁵⁴

The (Lack of an) End

³⁵³ Ibid, 438.

³⁵⁴ Paul Auster, *The City of Glass*, 367.

“Nobody reads a mystery to get to the middle. They read it to get to the end.”

—Mickey Spillane³⁵⁵

Ultimately, both cases lead the detectives and along with them the readers to dissolution and disintegration. *The City of Glass* ends almost before the story has taken off, like a half expressed idea that breaks off mid-sentence. In the final chapters we suddenly learn that this is not even an omniscient third-person account that we have been treated to so far, but rather a first person account of yet another “writer” figure separate from Paul Auster—he is neither the Paul Auster, the author that Quinn looks up, nor the Paul Auster that Virginia Stillman was intending to hire in the first place. This new narrator abruptly makes his presence felt towards the end of the story, revealing that he who has been narrating this story based on the notes he discovered in Quinn’s red diary. Just when we become comfortable in our assumption that when we are witnessing the detective’s disintegration, we are doing that at least from the relative stability of an omniscient narrator’s point of view, we are informed otherwise. “At this point, the story grows obscure,” the narrator tells us, in a sudden metatextual move. “The information has run out, and the events that follow this last sentence will never be known. It would be foolish to hazard a guess,”³⁵⁶ he concludes, drawing attention to himself for the first time in the story. We are informed that the narrator is Paul Auster (the writer who Quinn seeks out who turned out to not have been Paul Auster the detective that Virginia had been seeking)’s friend and after Quinn disappeared they went looking for him ultimately to the Stillmans’ apartment only to find the red diary. “I have followed the red notebook as closely as I could, and any inaccuracies in the story should be blamed on me,” claims the narrator, hastening to assure us that while “there were

³⁵⁵ Mickey Spillane in *Writers on Writing* by John Winokur (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1986).

³⁵⁶ Paul Auster, *The City of Glass*, 157.

moments when the text was difficult to decipher, he has done his “best” with it and “refrained from any interpretations.”³⁵⁷

However, given that Quinn is often shown scratching his head over the notes he has taken when he tries to read them, wondering what the hell he was thinking when he put them down, struggling, often unsuccessfully to decipher his own handwriting, the entire story then is now overcast with uncertainty. Moreover, if the narrator’s own account is to be believed, then Quinn does not begin using the red notebook until well into the story, and even then, when he is not illegibly jotting down unnecessarily detailed accounts of Stillman’s movements, he is writing down what can be described at best to be “stream of consciousness” accounts of the city, its people, with only marginal information regarding the Stillman case. Thus, ultimately, as the story ends almost before an ending as it were, all we learn is that Quinn is merely a part of someone else’s apologetic first person narrative, someone else’s confession—confessing to the unreliability of the entire narrative. Thus Quinn disappears from his own case and what began with Quinn the detective attempting to solve a mystery, becomes the mystery of the disappearance of the detective.

While Auster gives us almost a non-ending, a middle-of-the plot ending, Pamuk creates a story that refuses to end. In Galip’s case, Pamuk stretches out this delay in ending so much that it almost becomes the primary narrative device. The unending web of stories Galip gets caught up in seems to resemble more the infinite regress of the *Arabian Nights* where Scheherazade’s very life depends on being able to keep the stories coming, on being able to keep the mystery alive, on being the only one who knows how to get to the end of the story. *The Black Book* is a veritable quagmire of stories, yarns, reflections, reports, essays, and anecdotes, that end only to capture the

³⁵⁷ Ibid, 158.

reader in others more like it, all dangling the carrot stick of meaning in front of us, egging us on to keep reading, keep keeping faith, right up to the end that refuses to come.

While Quinn disappears literally from the story, Galip disappears in a sense, too, for by the end he is no longer living as himself, but as Celâl. More significantly, the detective in Galip disappears as well. Soon after Galip “finds himself” by becoming Celâl, Celâl is shot dead, and subsequently, Rüya’s body is discovered in a Alaadin’s shop. Galip, curiously enough, instead of sharpening his detective’s vision at this crucial point, gives up detection all together. Whatever little closure is provided comes from a journalist who reports that Celâl and Rüya had been on their way to the movie theatre when they were shot by a mysterious man. While Celâl died on the spot, Rüya was able to stumble in to the nearby shop and subsequently dies there. This of course raises deeper questions about Galip and his tale, none of which are answered: if Galip’s quest for finding Celâl and Rüya had indeed been so epic, if they indeed had been proving so difficult to find, how is it that they were openly walking about at a very public part of town, possibly a few blocks from Galip’s own home? Had this entire “disappearance” been but a ruse cooked up by Galip to give him a reason to launch an elaborate introspective search of his self and meaning? Or had he been speaking only metaphorically, signaling how left out he always felt from Rüya and Celâl’s interior worlds, who to him represented the reader of detective fiction and the detective, respectively?

For a novel that refused to end, the ending, when it comes, is severely anticlimactic, almost a non-ending. For a hero who had been so caught up in his quest that he could not stop exploring, hoarding more and more clues, relating and reading story after story, essay after essay, convinced that literally every object and person he encountered and met carried secrets in hidden depths exclusively for him to unearth, Galip is remarkably unenthused and resigned at the end, as

if confronting the real, material loss of Rüya and Celâl has rendered him inert, as if the pain of losing his wife has forced him to become numb and listless, and instead of sharpening his detecting skills he gives up on it altogether, apathetically allowing the authorities to take over. Ironically, it is at the very end of the narrative, when Galip seems most reluctant to act as a hero that the narrative suddenly switches from the supposedly passive third person voice to the supposedly more active first person (and back again to the third person before jumping back to end in the first person) and it is revealed that Galip had been writing about himself in the third person all along. Presumably it is only now that he feels he has found his “self” enough to speak in the first person, to reclaim the “I” that had so far been exclusively granted to Celâl. However, by this point, the entire notion of a stable, unique self has been dismantled to the extent that this sudden revelation, this switching back and forth between the first and third persons no longer seem to matter.

Thus, at the point of the story where there are not one but two undeniable corpses, at the very moment when the mystery finally deepens, Galip, who had only moments earlier jubilantly announced his finding of himself, quits. His narrative vigor also seems to slack off. A coup is mentioned, but listlessly so. No details are provided as to how it transpired, how it affected his beloved city, how it changed people’s lives, if at all. Galip who had been such a chronicler of Istanbul in its various aspects, can somehow not really cope with the present realities of the city. He passively looks on as the authorities take over the investigations, even refusing to contribute any insight or expertise as he is pulled to their headquarters night after night to identify possible suspects. He apathetically notes how the police follow the same path that he had, poring over each of Celâl’s columns, trying to connect different stories together, floating different theories about the death—that it was politically motivated, that it was executed by a madman, that it was

the work of one of the many that Celâl had rebuked or betrayed in his columns—each as likely or unlikely as the other. He also remains curiously unmoved as a series of people come forward to confess to the crime only to retract them, until one of them, a barber, is finally tried for the murder and executed. Galip provides no assuring details about this man to dispel any doubts that the authorities may have gotten the wrong man, but wraps up this story in a mere paragraph, saying, with extreme passivity, “it was decided that the murderer was a barber” who had been mentioned in one of Celâl’s columns and “who first denied the crime, and then confessed to it, only to deny it again, and then confess to it once more.”³⁵⁸ Galip does point out that just because this man was convicted and punished, does not mean that he was in fact the assassin, by mentioning that the authorities “decided” that this man was indeed the one they wanted and merely settled for a version of truth that would be convenient. Thus, not only does Galip not take part in the investigative process, but becomes non-cooperative, showing no inclination to work with the police in any capacity. He makes this clear to his readers, saying “it was after they showed me their photograph of this sixty-year-old man, and after they realized that I was not going to identify him as the culprit, that I stopped being invited to the fort to play mysterious games with other people’s lives.”³⁵⁹ After spending an entire narrative attempting to obtain the authoritative first-person point-of view-occupied by Celâl, Galip, now uses an extremely passive, almost inert, uninterested tone to deliver what would normally be one of the most crucial parts of a detective story. Lonely and desolate, he however, continues to write as Celâl putting out his columns regularly disguising them as posthumous publications. Now, instead of the one who simply seeks meaning, he is the meaning maker, selling his readers the hint of mystery in everything from street lamps to plastic bottles and egging them on with the promise of one day,

³⁵⁸ Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, 456.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

unearthing the mystery, even as we sense—at his suspension of detection—that he barely believes in these stories he once so desperately thought he could unearth and solve.

Thus, in both Quinn's and Galip's case, the only truth these amateur detectives discover is that it does not exist, and indeed, maybe did not exist at all. This is in keeping with other postmodern texts that seem to end with some kind of destruction, disintegration, perhaps pointing out the fictionality, the constructedness of some of our most basic assumptions, some of the grand meta-narratives we have based our stories on. Galip and Quinn's stories ends with the negation of the detective, as if they cannot sustain the character, or that the character can no longer continue to be faced with such overwhelming challenges to the very things that made them and that they controlled. It is almost as if the postmodern text expunges the detective by making overt what was only implicit and even covert in the depictions of previous generations of PIs. Indeed, it is as if these stories are about anachronistic heroes in a skeptical world where they seem redundant, ridiculous, even impossible. The detective's chief discovery about the world in which it finds itself is that he is powerless to order it, and that he does not even have the easy fiction of a stable self on hand that will enable this ordering. It is not that he can no longer extract confessions; it's just that that ability no longer leads him anywhere, no longer grants him any worthwhile authority that will help him manage those and that he encounters. Neither can he successfully approach confession from the other end, by projecting a confessional narrative himself where he becomes the guiding force in the world that is presented to us. In Galip's case it takes him a long, almost interminable narrative to climb up to the position of the authoritative "I" and even then it is a borrowed "I," an impersonating "I", and in having done that, appears to have lost steam, lost interest. For Quinn, this "I" remains a total fiction, as he is entirely subsumed within the confession of another. Confronted by his own fictionality, by the

incredibility of his own project, the detective then paints himself into a corner, or rather backs into a cliff edge and has no choice but to disappear, die, give up and fall.

Sherlock and the Big Fall

This brings us back, having digressed entirely, to *Sherlock*. In the very first episode of the first series of the BBC drama, the eponymous protagonist, Sherlock, shows us just how connected he is, how much access he has to private information, when we see that somehow he can send texts to all journalists simultaneously in a press conference he is not even attending. As Lestrade updates the press about a recent series of murders, telling them things like, “We’ve got our best people investigating,” Sherlock mockingly undermines him by texting everyone in the press conference: “Wrong!”³⁶⁰ A hapless Lestrade declares that he would put a stop to it but that he has no idea how Sherlock does it. This establishes Sherlock, right from the beginning, in the old familiar figure of the detective as the watchdog, the detective who can survey all while himself remaining unseen, as a detective who knows everything about others, but does not let on much about himself.

However, soon enough, we learn that even in the case of Sherlock—who admittedly is not burdened by detectives like Galip and Quinn by being cast in postmodern texts and instead appears as the hero of a mainstream prime time television series—the centre of surveillance is no longer exclusively within him; there are other eyes trained on him. The first of these “eyes” belong to none other than Mycroft Holmes. When John (Watson) is first creepily summoned by a mysterious caller to a deserted warehouse—someone who seems to know exactly which seemingly random public phone booth to call in order to reach him and who seems to have an

³⁶⁰ “A Study in Pink,” *Sherlock: Series 1*, Originally aired on 25 July, 2010 by BBC, Directed by Paul McGuigan and Written by Steven Moffat.

uncannily unnerving knowledge of Watson's personal life—we learn that somebody is indeed watching the watchmen.

The ominous stranger who identifies himself as Sherlock's "arch enemy" and who later Sherlock describes as "the most dangerous man you have ever met,"³⁶¹ makes us initially assume that this is probably going to be the modern day Moriarty. The fact that this turns out to be Mycroft should be a matter of some concern since we are also told by both the original Conan Doyle stories and the new BBC series that, "Mycroft IS the British government."³⁶² Mycroft represents a new kind of problem for the contemporary detective. He is a foreboding point of surveillance that lies outside the detective, specifically a government or at least state-sponsored surveillance, we can align him, in a in a post-9/11, post terrorism world rife with state backed phone tapping, security cameras, background checks, drone surveillance, collection of personal data and all kinds of intrusion on civilian lives for the sake of perceived safety. Indeed, "A Study in Pink," the first episode of the first series ends with Mycroft ominously telling his assistant to "upgrade the surveillance level ...on Dr. John Watson and Sherlock Holmes."³⁶³ The "new" Mycroft has a much more permanent presence in the *Sherlock* stories as does the "new" Moriarty, signifying a much more constant and pervasive challenges to Sherlock's authority. Sherlock's has a much more contentious relationship with his older brother than Holmes ever had, and indeed this new Mycroft is consistently depicted as a bit of a nasty man, somewhat sinister even in his ostensibly polite manners. As someone who keeps track of every move Sherlock—and indeed anyone else makes—Mycroft is quite literally a "big brother" figure who is constantly watching you. And now the detective too is the object of this surveillance.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid, and Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Bruce Partington Plans," *His Last Bow*, accessed July 29, 2013, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2346/2346-h/2346-h.htm>.

³⁶³ "A Study in Pink," *Sherlock: Series 1*.

Often, Mycroft appears to have a much more in-depth knowledge of what is going on than Holmes. For instance, in “A Scandal in Belgravia” it is Sherlock who is (almost) oblivious to a secret plan involving a Flight 007, or “Bond Air” as Mycroft refers to it. Towards the beginning of the episode we are treated to a montage depicting Sherlock pacing his room as a series of clients approach him with seemingly mundane problems. One among them is a man holding an urn insisting “she [the ash in the urn] is not my real aunt; she’s been replaced; I know human ash;” another is a little girl accompanied by her sister, informing Holmes, “They wouldn’t let us see granddad when he died.”³⁶⁴ However, unlike Doyle’s Holmes, Sherlock does not encourage them to explain their plight to him fully and in great detail—he tells the little girl that his grandfather has been “taken to a special room and burnt” and asks the man to “Leave!”³⁶⁵ As it turns out, these were all vital clues and Sherlock’s dereliction of duty, as it were, for not having taken confessions diligently will later prove severely damaging to the security of Britain and United States. For not only does this lead to Sherlock being out of the loop, but more dangerously, it causes him to unwittingly crack a code for the terrorist, informing them of Mycroft’s scheme to prevent a deadly attack. When Sherlock is escorted by members of the CIA/Secret Service to Heathrow Airport, he reckons he has figured out what is going on, declaring, “There is going to be a bomb on a passenger jet; British and American governments know about it but rather than expose the source of their information, they’re going to let it happen. The plane will blow up. Coventry all over again.”³⁶⁶ When Sherlock reaches flight 007, though, Mycroft shows him that while he was right to an extent, Mycroft has come up with a solution to what he calls the “Coventry Conundrum”: He has filled the plane with already dead

³⁶⁴ “A Scandal in Belgravia,” *Sherlock: Series 2*, Originally aired on 1 January 2012 by BBC, Directed by Paul McGuigan and Written by Steven Moffat.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

bodies, that is, dead bodies of citizens who have already died. Thereby, unlike with the Coventry Blitz—where the English government allegedly allowed the bombing of the city, killing hundreds of thousands of their own citizens, to prevent the German forces from knowing that that the Allied forces had cracked the Enigma code—the flight the terrorists plan to bomb may still fly, and give the terrorists hundreds of casualties without actually causing a single death. This will now not be so, since the terrorists already have cracked the code that told them that the government knows about the bombing—and it was Sherlock, oblivious to the clues presented by the clients he ignored to listen to, who cracked the code for them.

This story exemplifies the ambiguous depiction of Mycroft in the newly adapted *Sherlock*. Mycroft—both “the British Government” and “the most dangerous man you will ever meet”³⁶⁷—has a plan that is representative of the everyday intrusions into citizens’ everyday lives and the liberties taken by the state: unsuspecting citizens are having the bodies of their loved relatives stolen in a blatant disregard for cultural, emotional, and personal rights. Indeed, throughout the episode, Sherlock is depicted as being in outright defiance of anything or anyone representing the state or the British government, which, in turn, is depicted as potentially harmful and dangerous even towards its own citizens. Sherlock refuses to cooperate when summoned to the Buckingham Palace regarding a case related to a royal client, resulting in him being forced there, naked, wrapped in his bed sheet. This draws Mycroft’s admonition: “We are in Buckingham Palace, the very heart of the British nation - Sherlock Holmes, put your trousers on.”³⁶⁸ Sherlock relents, but not ungrudgingly. Later, once it transpires that the case involves matters of national security, we find out that Mycroft, even after handing the case to Sherlock, sends CIA trained killers after them just in case, putting Sherlock and Watson in possibly mortal

³⁶⁷ “A Study in Pink,” *Sherlock: Series 1*.

³⁶⁸ “A Scandal in Belgravia,” *Sherlock: Series 2*.

danger. All of this, including the Coventry reference only goes to show that in the new adaptation Sherlock Holmes' previously somewhat uneasy yet more often than not collaborative relationship with the state, must now be depicted somewhat differently, as more combative and reluctant, if he is to remain a character that is viewed sympathetically and as trustworthy by the viewers. For the state, as represented in Mycroft, is today overtly visible as a source of intrusive, unethical surveillance, and as not-necessarily-not-harmful to its own citizens. Indeed, when Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes declares that his elder brother practically is the British government, it is meant as a genuine compliment, but when Sherlock says the same thing to Mycroft, years later, it is hurled out accusingly, as an insult.

However, ultimately, Sherlock's—and our—mistrust in Mycroft is chided when we are told that after all, all of this was for a perceived greater good, for protecting citizen safety—an opportunity that Sherlock has squandered away by refusing to cooperate and carry on his task as master confessor, by being unwilling to hear private stories of people's lives. Mycroft and the state may make some morally ambiguous decisions, but we are meant to understand now that this is because they have our best interests at heart, after all, and are “as ever, concerned about you.”³⁶⁹ Indeed, whatever we may feel about Mycroft's—and by extension the state's policies regarding surveillance—there is no getting around the fact that this rivalry between the detective and the state is a sibling rivalry, even though Sherlock's contentious relation with Mycroft and those he works for tends to obscure that. The implication here seems to be that ultimately, perhaps it is for the greater good that Sherlock should and does comply and collaborate with the state and Mycroft. Indeed, in the first episode, Mycroft points out to Sherlock, that in many ways, he is indeed his double, not that different from him:

³⁶⁹ “A Study in Pink,” *Sherlock: Series 1*.

Mycroft: ...Never occurred to you that you and I belong on the same side.

Sherlock: Oddly enough, no.

Mycroft: we have more in common than you would like to believe.³⁷⁰

What is deeply worrying, however, is that later on in the series, Sherlock will have pretty much the same conversation with yet another double: Jim Moriarty.

By the time Moriarty makes his appearance then, showing us that *he* is scrutinizing Sherlock as well, Sherlock is truly no longer the sole centre of secret knowledge in the show and it is increasingly difficult to tell different selves apart. Good, evil, state, terrorist, detective, all seem to reflect back at each other. Sure enough, it is Moriarty now, who can declare as much as Doyle's Holmes could have, that he owns secrets.

Frustratingly enough, at least in "A Scandal in Belgravia" the episode attempts to offset Sherlock's failings by letting him have other "victories" over women, or well, in this case, over "the woman." Irene Adler, in the original Doyle stories, remained in the entire story simply, and undeniably, the woman who beat Sherlock Holmes. The woman who saw through Holmes' games and was able to be a step ahead of him, thereby winning his very genuine admiration. And while she was not alone among women characters in Holmes to impress him with their courage, she definitely was the only one who escaped Holmes' patronizing when it came to women, especially independent, working women. In *Sherlock*, however, Irene Adler becomes something of a femme fatal, who while definitely strong, is not *quite* independent, as we would like to believe. Indeed, as it transpires later, she is working under Moriarty's directions all along. Doyle's Irene Adler had outwitted Holmes, quite. Hence she had "beaten" him. Moffat's Irene Adler, on the other hand can only "beat" Sherlock in the literally sense with her dominatrix whip, thus indicating, that while definitely powerful, she must now exert her power only through her

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

sexuality, and the power of her sexuality over men. Indeed, Irene Adler must only exert her powers through her sexuality, through her feminine wiles, her seductive flirtations.

This rather ridiculous literalizing of Irene Adler beating Sherlock Holmes also de-intellectualizes her, makes her a match not for Holmes genius, but (possibly) for his boyish romantic imagination. Indeed, for all of their punning on the word “beat” the show does not really let Irene Adler beat, or outwit Sherlock. While he inadvertently cracks the code in a bid to show off to Adler, and ends up feeding into Moriarty’s plans, ultimately, it is *he* who cracks the code also to Adler’s cell phone, and rather ridiculously, apparently also to her heart, her life. The password to her cell phone, declared several times in the show to be her life, to contain the key to her very existence, turns out to be “sher” thus spelling out an even more laughably ridiculously, the phrase, “I am Sherlocked” indicating the hold Sherlock has had over Adler. Sherlock is literally able to “read” Adler, first by judging from her naked body that her “measurements” were actually the code to her safe, and then, by taking her pulse. By the fact that Irene Adler’s pulse quickened when Sherlock held her hand our astute detective becomes certain that this can only mean her undying love for him, and that her password to her all-important, life preserving, security providing cell phone must declare the same. After this, Irene Adler is reduced to a damsel in distress, when in a baffling scene at the end we are treated to Sherlock all set to dashingly save her from a host of evil terrorists right as they are about to execute her. This is a rather troubling reduction of the great Irene Adler. While it indicates that women and women with secrets can still be a source of concern in detective fiction at least *Sherlock* has not really come up with a progressive, more empowering way of taking apart and/or dismantling some of these concerns. Indeed, even Auster’s *City of Glass* and Pamuk’s *The Black Book*, while being works that dismantle some of the very fundamental assumptions and tenets of detective fiction,

somehow stop short of revising or bringing into question the misogynist, male-centric presumptions of the genre. In both works women characters appear as little more than two dimensional stereotypes or symbols of desire, a goal to be achieved, mysteries to be decoded, riddles to be solved—not unlike Irene Adler in *Sherlock*.

To return to *Sherlock*, then, while our sleuth is shown in the series as in some ways disempowered, as being admonished by Mycroft, missing vital clues at times, having lost his role as sole source of secret knowledge, this incarnation of Sherlock Holmes is also uniquely equipped to deal with some of the particular conditions of the time and space he has to navigate, in a way that perhaps other more obviously postmodern or metaphysical detectives were not. If Quinn and Galip find it unable to make their way around a depthless space filled with images, Sherlock seems perfectly at home in this landscape. Rather than drifting aimlessly in this cyberspace of hyperreal images, Sherlock is hip to it, aware of how to master it, map it, and use it to his benefit. Sherlock is a remarkably “plugged in” detective, constantly perusing his smartphone, texting, blogging, or sitting in front of his laptop like a distracted disinterested teenager for whom the “real” mundane world around him does not quite present much interest or challenge. Only, Sherlock is scouring the cyberspace for usable information, secret information that he can manage and categorize and control to find “truth.” To a certain extent, Sherlock no longer is required to be a confessor, per se, because the confessions are already out there, on the web, for the world to examine, but he does have to find ways to navigate this always expanding information data base, this overwhelming barrage of confessional information that backfires on other contemporary/postmodern detectives, burying them in a deluge of information they once themselves had encouraged. If the postmodern landscape is akin to a disorienting, depthless cyberspace, then Sherlock is the master surfer, the master search engine who can mine it for

information that can be used towards “truth” establishing disciplinary ends. In the first episode, he even refers to himself as a computer, referring to his brain as a hard drive. In fact, not only is Sherlock unfazed by this all-image, all-information landscape, but his *own* mental processes seem to be image based. Indeed, in each episode the show attempts to materialize or represent Sherlock’s own thought processes and that is always represented as computer screen like images and signs. In “The Hound of Baskerville” Sherlock at one point drives John Watson and Dr. Stapleton out of a lab telling them he needs to enter his “mind palace”—a space in his mind where he can ruminate on the different aspects of the case. Sure enough, Sherlock’s mental process is represented as a computer search of sorts—a random jumping from one object/image to another rather random object/image with only a nominal connection between them. Thus, the word “Liberty” throws up an image saying “Liberty-London,” then the image of the word *Liberte*, which in turn throws up an image saying “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*,” and subsequently “Liberty Bell,” “Liberty Bell March,” and an image of composer John Philip Sousa. Similarly, the word “Hound” brings up images of different kinds of dogs and finally one of Elvis with “Hound Dog” playing in the background. Similarly, the word “In” yields the images saying “India,” “Inn,” “Ingolstadt,” and “Indium.”³⁷¹

Sherlock’s mental process is here quite literally akin to an internet search, and he is depicted surfing through the information in his mind like one would through a computer/laptop/cell phone with a touch screen, flicking images aside, maximizing or minimizing them as required. He is ultimately able to piece together the information thrown up by this search till he arrives on “Liberty, Indiana, H.O.U.N.D.,” that is a secret project called “H.O.U.N.D” at Liberty, Indiana. It is this search result, or rather, Sherlock’s ability to make use

³⁷¹ “The Hounds of Baskerville,” *Sherlock: Series 2*, Originally aired on 8 January 2012 by BBC, Directed by Paul McGuigan and Written by Mark Gatiss.

of it effectively, that ultimately helps him solve the case. Thus not only is Sherlock unfazed by this cyberspace like reality, full of endless depthless images, he sometimes seems to be the very embodiment of it.

However, Moriarty poses threats to Sherlock that go beyond just that of image and surveillance. As someone who commits crimes because he is bored and for no other good reason, Moriarty defies the notion of motive and meaning. Faced with such sheer randomness of criminality and violence, postmodern detectives often fold back on themselves, their intrusive glares turning inwards, becoming a search for self. And this search, more often than not, seems to point to their own innate inauthenticity, the incredibility of the entire enterprise of detective fiction.

Postmodern authors, more often than not, approach detective fiction only to dismantle the concepts around which detective fiction weaves itself: truth, knowledge, meaning, and self. The chief crisis for the detective, then, or at least, for a certain kind of literary, male, authoritative, in-control detective, right now, is a crisis of credibility. Indeed, it is telling that in the final episode, the fact that Moriarty can break into the prison, the bank, and into the tower of London is not ultimately even the real threat. The main threat that Moriarty poses to Sherlock is that he has the power to make Sherlock an incredible figure, an unbelievable figure. By creating an alternative identity for himself, like a shape shifter of some sort, Moriarty manages to generate new histories and pasts and sells an “exclusive” story to a reporter about how Sherlock is a brilliant psychopath who hired him, Richard Brook, an actor, to play the part of Moriarty, a criminal mastermind, only so Sherlock can come out and defeat him, establishing himself as some superhero detective figure. What is strange is how easy it is for Moriarty to do that. Indeed, he already manages to make Anderson and Sergeant Donovan float a theory about a long-harboured suspicion that

Sherlock Holmes can solve cases because he is complicit in the crimes he purports to solve. What Moriarty ends up doing is establishing Sherlock as a fake, a fraud, a myth. A few simple ruses is all it takes to get the entire city suspecting that a figure like Sherlock exists, is even possible. The biggest damage done to Sherlock, that ultimately leads him to the roof of St Bart's, is that Moriarty has been able to make the entire concept of Sherlock—an all-knowing, all-seeing, truth delivering man—seem suspect, fictional, impossible. Moriarty, to a large extent, becomes the physical embodiment of the existential crisis that postmodern detectives like Galip find themselves in, by embodying a kind of surveillance which threatens to engulf even the detective, by detaching motive and meaning from objects and clues, by showing how easily “selves” can be fabricated, and by ultimately proving the detective to be unreal, incredible, and/or fake. The biggest threat posed to the world's greatest detective by the most dangerous criminal in the world is that he can in effect make Sherlock Holmes not have existed at all. And Sherlock, like so many detectives before him, has no option but to jump, quite literally symbolizing the great fall of the figure of the detective.

However, unlike with the postmodern detectives, we already know that Sherlock's fall presupposes a rise, a re-birth, a miraculous return to glory. After all, what better way to once and for all kill all doubts, to establish oneself as the performer of miracles that we must have faith in, than to perform one's own resurrection? *Sherlock* then ultimately deals with the problems of the postmodern detective in much the same way as some others have, by self destruction. However, in his case, his self-destruction will only be a prelude to his greatest ever feat: to come back from the dead, to quell all disbelievers and re-affirm the powers of the great detective.

It remains to be seen exactly how the show deals with Sherlock's return. If they continue to base their plots on clues and hints in the original stories, this return will be aided by Mycroft

Holmes, that is, the British government, thereby further justifying his methods, and allaying our fears of what he stands for. It will no doubt restore Sherlock's credibility, at least within the show, and of all the disciplinary, pastoral, and panoptic mechanisms he embodies, now provably indestructible. Whether or not this will exactly be the case is not verifiable as of now. As of now all we do know is that even before his return, there has been a fan-guided guerrilla promotion campaign for *Sherlock*. The slogan of the campaign is simply, "I *believe*."³⁷²

³⁷² Anne Kirn, "Sherlock Fans Create DIY Guerilla Marketing Campaign 'Believe in Sherlock,'" published on 4 February 2012, accessed July 29, 2013 <http://www.movieviral.com/2012/02/04/sherlock-fans-create-diy-guerilla-marketing-campaign-believe-in-sherlock/>.

CONCLUSION

“...at the end of the day there was nothing to be gained by reminding people that everything that had ever been written, even the greatest and most authoritative texts in the world, were about dreams, not real life, dreams conjured up by words.”

--Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*³⁷³

Hence we arrive, on a rather bleak note, to the end. Endings are tough to deal with, not least in a work dealing with detective fiction, a genre that must focus so much on endings, on neat solutions, on satisfying denouements. It has been my aim in this dissertation to first and foremost highlight the importance of confession in detective fiction—something that has heretofore not been looked at by critics of crime and/or detective fiction. Looking at detective fiction through the prism of confession, I think, brings to light several hidden aspects of the genre, particularly its relation to notions of surveillance and by extension to the government, law, and other such institutions. It also illuminates, in certain ways, the way the individual or the self is conceived of by the power relations that are implicit in the confession-surveillance-self nexus.

As we see in Chapter 1, the rise of Holmes was a literary example of how pastoral power gradually obscured its implicit links with state and legal forces by presenting itself as a sort of extra-legal, not always entirely bound by some of the pettier aspects of the law, and thereby less threatening power, but which nevertheless, did emerge out of the same needs that led to the birth of modern policing techniques, yet which the police were never entirely able to supply. The discretion implicit in the practice of confession allowed Holmes to provide at least a promise and an air of privacy that the police were never able to supply. However, Holmes presented a mode of surveillance far subtler, more complex, and more insidious than the state or the police could

³⁷³ Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, 420.

embody, thereby making him a valuable ally, and indeed a fitting literary embodiment of the kind of pastoral mode of surveillance and governance that was overtaking the more sovereign or blatantly and forcefully disciplinary kinds, at the time. And while Holmes did sometimes take matters into his own hands, letting certain people escape the law where he was certain that the law's obligatory and purported blindness would create a bigger injustice than one caused by the "criminal," this only further emphasizes his role as someone who has jurisdiction in areas where the law is found wanting, thereby aiding the overall goal of the state and the law to conduct an effective management of the population. And from the very start, with detective fiction, this must be done with confession.

Poirot also exercised a similar pastoral power in his stories, though, often he is a much more visible source of surveillance—given that he operates in smaller, closed off spaces with a more intimate cast of characters—and while the presence of Inspector Japp, who at once makes fun of him but respects him and is a loyal friend, underlines Poirot's alliance with the police and the law, the stories also afford him an opportunity of operating more as representing a certain kind of moral law enforcer in his own right. In either case, though, this surveillance finds its goal through confession—a confession which is sometimes a lot more violent and forced than the ones in Holmes stories ever were.

The hard-boiled detective, on the other hand, represents a vigilante kind of surveillance like probably no other detective before him. While detectives like Marlowe, too, regularly do consult and work with the police in *some* capacity, the presumed corruption and/or world weariness with which the police is characterized in the depressed scenario they work in means guys like Marlowe must operate very much as lone wolves of sorts, operating in most instances independently of or sometimes even against the police. Indeed, a lot of the character's

romanticized and idealized sense of alienation derives from his being a lone source of surveillance, of disenfranchised power. The first-person narrative mode that Marlowe and other hard-boiled detectives adopt indeed give us a closer, much more up-close-and personal look at the life of the detective, creating a situation where it is we, the readers, who get to be privy to his inner thoughts and feelings, to his confession, as it were. But rather than the hard-boiled detective's confessional narrative being an instance of a self-scrutiny and self-surveillance, the private eye's narrative projects outwards, bringing its narrative scrutiny to rest much more harshly on certain others, particularly women, against whom he seeks to define himself. Indeed, there is perhaps as much self-evasion in the hard-boiled detective's confessional narrative as there is self-construction.

That the detective is not well-equipped to handle an introspective glance at his own self is made rather evident in certain post-modern detectives who are regularly struggling not only with their own inherent fictionality and at the staggering realization, having glanced inwards, that they really are simulations at best, lacking the kind of depth and uniqueness that a is a prerequisite for the confessional self. With postmodern fiction's penchant for incessant citation and metatextuality, the postmodern detective must always confront their own non-beingness and deal with the uncanny feeling that they may just be a character in a book, a figment of someone's imagination, a carefully conceived construct being watched closely by others rather than one who is keeping watch over everyone else.

Indeed, postmodern detectives find themselves in a culture where confession is ubiquitous enough to seem mundane. However it is probably precisely this hyper naturalization of the confessional that should perhaps worry us, make us pause and reflect on the kinds of power systems we may be feeding into by our acceptance and participation in an all image, all

accessible culture which not only makes the constantly visible confessional information and practices seem normal but also completely obscures and or naturalizes the kind of surveillance this kind of culture necessarily implies, especially if often we really have no way to determine who this kind of surveillance benefits, what kinds of “truths” it helps create, protect, perpetuate.

If some postmodern detectives seem paranoid in their uncanny feeling that they are constantly watched, in the “real” world this would indeed be a rather practical concern. Not only does this confession culture feed right into government and corporate surveillance but is indeed encouraged and perpetuated by it. Detective fiction, by operating precisely in the confluence of the self, confession, and surveillance provides an avenue, then to an albeit oblique reflection on our constantly confessing, constantly scrutinized selves. And it is indeed becoming increasingly important that we be wary of the confession/surveillance nexus not simply because of the ethical and personal boundaries it crosses but also because of the greater more far reaching damages this causes all across the globe. The fact that Facebook technically owns our confessional “updates” about our dinner, or our cats, and our occasional online activist vent, may not seem to worry us much. Similarly, the fact that corporations may use these to chart our reading habits, dating patterns, travel destinations, shopping expenses, phone records, GPS information, etc., to sell them not only to other corporations, or re-use themselves, thereby effectively reducing us to data in market research, and make us complicit in the military-industrial complex in ways it was never possible before, may seem to many to be of only marginal concern. Even when this information is sold to government intelligence and law enforcement organisations, thereby effectively marking us potentially criminal, so ingrained is our confessional habits that the more we find confession mundane, the more the corresponding surveillance seems excusable.

However, it is this kind of a culture where acts like the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Acts which essentially allows governments to conduct civilian surveillance without warrants get passed (as it indeed was by the U.S House last September) without any public outrage.³⁷⁴ Indeed former National Security Agency analysts keep surfacing in the media to reveal that FBI and NSA have access to every email in this country,³⁷⁵ indicating, that the only thing standing between citizens and possible total government surveillance is that there is simply *too* much information to mine. This indeed would make the rise of detectives like Sherlock whose special skills lie in being *able* to mine an endless minefield of information seems to answer to a need at the end of the government surveillance than citizen vigilance. Indeed, government surveillance and surveillance-based actions not only pose troubling ethical and legal questions but are increasingly indistinguishable from the acts of those it purports to protect its civilians against. For instance, surveillance drones allow the government to collect data from other nations at extremely low risk and give way to drone strikes that cause devastating damages in countries like Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, not only by causing a disproportionately large number of civilian deaths for every terrorist it kills (and also causes further damage to its target countries by affecting the economy, agriculture, tourism, et al.),³⁷⁶ and thereby it is now practically, morally, and ethically indeed impossible to distinguish terrorist strikes from government authorized one.

³⁷⁴ See James Risen and Eric Lichtblau, "Court Affirms Wire Tapping Without Warrants," *The New York Times*, January 15, 2009, accessed July 29, 2013,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/16/washington/16fisa.html?ref=foreignintelligencesurveillanceactfisa&r=0>.

³⁷⁵ Edward Snowden being the most recent in a long line of whistleblowers speaking out against ethically shady NSA and FBI dealings.

³⁷⁶ See Robert Taylor, "Predator Drone Strikes: 50 Civilians Are Killed For Every 1 Terrorist, and the CIA Only Wants to Up Drone Warfare," *Polycymic*, October, 2012, accessed July 29, 2013,

<http://www.polycymic.com/articles/16949/predator-drone-strikes-50-civilians-are-killed-for-every-1-terrorist-and-the-cia-only-wants-to-up-drone-warfare>; Mansoor Jafar, "Can Pakistan Shoot Down U.S. Drones?" *Al Arabia*, June

4, 2013, accessed July 29, 2013, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/world/2013/06/04/Can-Pakistan-shoot-down-U-S-drone-.html>; and Ryan Gallagher, "Did a Surveillance Drone Help in the Arrest of a North Dakota Farmer?" *Slate*, June 12, 2012, accessed July 29, 2013,

http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2012/06/12/rodney_brossart_north_dakota_farmer_arrested_in_case_involving_predator_surveillance_drone_.html.

When we consider this in relation to the use of torture to force out confessions from prisoners at Guantanamo,³⁷⁷ and elsewhere, then one begins to feel that the pastoral is indeed gradually giving way again to the sovereign. The pastoral of course continues to obscure these links by making a constantly confessional culture seem mundane, inevitable, and indispensable.

Of course, in this dissertation I have only examined this relationship between confessions, surveillance, and self though the male, heroic, canonical detective, and I daresay, focusing my attention on alternative forms of detective fiction could well have led us down different paths, brought to light different aspects of detective fiction as well as confession. Indeed, confession has always been deemed a particularly feminine genre and as such a study of women detectives through the prism of confession would prove worthwhile, especially given the fact that women (along with other marginalized “others”) have always been placed under harsher confessional glare. Nevertheless, old ladies who try to solve cases from the margins society (Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple), young private investigators who repurpose the hard-boiled first person narrative to feminist ends (Sara Paretsky’s V.I Warshowsky) or use more conventional methods to engage with unconventional mystery stories (Alexander McCall Smith’s Precious Ramotswey), closeted lesbian homicide detectives (Laurie R. King’s Kate Martineli) et al have contributed to and changed the genre in significant, complex ways, and I have, for reasons of time and space focused my study entirely on the typical, (mostly) white male detective, but would love to explore this in future projects. Similarly, contemporary children’s detective fiction, for instance those by Phillip Pullman, with its emphasis on play, friendship, and fantasy, often present different ways of engaging with truth and power, which could prove to be illuminating in our understandings of the genre. Indeed, the male detectives I examine never

³⁷⁷ Jennifer Fenton, “Former Guantanamo detainees tell of confession under torture,” *CNN*, October 28, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/28/world/meast/guantanamo-former-detainees>, (04.06.13).

quite seem to break away from the disciplinary aspects of confession, and express a concern about being able to be the singular, and therefore, exceptional source of power in the text. Thereby we never really get to see other, non-disciplinary, non-surveillance-connected aspects of the confession, and by no means do I want to indicate confession as inevitably and automatically connected to intrusive power systems.

In Foucault's writings itself, for instance, we can find another form of confession: the writing of and about the self, especially, in correspondence with another, usually a good friend one could trust. This kind of confessional writing focused on "life, mood...the experience of oneself was intensified and widened by virtue of this act of writing."³⁷⁸ This was a kind of writing Foucault says was found in Hellenistic culture and which, while also directed a lot on bodily sensations, was also equally keen on a consideration of the conscience (indeed, in this respect it was similar to subsequent Christian forms of confessions). This kind of confessional writing was part of the Stoic practice of *epimelésthai sautou* or the "care of the self" (which was later overtaken by the Delphic practice of *gnothi sauton* or "know yourself"), or *askesis* and involved a kind of a daily stock taking of the self and its upkeep. More importantly, according to Foucault, this form of confession was not as keen as the Christian tradition was on locating guilt, but was simply a taking account of the daily activities and thoughts of the self without the burden of analysis or interpretation or meaning. This, as part of care of the self, was essential to the discovery of truth in Stoic tradition, and thereby to the living of a good life. This kind of training of the mind, body, and soul, according to Foucault, included a rather keen general awareness of the power relations underlying each relation, so as to be alert to the possibilities of a fear of enslaving oneself to others. Foucault explains that *askesis* "include exercises in which the subject

³⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, 28.

puts himself in a situation in which he can verify whether he can confront events and use the discourses with which he is armed. It is a question of testing the preparation. Is this truth assimilated enough to become ethics so that we can behave as we must when an event presents itself?”³⁷⁹ Thus, this kind of confessional writing was seen as a way out of an oppressive subject-power relationship:

The risk of dominating others and exercising a tyrannical power over them arises precisely only when one has not taken care of the self and has become the slave of one's desires. But if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know ontologically what you are, if you know what you are capable of, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen of a city... if you know what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know, finally, that you should not be afraid of death – if you know all this, you cannot abuse your power over others.³⁸⁰

Of course, this other example of confession also, contained loopholes, presumptions and blind spots.³⁸¹ However, my point in mentioning technologies of the self was to point out that there are alternatives to the kind of confessional practices that I have dealt with in my dissertation and looking at other kinds of detective fiction may well have shed light on different kinds of confessional practices.

Thus, not only are there alternatives to and alternative kinds of confession, but possibly alternative ways for the detective to engage with confession, surveillance, and power and my dissertation is by no means meant to be an exhaustive look at the way different kinds of detective

³⁷⁹ Ibid, 239.

³⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 288.

³⁸¹ Foucault glosses over the power relation implicit between the teacher and the student—the teacher whose lessons the student is expected to memorize as part of his journey towards truth—or, say the master and the slave. For instance, in “Technologies of the Self” Foucault quotes a letter between Seneca and Lucilius, where Seneca, as part of his daily confessional letter to Lucilius, accounting for the activities of his day, mentions casually how, “a little physical training, running with the pet slave, bath in water that is barely lukewarm,” etc, but does not pause to consider the power relations implied by the dependency on the “pet slave” to help Seneca practice his care of the self in his progression towards a kind of self-knowledge that was supposedly meant to help him escape the risk of tyrannizing and dominating others.

fiction deals with these problems, if at all. Ultimately, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions in a genre that is so expansive and varied, but it has been my effort to at least draw some focus on an aspect of detective fiction that seems essential to its ideology, plot structure, characterizations, et al, but which has not so far garnered any attention from critics. This of course, is ironic in a dissertation focusing on a genre where the sense of a definitive ending is what the entire narrative drives towards. However, in the interest of keeping the dissertation open to multiple possible truths that may emerge from this point, I shall end here with the hope that if nothing else, the dissertation affords an opportunity to look at a much written-about genre from an important yet new angle, and at least asks if not answer some critical questions about surveillance, confession, authority, and the self, in this increasingly surveyed yet increasingly confessional world.

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