ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: HARD-BOILED ANXIETY HAMMETT,CHANDLER, AND MACDONALD

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Between 1946 and 1976 Ross Macdonald produced eighteen Lew Archer novels, the heart of his achievement. The Archer series also extended the work begun by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Together these three writers invented the genre of hard-boiled detective fiction, gave it romantic voice, and used it to increasingly adaptive purposes.

For Macdonald, writing his books got him to the far side of pain – to a place where he could make the best of the rest of his life. He had experienced childhood as full of predatory secrets and sexual shame. As soon as he could – and by 1936 both his parents had died – Macdonald reinvented himself and prevailed in this willed performance for twenty years. In 1956, when his own child was in terrible trouble, Macdonald got help for her and, finally, for himself.

"Notes of a Son & Father" is the keystone of my project: an unpublished, confessional, harrowing accounting of Macdonald's childhood, marriage, and fatherhood, written for his psychiatrist. I was lucky to find it in the Kenneth and Margaret Millar Papers at the University of California at Irvine Libraries' Special Collections & Archives. A dime-store spiral notebook with 39 pages of small,

tightly penciled handwriting: an anguished exercise in courage for Macdonald to write and then give over to readers like me who might come along.

In the course of his psychoanalysis, Macdonald began to hope that he could, finally, write about his past in the guise of Freudian fables. In this effort, he extended the hard-boiled genre into emotional territory that Hammett and Chandler anticipated, but never occupied. This new work culminated in the last twelve Archer novels, the best of which are The Galton Case, The Chill, and The Underground Man. In these three works, Macdonald transforms the detective figure into a listener, a man devoted to uncovering not crime but rather the power and logic of archetypal complexes, family romances, *folie a deux*, the repetition compulsion, and the inversion theory.

HARD-BOILED ANXIETY IN HAMMETT, CHANDLER, AND MACDONALD

by

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Introduction

Between 1946 and 1976 Ross Macdonald produced eighteen Lew Archer novels, the heart of his achievement. The Archer series also extended the work begun by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Together these three writers invented the genre of hard-boiled detective fiction, gave it romantic voice, and used it to increasingly adaptive purposes.

For Macdonald, writing his books healed him and got him to the far side of pain - to a place where he could make the best of the rest of his life.[1] He had experienced childhood as lacking in emotional continuity, full of predatory secrets and sexual shame. As soon as he could - and by 1936 both his parents had died - Macdonald reinvented himself and prevailed in this willed performance for twenty years. In 1956, when his own child was in terrible trouble, Macdonald got help for her and, at last, for himself. He began to hope that he could, finally, write about his past, in the guise of Freudian fables. This new work culminated in twelve more Archer novels, the best of which are The Galton Case, The Chill, and The Underground Man.

"Notes of a Son & Father" is the keystone of my project: an unpublished, confessional, harrowing accounting of Macdonald's childhood, marriage, and fatherhood, written for his psychiatrist. I was lucky to find it on October 16, 2008, in box 49 of the Kenneth and Margaret Millar Papers at the University of California at Irvine Libraries' Special Collections & Archives. A dime-store spiral notebook with thirty-nine pages of small, tightly penciled handwriting: an anguished exercise in courage for Macdonald to write and then to give over to

readers like me who might come along. Throughout this dissertation any unattributed direct quotations come from "Notes of a Son & Father."

Macdonald began writing "Notes of a Son & Father" for his daughter Linda's analyst, to provide "enough to give a line, at least a line to read between." Desperate to help his child, he started the notebook to speed her analysis along, to heal her faster. But he found the process of writing "Notes of a Son & Father" helpful to his analyst, to *himself*, and so Macdonald adapted the experience to create openly self-realizing fiction, and the adventure of doing that made him a less-haunted, more present man. Archer became a very different fellow too, in the twelve Macdonald novels that came after "Notes of a Son & Father." "I think [my novels] have deepened my understanding of life," Macdonald said. "Let's put it this way, my novels have made me into a novelist."[2]

"[W]e are interested in the moral mechanisms of family life, and where the machine broke down," Macdonald wrote. In the figuring out of those processes, "Notes of a Son & Father" becomes an accounting of his own life. What is curious is that what was clear to Macdonald is not what the reader sees: on every page Macdonald judges himself guilty of not loving his mother, his father, his wife, or his daughter enough. But the reader sees that Macdonald's father was unavailable to his son for years at a time, that his mother was a hysteric, that his wife was angry, and that Macdonald was a successful academic and writer, an effortful husband and father – and that he loved all of them enough.

By the time he began psychoanalysis in 1956, Macdonald had written six Archer novels, so he knew what Chandler knew: that Hammett's hard-boiled

detective genre had developed conventions providing a structure that could support any number of themes. In his essay "Down These Mean Streets a Man Must Go," Macdonald describes reading Hammett for the first time:

> It wasn't escape reading. As I stood there absorbing Hammett's novel, the slot machines at the back of the shop were clanking and whirring, and in the billiard room upstairs the perpetual poker game was being played. Like iron filings magnetized by the book in my hands, the secret meanings of the city began to organize themselves around me like a second city.
>
> For the first time that I can remember I was consciously experiencing in my own sensibility the direct meeting of art and contemporary actuality – an experience that popular art at its best exists to provide – and beginning to find a language and a shape for that experience.[3]

That "second city" is something like the truth about the factual city that can be found only in fiction – more specifically, only in the direct meeting of art and contemporary actuality. The fiction organizes and thereby makes clear the secret meanings of the factual city. Hammett is doing more than selecting telling details about San Francisco in 1929: he is distilling its rank perfume, using its cock-eyed vocabulary, and inventing the lonely, near-tragic

> little man going forward day after day through mud and blood and death and deceit – as callous and brutal and cynical as necessary towards a dim goal, with nothing to push or pull him towards it except he's been hired to reach it.[4]

This first narrating hero, the Continental Op, sprang from the reports Hammett had filed as a Pinkerton National Detective Agency operative and from his essay "From the Memoirs of a Private Detective." From the Op forward the hard-boiled private eye has been fashioned in his creator's image, a fact which makes knowing that author's biography all the more crucial to the study of his canon. In Self-Portrait: Ceaselessly into the Past, Macdonald encourages us to coordinate the work with the life:

> I can think of few more complex critical enterprises than disentangling the mind and life of a first-person detective story writer from the mask of his detective-narrator. The assumption of the mask is as public as vaudeville but as intensely private as a lyric poem. It is like taking an alias, …and it constitutes among other things an act of identification with the people one is writing for.[5]

Hammett's childhood, coming of age, and marriage - including a paternity question that arose in 1980, nineteen years after Hammett's death – provided those parts-at-hand that he used to assemble a code for both his fictional protagonists and his own behavior, a code that was existentialist, honorable, atheistic and unexplained. This code worked for the lot of them – author and shamuses - but not in a sustained way because it did not address the anxieties that fueled Hammett's capacity for self-destructive behavior. His fiction, though, reveals what he and his detective heroes wouldn't discuss, matters taken up in Red Harvest, his "sex stories," and The Thin Man.

In his essay "The Writer as Detective Hero," Macdonald recognized that this proclaimed versus hidden-in-plain-sight model is also at play, though in different ways, in Chandler's uses of Philip Marlowe:

> It is Marlowe's doubleness that makes him interesting: the hard-boiled mask half-concealing Chandler's poetic and satiric mind. Part of our pleasure derives from the interplay between the mind of Chandler and the voice of Marlowe.[6]

Chandler elevated the language and the hero of the hard-boiled form, thereby creating two more doublenesses in his fiction. Macdonald said that he "wrote like a slumming angel, and invested the sun-blinded streets of Los Angeles with a romantic presence."[7] Brought up on the classics in English public schools, Chandler made over Hammett's private detective into an unlikely soul – a Depression era, Los Angeles-based knight errant. Moreover, Marlowe isn't who Chandler really was; Marlowe is who Chandler needed to *insist* he was.

Close readings of Chandler's Double Indemnity, Strangers on a Train, and The Long Goodbye disclose the sexual doubleness that Chandler was concerned to deny in himself. Chandler's childhood, coming-of-age, and marriage reveal sexual anxieties that contributed crucially to the sadness in both Marlowe and Chandler - including the too-little-considered, doubled reality that Chandler was regarded as a homosexual by his friends in England while living outwardly as a heterosexual in the United States.

"A man's fiction," Macdonald believed,

> no matter how remote it may seem to be from the realistic or the

> autobiographical, is very much the record of his particular life. Gradually it may tend to become a substitute for the life, a shadow of the life…. As the writer grows older more and more of his energy goes to sustain the shadow.[8]

Hammett and Chandler got what they thought they wanted when they were regarded by their readers as perfect doubles of their fictional detectives. It became complicated, though, when they started believing the perceptions themselves. Frantic to maintain the shadows, the personae, they crippled themselves and eventually were unable to write fiction at all.

Hammett and Chandler tried to use the hard-boiled genre to mask their own predicaments: the Op's and Sam Spade's vaunted code make a virtue of Hammett's lifelong need to live at a self-protective remove. His "sex stories" spell out marriage as a male-neutering institution wherein dominating wives run needy husbands – and thereby justified Hammett's indiscriminate womanizing. His detectives' across-the-board, wise guy attitudes condone Hammett's penchant for abrupt violence and slashing verbal cruelty. Marlowe's poetic loneliness eulogizes Chandler's rigidly constrained marriage, the women-as-bitches or as-nymphomaniacs in his writing made Chandler's sweaty nervousness in the company of attractive young women seem sensible, while he wrote enough sadistic homosexuals into his novels to deflect any questions about his own doubled sexuality.

But Hammett's and Chandler's defenses actually worked to reveal what they attempted to keep hidden; fiction makes known its author's anxieties: "Like

burglars," Macdonald writes, "who secretly wish to be caught, we leave our fingerprints on the broken locks, our voiceprints in the bugged rooms, our footprints in the wet concrete and the blowing sand."[9]

Given this sense of the failure of every defense and disguise, Macdonald was to read Hammett and Chandler as confessional writers, even when they were trying not to be.

In Literary Biography, Leon Edel posits an

> axiom that the poem is the poet's and no one else's; the words, the structure, the poem's character and psychology issue from the poet's inner consciousness; its contents are tissued out of those memories of reading and of life that have become emotionally charged. In saying this we reject the old and rather naïve concept of the happy artistic inspiration which just "flew" into the poet's mind. The flight is outward, from assimilated experience.[10]

Edel's axiom, "flight is outward," is in keeping with psychoanalytic thought; for example, his metaphor is apt for the dispersed power of any man's private sexuality. In The Novels of Ross Macdonald, Michael Kreyling emphasizes: we do not develop sexually or psychologically in isolation:

> for better or worse we develop in families: the first "others" we desire are family members; the first "others" from whom we hide those desires are the same people. Family tensions ripple outward from the intimate nuclear family to the extended family of kin to the neighborhood, the state, tradition (the family extended into past

> and future)….[11]

Reading literary biography, watching the experience become assimilated, can be a part of truly knowing a work of fiction. Sigmund Freud biographer Ernest Jones' opinion is clear:

> A work of art is too often regarded as a finished thing-in-itself, something almost independent of the creator's personality, as if little would be learned about the one or the other by connecting the two studies. Informed criticism, however, shows that a correlated study of the two sheds lights in both directions, on the inner nature of the composition and on the creative impulse of its author. The two can be separated only at the expense of diminished appreciation, whereas to increase our knowledge of either automatically deepens our understanding of the other.[12]

Macdonald fully invites his reader, his critic, to participate in such a correlated study of his novels. He uses the genre straightforwardly; unlike the agendas of Hammett and Chandler, his is unhidden. Writing hard-boiled fiction is how Macdonald organizes his search for a defined self. His process is something like this: a private, original sin becomes a myth, and that myth is then told within hard-boiled conventions. In this way Macdonald gets both distance from and perspective about that early, searing pain. "The whole apparatus of the detective story," he says, "the whole apparatus and tradition is to provide what I once described as a welder's mask which enables you to handle dangerously hot material."[13]

Macdonald believes that fiction *has* to have that higher purpose:

> [It] has to feed the writer as he is writing or it won't feed other people. It has to be a living act, which you do for your own sake in your own time. You don't just do it to produce a book. You do it to struggle with demons, to get them under control. I say demons, but I mean problems, memories, or whatever else makes up one's own psychic life. To put it another way, you're wrestling with your own angels.[14]

Macdonald is choosing a welter of sexually-tinged metaphors to describe the process of writing fiction: "dangerously hot materials," "feeding [both] the writer [and] other people"; and "angels" and "demons" are "problems, memories, …whatever else makes up one's own psychic life." These all speak to the guilty anxieties of childhood.

Edel continues, "Art is the result not of calm and tranquility, however much the artist may, on occasion, experience calm in the act of writing. It springs from tension and passion, from a state of disequilibrium in the artist's being.[15] Fully experiencing a work of fiction, whether as author or reader, can create surcease in the forms of understanding and acceptance: "exile and half-recovery and partial return," as Macdonald puts it.[16]

So the solving of the murder case posed in a Hammett, Chandler, or Macdonald novel is nearly beside the point. The real mysteries, those that gain the reader something, are in the several doublenesses: author/detective, coded behaviors and misdirection/hidden behaviors and revealed truth, and factual

city/second city. Macdonald argues in favor of figuring out those latter, real mysteries.

> The connections between the work and the life – other men's as well as my own – have always interested me. It becomes more and more evident that novels … are built like Robinson Crusoe's cabin out of the flotsam of the author's past and his makeshift present.[17]

But life-work connections can be difficult to locate. Edel invites us to think of the work as an author's dream, one open to many readings:

> A dream cannot be truly interpreted … unless it is attached to the dreamer, although it may be a pretty story and have distinct meanings for someone to whom it is narrated. These meanings, however, are not necessarily those of the dreamer, who has put into the dream his personal symbols.[18]

Edel encourages us again to study a man's fiction via a psychoanalytic model.

Freud believed that neuroses were caused by the incomplete repression of unacceptable sexual wishes. The wishes get buried but create psychic pressure for expression, and the pressure is relieved by neurotic symptoms. In analysis, these behaviors need to be decoded to find the underlying erotic desires. When we sleep our powers of repression are relaxed and the guilty impulses come into our dreams. Our internal censors are loosened but not gone while we sleep; therefore the shaming wishes are disguised and have to be identified in a process called dreamwork.[19]

So we can read a man's novel *as if* it were a dream, identify its symbols, and figure out what self-proscribed authorial yearnings are masked by those symbols. The more we know of an author's life, the better we can find him in his canon. Ross Macdonald is in effect telling us: I have consciously started with the secret blows of my childhood, transformed them into myths, and organized those myths into narratives controlled by the conventions of hard-boiled fiction. Macdonald sees that, with repeated effort, language can encode suppressed longings: "The control of ideas is only possible through language. And by practice we learn to use the subconscious so that it feeds into the conscious mind at the proper level. This is true of life as well as literature.[20] That Macdonald is engaged in psychoanalytic, courageous, waking dreamwork when writing his novels is the argument of this project.

Writing fiction, particularly writing hard-boiled novels, is a self-realizing, dynamic undertaking, a living act. It's open-ended: each time the novelist works on his manuscript, the experience, the doing, reveals more. A novel is always a work-in-progress; at some arbitrary point it is called done, abandoned by its author, and published. In an interview, Canadian journalist Jerry Tutunjian accuses Macdonald of writing the same story twelve times. His response was, "No. Every time you do it, you dig deeper. It's like going to a shrink: you're discovering different aspects of it, and of yourself."[21] "It's all one case," Macdonald told Paul Nelson of <u>Rolling Stone</u>.[22]

The reader's experience is analogous: each time he approaches a novel he is a slightly different man because the reader is a work-in-progress too. At each

reading he sees more, he sees differently. The participating, knowing reader of Macdonald's later fiction is learning how, and at what cost, a grounded, integrated life can be self-won. A reader who participates in Macdonald's dreamlike experience of writing fiction will find that process of use to his own self-awareness, his own relief. Moreover, his experience does not stop when the novel does; the creative process can lead outward and beyond. The speculating reader is the necessary third party to the author and his hard-boiled narrating detective, the one who completes the act of identification.

Chapter 1: Sons and Fathers

On a February weeknight in 1956, in Santa Barbara, California, Linda Millar, sixteen years old, drank nearly two quarts of wine and started driving. She struck three Hispanic, thirteen-year-old boys walking home from a basketball game at Our Lady of Guadalupe School. Two of the boys were hit and thrown seventy feet: one of them died and the other was badly injured. Linda drove away, and ten minutes later she hit a parked car with its parking lights on and a couple inside. That car was thrown sixty feet, and Linda's car rolled over. When she was detained, she lied; it took her forty-eight hours to admit to both accidents. A month afterward she slashed her wrists and was hospitalized.[23] In June 1956 she was found guilty on two felony counts and sent to the prison hospital in Camarillo, California.[24] Her forty-one-year-old father, Ross Macdonald, the author of six detective novels, was undone.

Macdonald found that he could assimilate Linda's crimes and his failures as a parent; what stopped him in his tracks was being thrown back on his own beginnings. "My half-suppressed Canadian youth and childhood rose like a corpse from the bottom of the sea," he said.[25] One of the requirements of Linda's release from Camarillo was ongoing psychiatric counseling, and Macdonald, heretofore self-reinvented and intensely private, found an analyst for himself as well. He would change; his detective would change. As Macdonald would say: "<u>Solve</u> is the wrong word. Let's say <u>understand</u>."[26]

In 1948, hoping to make money, Macdonald had written his first Lew Archer novel. In 1956-1957, he wrote The Doomsters hoping to make himself well – or, as he was learning to accept, well *enough*. Written during the early days of his psychoanalysis, it was his first try at a new kind of hard-boiled writing. The Doomsters is about sons and fathers, specifically Carl Hallman, on the lam from a mental hospital, who hires Archer to figure out the suspicious deaths of his wealthy parents. Carl holds himself the "real" cause of his parents' death: his mother's suicide and his father's heart attack right after he argued with the old man. As the plot plays out, it is Carl's wife who murdered her in-laws and she did it for security – for money. About sex with her husband, she says,

> I'd be in two parts, a hot part and a cold part, and the cold part would rise up like a spirit. Then I'd imagine that I was in bed with a golden man. He was putting gold in my purse, and I'd invest it and make a profit and reinvest. Then I'd feel rich and real, and the spirit would stop watching me.[27]

For women in Macdonald's later fiction, sexual desire, like murder, is really a felt need for security.

Macdonald tries to cover too much ground, with the result that those who should have been characters are closer to caricatures or archetypes. He also succumbs to the temptation of providing too much autobiographical information about Archer, which contradicts the role Macdonald now wanted for him, telling an English interviewer, "He is a deliberately narrowed version of the writing self…."[28] The last misstep is Macdonald's long and talky explanation at the

novel's end, which is only tenuously connected to the plot, for example: "I'd guess …that she's borderline schizophrenic. Probably she's been in-and-out of it for several years. … she must have considerable ego strength to have held herself together for so long. But the crisis could push her back into very deep withdrawal."[29]

The Doomsters' first theme is the price of denying one's past; Macdonald, who had "successfully" reinvented himself after the death of his parents twenty years earlier, had come to a sad realization. "It isn't possible to brush people off, let alone yourself," Archer says, "They wait for you in time, which is also a closed circuit."[30] And he says,

> An alternating current of guilt ran between her and all of us involved with her. … Even the Hallman family, the four victims, had been in a sense the victimizers too. The current of guilt flowed in a closed circuit if you traced it far enough.[31]

As a consequence, Macdonald wants to talk about guilty families and scapegoating:

> You know, when a person breaks down, he doesn't do it all by himself. It's something that happens to whole families. The terrible thing is when one member cracks up, the rest so often make a scapegoat out of him. They think they can solve their own problems by rejecting the sick one – locking him up and forgetting him.[32]

Macdonald's guilty sense of pain and culpability in his daughter's breakdown are palpable in The Doomsters. But he's moving too fast and slightingly, and hasn't yet learned to explain by implication. Here is Kreyling, summing up:

> The protracted denouement of The Doomsters serves an extraliterary purpose. Macdonald had personal investments in the psychoanalytic process, and he had pledged his fiction to pay. The Doomsters is a split attempt to cover both debts: to mobilize an enormous mass of Freudian material circulating in the atmosphere of the times and in his personal situation to heal his own broken family, and to fulfill his formal obligations to the detective novel. The Doomsters left a balance due on both accounts.[33]

The Galton Case was next and better: the author tightens his focus to a son's journey back home after exile from the family, and Macdonald is sure-footed enough to let the action and Archer carry his themes. The thematic connections twist Macdonald's autobiography and classical and psychoanalytic archetypes into a story organized by hard-boiled conventions. The danger is of emotional pain and the courage needed is psychological. It was his breakthrough novel.

The Galton Case, set in real time (1958), starts with a rich client hiring a private detective named Lew Archer: wealthy Californian Maria Galton is dying and wants to reconcile with her son, Anthony ("Tony"). It was 1936 when he angrily left home, dropped out of college, married his working-class, pregnant girlfriend ("Teddy") and disappeared.

It's too late: Archer follows a poem, "Luna," that Tony wrote in Luna Bay, where he learns that Tony was murdered the same year he disappeared. The search changes: find the baby. Soon enough a twenty-two-year-old young man named John Brown, Jr. shows up, claiming he's Mrs. Galton's grandson. But it comes to nothing: John Brown, Jr. turns out to be Theodore Fredericks, son of a Canadian murderer, and mixed up with a crooked lawyer in a scheme to get the old lady's money.

Then the above facts are overridden: Theodore Fredericks, pretending to be John Galton, really *is* John Galton. Archer goes to Canada and finds Teddy Fredericks, who tells him that Nelson Fredericks murdered her husband, Tony Galton, took Teddy and her baby, and fled to Canada, where Nelson and Teddy lived as man and wife and the baby was called Theodore Fredericks.

Macdonald freely imprints himself on this novel: he and John Galton were born near San Francisco, were taken to Canada at age four by their mothers, and "Luna" is a poem Macdonald wrote when he was sixteen. Macdonald and John Galton both suffered abusive childhoods. On that private level, Macdonald's childhood and this novel about it are sordid, personal histories of sons and lost fathers.

Macdonald amplifies that same history into a fairy tale told to a very young John Galton by his mother:

> I was only a toddler, and I used to think it was a fairy tale, I realize now it was a story about myself. She wanted me to know about myself, but she was afraid to come right out with it.

> She said that I was a king's son, and we used to live in a palace in the sun. But the young king died and the bogeyman stole us away to the caves of ice where nothing was nice. She made a sort of rhyme of it. And she showed me a gold ring with a little red stone set in it that the king had left her for a remembrance.[34]

The mother's fairytale connects back to an earlier description of Maria Galton's estate in palatial terms: "high masonry walls, … stone gateposts in which the name of Galton was cut, … majestic iron gates, … a portcullis effect.… The windows were narrow and deep in the thick walls, like the windows of a medieval
castle."[35]

The final passage continues: John Galton describes murdering his false father: "I got a butcher knife out of the drawer, and hid it upstairs in my room. When Fredericks tried to lock me in, I stabbed him in the guts. I thought I'd killed him. By the time I saw a newspaper and found that I hadn't, I was across the border."[36]

This too connects back to an earlier chapter, wherein a minor character remarks, "It sounds like one of the Grimm's fairy tales. The goatherd turns out to be the prince in disguise. Or like Oedipus. John had an Oedipus theory of his own, that Oedipus killed his father because he banished himself from the kingdom."[37]

Oedipus did not *know* he was killing his father or marrying his mother. In fact he tried hard *not* to do these things. Moreover Oedipus hadn't a choice; he did

what he was fated to do. His parents were the more culpable inasmuch as they had banished their son when he was a baby. Yet it is he, the *innocent* son, who is undone by guilt. The Galton Case is an inflation of Macdonald's anger and shame over his own father's death: he didn't protect me from my mother, when he left we had to leave California and live in Canada, I didn't go with him when he wanted me to, I didn't love him *enough*.

Elevating the story into alignment with familiar myths serves two purposes: it models how family histories are encrypted and passed, parent to child; and it makes one son's loss applicable to everyone, helpful to everyone. Macdonald's art was expressing something potentially universal.

Macdonald said in an interview: "We all eventually lose our fathers…. For the reader as well as for the writer, fiction is a handling of pain, not just succumbing to it, but a handling of it, making something better than it was otherwise.[38]

The words "handling" and "making something better" are part and parcel of Macdonald's thinking about the past. The structure-by-elevation is how Macdonald handles and makes something better of his own history. In The Galton Case, Macdonald organizes the facts of his own lost father into wider patterns: psychological archetype, classical legend, fairy tale. Macdonald didn't write himself *well* but he did write himself *better*. The reader can do it too: he can safely locate his childhood inchoate outrage and humiliation in The Galton Case's all-encompassing tropes.

The Galton Case plot is a series of repeating stories: a murder a generation ago connects to a murder now, of misidentifications begetting correct

identifications: John Galton becomes Theodore Fredericks becomes John Galton, and of second chances: a twenty-two-year-old son is lost and a twenty-two-year-old grandson appears.

"I was across the border" should really be "I was back across the border." With its theme of repetition, The Galton Case attacks the very American premise that a man can reinvent himself. Theodore Fredericks – and Macdonald - have left cold Canada, "the caves of ice," come to "a palace in the sun," and changed their names. It's a California cheat: neither John Galton nor Macdonald has outrun his own history. "The California escapists of my books," Macdonald writes elsewhere, "drag with them their whole pasts, rattling like chains among the castanets."[39]

So the work becomes a process of apology and forgiveness. In The Galton Case, Maria Galton's forgiving her son for leaving school, marrying against her wishes, and stealing from her, and her felt apology for treating him too harshly set in motion all the action of the novel. The Galton Case ends when John Galton and his mother forgive each other:

> "Too much water under the bridge. I don't blame my son for hating me."
>
> "I don't hate you," John said. "I'm sorry for you, Mother. And I'm sorry for what I said."[40]

In Macdonald's later novels, Archer is judgmental *only* when a child is suffering or in danger. So, in The Galton Case, he understands Teddy's choosing to remain with her murdering husband out of loneliness: "I had nobody else left in

my life excepting him," she tells John. "Don't be too hard on your mother,"[41] Archer says. Understand and accept, Macdonald is arguing. And then move on into the present before it's too late. John Galton has Sheila, who loves him; "Just take good care of your girl,"[42] his mother begs.

The Galton Case ends in real time and hopefully:

> Somewhere outside, a single bird raised its voice for a few notes, then fell into abashed silence. I went to the window. The river was white. The trees and buildings on its banks were resuming their colors and shapes. A light went on in one of the other houses. As if at this human signal, the bird raised its voice again.
>
> Sheila said: "Listen."
>
> John turned his head to listen. Even the dead man seemed to be listening.[43]

Tony Galton and his son John are the central characters even though the father has been dead for a generation when the novel begins. The son has no memory of his lost father. The Chill looks harder at sons and mothers and The Underground Man at sons and other women, but sons and fathers are always there too at the core of any late Macdonald novel. The Chill's Alex Kincaid is old enough to get married but emotionally undercut by his father. Alex does what his father demands, abandons his new wife in a mental hospital and returns home to his parents, but the next day he moves out and returns to his bride, telling Archer:

> When Dad gets upset it has a peculiar effect on me. It's like

> sympathetic vibrations: he goes to pieces, I go to pieces. Not that I'm blaming him. … Dad's afraid he can't adjust, and I guess it makes him afraid of things in general.
>
> You started me off with what you said about annulling myself. I felt that way when I went home with Dad….[44]

Then, in the happiest three sentences in all of Macdonald's fiction, Alex exclaims, "It's really amazing, you know? You really can make a decision inside yourself. You can decide to be one thing or the other."[45] Look at what Alex has said: he acknowledges the power his childhood has over him, sees the repetition of his father in himself, and then, thereby, moves on. This is the fundamental process necessary to mature mental well-being. Archer thinks, "The only trouble was that you had to make that decision every hour on the hour. But he would have to find that out for himself."[46]

The Underground Man's Stanley Broadhurst's father disappeared when he was twelve, and Stanley obsessively looks for him – to the extent of shortchanging his six-year-old son. At the novel's end there is a murdered son buried in the same grave as his murdered father, two father substitutes, and two surviving fatherless boys. But there is a third fatherless boy – a boy-like man, actually. Perhaps Macdonald was thinking about him when in his last novel, The Blue Hammer, he has Archer realize: "My chosen study was other men, hunted men in rented rooms, aging boys clutching at manhood before night fell and they grew suddenly old."[47] That boy, those men are who Macdonald grieves for most, because they beg the Oedipal question: what happens if the son *wins*?

Macdonald eventually puzzled out the connection of his father to his own manhood. He named his crucial autobiographical document "Notes of a Son & Father" and in its pages he refers to himself as "the son," with his mother named "the son's mother," his wife "the son's wife," and his daughter, "the son's daughter": Macdonald is consistently referencing himself from his relationship as a son to John "Jack" Macdonald Millar (pronounced "Miller"). "I was my wandering father's son, after all, … even though I saw him infrequently, sometimes not for years at a time,"[48] said Macdonald.

Millar and his wife, Annie Moyer, separated when their son, Kenneth Millar (who would use the pseudonym Ross Macdonald), was four years old. And there it is: the son had won, and because the triumph felt sexual, he experienced the loss of his father as *guilt*: "My original sin, so to speak, was to be left by my father."[49] Misplaced guilt, like misidentifications, are strongly present in Macdonald's fiction.

Millar was "a futile Ulysses, a Jack London with more heart and less brains," Macdonald wrote. Millar was forty-one, writing poetry, and working as a harbor pilot in Vancouver Harbor when Macdonald was born in 1915. He had been a wrestler and long-distance swimmer, lived with the Indians of Vancouver Island, helped the Japanese fisherman during the 1907 Vancouver riots, started three newspapers, and suffered a minor stroke. Macdonald loved to remember one crucially golden day:

> One of those days still seems the happiest day of my childhood if not my life. I mean the unforgettable day when my father first took me to

> sea in a harbor boat, and I stood beside him in the offshore light, with his hands and my hand on the wheel.[50]

After the separation, Millar wandered:

> east and west he traveled, still on the trail of a wished-for world where Indians and white men shared the unploughed territories or climbed through the blowing passes to the north. Though my father's life was more adventurous, and less prosperous, I became aware at almost every turn that it was patterned on <u>his</u> father's life, just as my own recurrences to the west and north have been patterned on my father's.[51]

Annie took her son back to Ontario, Canada where she did badly and Macdonald, referring to himself as "the son," had guilty feelings about his father:

> His son spent his life trying to forgive him his bad luck; part of which consisted in his marrying a woman unfit for marriage. And the son has spent his life trying to unlearn the habit of self-pity, which so often can end in nihilism or diabolism. But has not.

Relatives helped him here and there. A second cousin, Rob Millar, and his wife, Elizabeth, took Macdonald in when he was six years old. While living with them, Macdonald later wrote, labeling himself "the boy," he bullied playmates, repeatedly physically seduced "a mentally-retarded nineteen-year-old 'maid,'" and began a habit of stealing:

> The earliest theft occurred in this period. The cousin had lost two young daughters and kept their pictures in an Indian basket, with other mementos, including some silver money. The boy stole a

> dime of this silver and used it to buy a ten-cent pencil, which he broke deliberately in his hands soon after leaving the store.

So Macdonald felt both guilty and angry about his father; thereafter, in the home of a father figure who seemed to love him, maybe Macdonald did things to *earn* guilt *again*: insecure (stealing and breaking reminders of Rob's "real" daughters), and enraged, *sexual* things. He was only eight-years-old when his time with Rob and Elizabeth - "the most fortunate thing that ever happened in my life"[52] - was over. Rob's wife died unexpectedly – Macdonald remembered the evening – and Rob couldn't keep him.

By age eleven Macdonald was getting into more trouble: "petty theft, a few homosexual episodes with other boys, some fights in which the thought of the father's failure was involved." But, Macdonald added, "This thought also helped to cause the boy to head his class in both studies and athletics."

Macdonald was twelve when his father came to see him; Millar, shyly and uncertainly, proposed that the two of them go out west on one last adventure. Macdonald turned him down, and thereafter the self-destructive behaviors ramped up: he drank, fought, and "the patterns of theft and homosexuality made him miserable."

At thirteen Macdonald went to live with an aunt and her husband, "a cold Pharisee of a man," Macdonald would later say. "They rejected the boy at the end of the year, no doubt for good reason. There was no theft this year, but homosexual episodes continued and I believe one came to their attention, though they never spoke of it."

Now permanently hospitalized in charity wards after a series of strokes, Millar couldn't speak, but he was still writing poetry in couplets. Millar was, Macdonald wrote, "visited by the son, who was ashamed of him and also loved him, but not enough." Macdonald hitchhiked to see Rob Millar, but Rob had remarried and had a "real son" now; Macdonald spent the night and left.

Macdonald left high school at sixteen and got a job with board and room with a (Canadian) Pennsylvania Dutch farm family "who treated him like a son. In the first month of it, he made the conscious decision never to steal again, and with a single exception two years later, this was the end of the homosexual episodes…." Macdonald was developing will and putting his faith in it.

It was while Macdonald was working on that farm that Millar died. He left his only child his personal copy of Henry David Thoreau's Walden; the proceeds - $2,012 - of a life insurance policy came to Macdonald too. Macdonald was eighteen years old and had enough money to go to college. "Before I reached University," Macdonald wrote, 'looking around for something to become in my father's absence, I had become a writer."[53]

So, in his later and best novels, Macdonald refigures his childhood experience of his own father. He elevates that pain to a universal level by describing that experience in the vocabulary of classical myths and psychological archetypes.

Greek legends are stories about *families*: that's what makes referencing them a powerful choice on Macdonald's part. "Here we have the fundamental structural flaw in the Greek family," Philip E. Slater writes in The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family.

> Within the family circle the thin patriarchal veneer tends to collapse, and the child does not experience paternal adequacy where it is needed. Indeed, Heracles is soon struck by the same insight, protesting that all of his glorious deeds are pointless if he is incapable of fulfilling the most elementary male role – protecting his wife and children.[54]

Psychoanalysis, as it was generally practiced in 1950s America (when Macdonald was being treated), postulates that for every son - not just those with fathers present - there is a necessary progression of tasks. The little boy, who is infatuated with his mother, resents his father's presence as her lover and often fantasizes about violently getting rid of his father. Analogously, the male child fears his father: "The same part is played by the father alike in the Oedipus and the castration complexes," writes Freud in Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics, " – the part of dreaded enemy to the sexual interests of childhood. The punishment which he threatens is castration, or its substitute, blinding."[55] In The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud explains the universal power of Oedipus Rex or similarly-themed literary works:

> His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours – because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual desire towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so.[56]

So goes the paradigm, one Macdonald would adapt in significant ways.

Psychologist Michael Kahn reiterates Freud's point:

> We have seen how crucial it is that children do not become convinced they have won the Oedipal struggle, and how important it is that parents maintain a constant position that there is no possibility of the child winning. …In the realm of primary process the wish, for example the wish to kill, is equivalent to the act, and exile is equivalent to murder.[57]

And here, this, the stuff of classical myth and modern psychoanalysis, and of Macdonald's childhood experience, is the source of inescapable and unearned guilt and one of the concerns of Macdonald's last, best Archer novels. And remember: every son is Oedipus and all fathers do go missing. "I have an idea," Macdonald says,

> that the bad things that happen to people, misfortunes and sorrows, are only bad so long as you don't convert them into something better. It's been my experience in life that a very bad thing if you survive it and learn from it, you're better off than you were in the first place. This is for me the way life works and one of the experiences of life is loss followed by recovery, and this is particularly true of a novelist. It's undoubtedly one of the reasons I became one. A novelist has the ability to go back, clear to the beginnings of his life and his troubles and his sorrows, and convert them into something that will not only be pleasing and satisfying to him, but also meaningful to other people.[58]

"Convert": this is how a writer works through the most fundamental and private difficulties in his life - and invites self-realizing readers to do the same. The

Galton Case ends with John and his dead father listening. Lew Archer is more listener than solver, just as a book's reader listens to its author.

Macdonald consistently chooses to use the conventions of genre American detective fiction to tell his stories of archetypal sons and fathers. His novels come not only from his autobiography and his study of psychology, literature, and myths, but also from the men whose hard-boiled novels prefigured his own, Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Hammett and Chandler insisted that they were not autobiographical writers, but in some ways they are. Their own fathers didn't matter, they said; that's why they didn't talk about them or write about them. But of course they do. The participating reader of Macdonald's best novels serves himself by understanding those two anxious hard-boiled novelists who came before.

In fact, a fictional father figure is writ large in Hammett's canon; his two most sustained characters are an operative for the Continental Detective Agency and his boss: the Continental Op and the Old Man. This state of affairs connects Hammett-the-writer to Hammett-the-son; the father *figure* matters *more*.

The Op appears in 36 stories and two novels and it is always his Old Man who launched him into the adventure at hand. The Op/Old Man relationship has three aspects, the first being that the Op acts more like an adolescent son than an employee in dealing with his boss, saying, for example, that the Old Man will give him "merry hell, …will boil me in oil if he ever finds out what I've been doing."[59] and, at the end of Red Harvest, "I spent most of my week in Ogden

trying to fix up my reports so they would not read as if I had broken as many Agency rules, state laws, and human bones as I had."[60]

Second, the Op is at pains to describe how just how tough his Old Man is. For "The Scorched Face" he's drawn as "The Old Man, with his gentle eyes behind gold spectacles and his mild smile, hiding the fact that fifty years of sleuthing had left him without any feelings at all on any subject."[61] This picture is reinforced in "The Big Knockover":

> Fifty years of crook-hunting for the Continental had emptied him of everything except brains and a softspoken shell of politeness that was the same whether things were good or bad – and meant as little at one time as another. We who worked under him were proud of his cold-bloodedness. We used to boast that he could spit icicles in July, and we called him Pontius Pilate among ourselves, because he smiled politely when he sent us out to be crucified on suicidal jobs.[62]

This then is the role model: no name just a function, without affect, unforthcoming, nothing-but-code.

Third, the Op/Old Man dynamic changes as the Op gains experience. The Old Man trusts him more; in "Fly Paper,"

> The Old Man gave me the telegram and a check, saying: "You know the situation. You'll know how to handle it."
>
> I pretended to agree with him.[63]

In the later Op novel, The Dain Curse, and the last four Op short stories, the Op is beginning to be a father figure himself; he is supervising other, less seasoned

operatives. The Old Man tacitly acknowledges the Op as a grown son. Hammett and his own father never got that far.

Samuel Dashiell Hammett was a country baby, born on May 27, 1894, at home on his paternal grandfather's Maryland farm. Before his time there had been a town called Hammettville on the Patuxent River, where his great grandfather had lived. Twenty-seven Hammetts are indexed in History of St. Mary's County, Maryland, written, appropriately enough, by Regina Combs Hammett in 1977.[64] Descendants of Hammett's brother Richard are there now. Another Samuel Hammett of St. Mary's County, Maryland was killed in the First World War.

His paternal tribe's multitudes and history aside, Hammett experienced family life as counterfeit and anxious. His parents were unhappy and their three children were encouraged by their mother, Annie Dashiell, to believe that their father, Richard, was the problem. He appears never to have caught hold of a profession, and, as time went on and his various dreams didn't pan out, he began to seem like a braggart and a fraud. In his own adulthood, Hammett would be adamantly honest, frequently to the point of rudeness, and ruthlessly self-critical, often to his own emotional detriment. Hammett's early relationship with his father was stormy and, when the young man moved away from home and got beyond asking for money, their connection became tenuous.

Still, there were aspects of Richard that Hammett must have sneakily appreciated: the elder Hammett had ward-heeling political tendencies and was a snappy dresser; his niece remembered him appearing "in St. Mary's County in

cars driven by attractive women in their mid thirties," and dressed "just like the governor of Maryland himself." He "…caroused, consorting with beauticians, whom he seemed to favor, drinking heavily."[65] Hammett was openly admiring when Richard in his later life had to have a leg amputated and thereafter took up rhumba dancing.[66] Hammett's father never left his family but Hammett left *him*; while remaining close to his mother and sister, he would go eight years without seeing Richard in the 1930s and would have no communication with his brother, also named Richard, for more than twenty years. Hammett paid for his father's funeral but didn't attend, and then later wished he had. Hammett paid for the artificial leg, too.

Richard was an unenthusiastic farmer, so, in 1897, the family moved to Philadelphia where Annie had family and Richard had aspirations. By 1898, they were living in a rented house in Baltimore with Annie's mother. Richard worked as a clerk, salesman, bus conductor, foreman at a lock factory, and dealer in oysters. The family moved in and out of Mrs. Dashiell's house as Richard's paychecks came and went. Annie was the parent with the work ethic; she "went out" as a private nurse. Hammett blamed his ineffectual father for his mother's having to work when she was sick: she "had a chest," as they used to say before they said "tuberculosis."

There was an incident somewhere in these years that became telling as Hammett's life played out. He was still small when he hit another boy with a stick, making his chin bleed. The other boy was winning at hockey and

Hammett's fury suddenly went beyond his own control. Then he ran, terrified and shamed by what he had blindly done.[67]

The children made their way through Baltimore's public school system. In 1908 Hammett started at Baltimore Polytechnic High School, a special school earmarked for bright students, a place to get ready for college. Hammett got in one semester before his father called a halt: his son was old enough, tall enough, and cocksure enough to work. He was fourteen years old and his formal education was done.

There followed seven years wherein Hammett worked unhappily and peripatetically, operating a nail machine, running messages for the B & O Railroad, chalking up stock market transactions for the Poe & Davies Brokerage House, and doing other entry-level jobs from which he never went up – only out, quitting or being fired. Hammett was living reluctantly with his parents and siblings in his grandmother's house. He lit out every night, a fledgling man-about-town. He drank, played cards and dice, bet on horses and fights, and frequented every "soiled dove" he found.

In summer 1915, a blind ad appeared in the Baltimore paper: "wide work experience and be free to travel and respond to all situations"[68] – orphans preferred. Hammett jumped at the chance, and was hired by the Baltimore office of the Pinkerton's National Detective Service. He manhunted counterfeiters, bank swindlers, jewel thieves, and forgers. The Pinkertons used him as a guard, a hotel detective, and a strikebreaker. Hammett had found his rhythm; as Richard and Annie hoped, the work would make a man of their son.

The fun stopped on June 24, 1918, the date Hammett enlisted in the Army. Trained as an ambulance driver, he never got further than Camp Meade, Maryland. Afterward he was careful to say that he was in the Army at the time of World War I but that he did not fight in it. There was a second seminal event: Hammett overturned an ambulance and people were hurt. Hammett quietly decided to never drive again, and he didn't.[69] By October he was sick, reportedly felled by the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918 that killed 548,000 Americans, G.I.s acting as unwitting vectors.[70] But Hammett was medically discharged from the Army with a different diagnosis: "untreatable tuberculosis."

Thereafter that diagnosis *roiled* Hammett's life. In the short run, out of the Army after less than a year, Hammett went home. He hadn't a choice; he was sick. Beginning at the end of May 1919, Hammett worked intermittently for Pinkerton's Baltimore office. He stuck out life at home for a year and then, in a wild sort of decision, the twenty-five-year-old Hammett transferred to the Pinkerton branch in Spokane, Washington, as far from home as he could get.

With his disease in remission, Hammett went all over the Northwest on Pinkerton business in the summer of 1920. Working as a Pinkerton-contracted strikebreaker, he found himself in Butte, Montana during the murderous Anaconda Copper Mining Company strike. Butte would give him common ground with his wife, the beginnings of a political conscience, and a setting for his first novel. Somewhere in these years of on-and-off Pinkerton service, a third telling episode happened to him. Hammett shot a man. He was guarding a magazine when a thief started scaling the fence and wouldn't stop when

Hammett shouted. Hammett shot him, the man grabbed at himself, dropped off the fence, and ran.[71] Hammett stopped carrying a gun. As he had been when he hurt the boy and overturned the ambulance, Hammett was horrified at how easily he could hurt someone; his response was characteristically absolute: he was through with hitting and driving and shooting for the rest of his life.

In each of the three events, Hammett appears to have been afraid of his own capacity for violence and of losing self-control, and he experienced those fears as *shame*. The words Macdonald used for getting past shame - “understanding,” “acceptance,” “forgiveness,” “half-recovery and partial return” - did not occur to Hammett. Really, Macdonald is saying, shameful secrets stop being shameful when they stop being secrets. Once acknowledged, the character or his author or his reader finds that his instincts are shared and universal. Hammett’s response was to clamp down, never to speak of what had happened.

But ten years later Hammett’s anxiety about violence leaked out and into the first Op novel, Red Harvest, in a maneuver somewhat akin to the “vents” Freud postulates in his theory of family romances. By the time he was writing Red Harvest, in 1928 and 1929, Hammett may well have become uneasy about what he had done earlier in Butte as a Pinkerton strikebreaker. It is interesting that when he wants to write a novel of social criticism and political corruption he set it in Personville - called “Poisonville” - the stand-in for Butte. In Red Harvest, old Elihu Willson owns everything: the mining company, the bank, and the newspapers. When the mine was struck, Willson hired gangsters and the miners backed down. Now, however, the gangsters are ensconced: one runs all the

gambling, another the bootlegging, and a third one organizes thieves and fences. And the chief of police is corrupt. None of the above want to hand Poisonville back to Willson. Willson hires the Continental Detective Agency to get rid of the "mail-order troops. … And then," the Op tells Elihu, "you'll get you're your city back, all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again."[72] The Op sets the various criminal factions against each other. At novel's end, twenty-four people have been murdered, Willson and the Op are still standing, and that's as much success as there is.

There is a phenomenon in law enforcement that Hammett puts into his first novel: the close relationship between criminal and detective, due to a shared respect for sticking to a code, maintaining a shell, and toughing it out without complaint. At the end of Red Harvest, the Op admires the way gangster Reno Starkey dies:

> I knew pain had stopped him, but I knew he would go on talking as soon as he got himself in hand. He meant to die as he had lived, inside the same tough shell. Talking could be torture, but he wouldn't stop on that account, not while anybody was there to see him. He was Reno Starkey who would take anything the world had without batting an eye, and he would play it out that way to the end.[73]

Red Harvest is the first time the Op disappoints his code, in this case by losing objectivity. By his own description he becomes "blood simple," beguiled by violence.

> I've arranged a killing or two in my time when they were necessary. But

> this is the first time I ever got the fever. … Play with murder enough and it gets you in one of two ways. It makes you sick, or you get to like it. … it was easier to have them killed off, easier and surer, and now that I'm feeling this way, more satisfying…. I looked at Noonan and knew he hadn't a chance in a thousand of living another day because of what I had done to him, and I laughed, and felt warm and happy inside. That's not me.[74]

Or at least he couldn't admit it was. And Red Harvest is the first time the Op drinks on the job.

A guilty fondness for brutality was a telling weakness for Hammett to choose in light of his abhorrence of his own three minor acts of violence. Years after he wrote Red Harvest, Hammett would be appalled when Senator Joseph McCarthy asked him if he advocated the violent overthrow of the United States.

Back in 1920, came the refrain: Hammett got sick again. In November of that year Hammett met 2nd Lieutenant Josephine ("Jose," pronounced "Joe's") Dolan in the public health hospital he wound up in when he was too sick to be a Pinkerton. In 1921 Jose and Hammett moved to San Francisco, got married, had a baby, and Hammett rejoined the Pinkertons, third time around. It was during this tenure that he saw California sleaze in a higher stratum, working for the defense in the trumped-up Fatty Arbuckle rape-and-manslaughter charge and for the prosecution in the multiple transgressions of con artist Nicky Arnstein who had fixed the 1919 World Series and married Fanny Brice.[75]

But the undertow – active, intractable tuberculosis – came back; by the end of 1921 the 6'2" Hammett weighed 126 pounds and was very sick. He and Jose both thought he was dying. After all, in 1922, 71.2% of TB patients in California *would* die.[76] Hammett couldn't walk from the bedroom to the bathroom without help. Continuing work as a Pinkerton operative was impossible. Freelance writing was the only moneymaking gig Hammett could come up with that could be done in bed. By early 1922 he and Jose were so desperate for money that Hammett wrote to his father, asking for a loan. Richard grudgingly sent some money, along with a refusal to ever send more and a harangue against free-lance work. Then on August 3, 1922, another Hammett *did* die of tuberculosis: Annie Dashiell Hammett, who had had to work while she was sick, died young, and two months before the son she had particularly championed had his first fiction published. Between the lecturing letter and his mother's death, Hammett was pretty much finished with his father by the end of 1922.

Yet Hammett was happiest in male bastions: the Pinkertons, the Army, the veteran's hospital, Black Mask, and even prison; the pull of esprit de corps was very real.[77] He found good father figures; he must have been open to the possibility of them. The first was the crusty soul who was Assistant Superintendent of Pinkerton's Baltimore Agency and trained the 21-year-old Hammett to be an operative.[78] Jimmy Wright happened to Hammett just when Hammett needed him. Here was an adult man who was different than Richard. Operatives adhered to ground rules: don't cheat your client and don't violate your own integrity. Stay anonymous. Operatives aren't identified by name and

reports are filed by number. Stay quiet. Drinking and gambling were forbidden unless needed in an undercover situation.[79] Stay objective. Operatives are on twenty-four-hour call so their code is always in play. For Hammett, who was chary of his own emotions and had a strong sense of personal honesty, and who hated pretense but wanted desperately to have "style," the rules became his code, a way for him to be in the world. "He had found a job that in a sense validated his own need for distance,"[80] wrote Sinda Gregory in Private Investigations: The Novels of Dashiell Hammett.

Hammett's second father figure was the man who hired him as a copywriter and advertising manager in 1926. Between 1922 and 1926 Hammett had studied journalism at Munson's Business College and had published stories and ephemera in seventeen different pulp magazines and in several genres: "sex," "novelty," "crook," adventure, and western: fully fictional and not based on personal experience. The Smart Set, edited by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan: "a magazine for cleverness," had published some of his ephemeral pieces and he had sold some freelance advertising copy. Hammett used a pseudonym for his early work, "Peter Collinson," a dig at his father; a "Peter Collins" was a nobody, so Peter Collinson was a nobody's son.

But by 1926 there just wasn't enough money. His daughter, Mary, was in kindergarten and Jose was pregnant. Nothing for it, Hammett had to get a job, and he did: as copywriter/advertising manager for Samuels Jewelers, "The House of Lucky Wedding Rings," at $350/month. Hammett concocted weekly 300-word "essay ads": dramatic stories about people in all sorts of situations

finding happiness by buying a Samuels diamond. He blossomed under the structure of a regular job, and grew a mustache. The best part was his congenial boss, Albert S. Samuels, "as close to a patron as Hammett ever had," and "upon whom Hammett would fasten if not orphan love, at least wild gratitude."[81] Samuels encouraged him to keep up his freelance writing, and predicted great things for him. When Hammett had an affair with a secretary, Samuels made no judgment; when Hammett disappeared on a bender and then reappeared, Samuels took him out to lunch.[82] Hammett started at Samuels in March 1926, two months later his second daughter, Josephine ("Jo") was born, and two months after that he collapsed at work. He was found lying in a pool of blood, hemorrhaging from his lungs. Hammett was taken, again, to the veterans' hospital; now he had TB and hepatitis. That summer, he and Jose waited again for him to die.

After eight weeks it was clear Hammett couldn't come back to work. Hammett was granted a 100% disability ($100/month), on condition of his living alone; Samuels had written on his behalf to the Veterans' Bureau. Four years later Hammett borrowed $1,000 from Samuels and moved to New York. Hammett would dedicate his fourth novel, <u>The Dain Curse</u>, to him. He had worked for Samuels for only five months.

In December 1922, <u>Black Mask</u> had published Hammett's first short story and his first Op story in October 1923. What prefigured the Op's first-person narratives weren't fictional detective stories but rather the recollections of real-life detectives, especially Pinkerton founder Allen Pinkerton's memoirs and

Hammett's own "From the Memoirs of a Private Detective," published in March 1923 in The Smart Set. The article was a numbered list of twenty-nine observations and anecdotes taken from Hammett's experiences as a Pinkerton operative.

> 2. A man whom I was shadowing went out into the country for a walk one Sunday afternoon and lost his bearings completely. I had to direct him back to the city. …
>
> 8. I was once falsely accused of perjury and had to perjure myself to escape arrest. …
>
> 28. I know a man who once stole a Ferris wheel.[83]

Hammett had found his medium and detective fiction was about to turn a corner: from upper-class amateur detectives with spotless reputations to working-class, hired detectives with average looks, average smarts, and compromised morality; from intricate plots with ingenious resolutions to slammed-through battles ending, at best, in gritty survival. The Op's first-person narratives are elaborated upon and fictional versions of the reports Hammett filed with the home office when he was a Pinkerton. Hammett's writer-as-witness style was congruent with founder Allen Pinkerton's trademark "eye that never sleeps" and with the emotional detachment part of the Op's code.

Pinkerton's ground rules for operatives, the Op's code, and Hammett's stringent, private set of moral principles were all of a piece and, at their core was a demanding work ethic. Joseph T. Shaw, Black Mask's editor from 1926-1936, recalled Hammett's "unrelenting labor and unflagging perseverance through

those early days."[84] Shaw was a national saber champion, a bayonet instructor, and a World War I hero. He was licensed to carry a sword cane. Shaw came at Black Mask with enormous energy and confidence:

> We meditated on the possibility of creating a new type of detective story…. Obviously, the creation of a new pattern was a writer's rather than an editor's job. Consequently, search was made in the pages of the magazine for a writer with the requisite spark and originality, and we were amazingly encouraged by the promise evident in the work of one….[85]

Mary remembered Shaw coming to their apartment and bringing her a doll. Shaw promised her father higher rates and more creative freedom if he'd write an Op novel, to be published serially in his magazine. Hammett was enthusiastic: "That is exactly what I've been thinking about and working toward. As I see it, the approach I have in mind has never been attempted. The field is unscratched and wide open."[86] The distinctive authenticity in characterization, action and dialogue that Hammett was working towards and Shaw was encouraging came to be known first as "The Black Mask School" and later as "hard-boiled."

What Hammett and Shaw invented in the 1920s and early 1930s was an American genre because it's practical: here's how you can move up. At the same time that Ernest Hemingway was writing manuals of instruction, "how to catch a fish," Hammett was penning "how to be a detective." Macdonald's work in the late 1950s until the mid-1970s was also American because it's hopeful: you can get better. At first glance, the hard-boiled fiction a washed-up

American/Englishman named Raymond Chandler wrote from the late 1930s into the early 1950s is neither practical nor hopeful. Hammett's detectives – the Op, Sam Spade, Nick Charles – were, for good or for ill, very much like him, as was Macdonald's Archer, the "understander." It is Chandler's sad and lonely Philip Marlowe, though, who best reveals his author to his reader. Chandler insisted on Philip Marlowe. Although at great pains not to be, Chandler was a highly confessional writer.

When Chandler and Billy Wilder wrote a screenplay based on James M. Cain's Double Indemnity, they changed it in a curious way. In Cain's telling, Walter Huff is an amoral, slick insurance agent who meets Phyllis Nirdlinger when he tries to sell her husband car insurance. Huff immediately knows that Phyllis is both highly sexed and capable of murdering her husband without falling apart. Huff believes he's orchestrating the intricate, successful killing of Howard Nirdlinger, only to learn way too late that he has been played by Phyllis - she who had already murdered children and Nirdlinger's first wife. The head of the claims department at General Fidelity of California, a fellow called Keyes, figures out a way to safeguard the company's reputation by putting Huff, under another name, onto a South Seas steamer. But that's a set-up too; Keyes has put Phyllis on the same ship. Huff ends the novel:

> She's made her face chalk white, with black circles under her eyes and red on her lips and cheeks. She's got that red thing on. It's awful-looking. … her hands look like stumps underneath it when she moves them around. She looks like what came aboard the ship

to shoot dice for souls in the Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

I didn't hear the stateroom door open, but she's beside me now while I'm writing. I can feel her.

The moon.[87]

In Chandler's and Wilder's Double Indemnity screenplay, Phyllis, like Neff (his last name was slightly changed), has no criminal history. They are a *folie a deux*, wherein two people only manifest delusional behavior together. The screenplay stresses the dull price to be paid for moral living; as Billy Wilder put it, "For Walter Neff, crooking the house might be fun."[88] Decency is sterile: Neff sells insurance and Phyllis knits. Murder is erotic:

Phyllis (describing her dull marriage to an older man) "So I just sit and knit."

Walter: "That what you married him for?"

Phyllis: "Maybe I like the way his thumbs hold up the wool."

Walter (grinning): "Anytime his thumbs get tired…. (leering) Only with me around you wouldn't have to knit."

Phyllis: "Wouldn't I?"

Walter: "Bet your life you wouldn't."[89]

The biggest change from the novel to the screenplay is the enhanced importance of Keyes, who acquires a first name – Barton - in the movie. Whereas he figures out and outsmarts Huff in Cain's novel, in Chandler's version Keyes is the emotional *center*. Wilder biographer Ed Sikov describes Keyes as

not only a moral force in the film but also becomes instead a

> paternal, fraternal, and avuncular character, all in one. … he's a figure of love – short, chubby, sweating love. … Whenever the older man fumbles around his jacket pockets searching for the matches he never keeps, his younger friend pulls out one of his own, flicks it singlehandedly against his thumbnail, and provides the missing light. It's a gesture of affection, a poignant acknowledgment of one man's need for another.[90]

They light each other up and, in fact, a variation on that gesture ends the movie:

> Neff: "You know why you didn't figure this one, Keyes? Let me tell you. The guy you were looking for was too close. He was right across the desk from you."
>
> Keyes: "Closer than that, Walter." (The eyes of the two men men meet in a moment of silence.)
>
> Neff: "I love you too."
>
> Neff fumbles for the handkerchief in Keyes' pocket, pulls it out and clumsily wipes his face with it. The handkerchief drops from his hand. He gets a loose cigarette out of his pocket and puts it between his lips. Then with great difficulty he gets out a match, tries to strike it, but is too weak. Keyes takes the match out of his hand, strikes it for him and lights his cigarette. The scene fades out.[91]

Wilder credited Chandler for the Neff/Keyes relationship:

> <u>Double Indemnity</u> was really a love story between two men – Fred

> MacMurray and Edward G. Robinson, who was MacMurray's older co-worker and boss at the insurance agency. Robinson knows that MacMurray is up to no good, and he tries to save him, tries to keep him from going bad and succumbing to the influence of the evil Barbara Stanwyck. A love story between two men…. That story hadn't really been a part of Cain's novel, but was something added by Ray, who saw the potential there.[92]

Cain said this about Chandler's and Wilder's screenplay:

> It's the only picture I ever saw made from my books that had things in it I wish I had thought of. [The] ending was much better than my ending … I would have done it if I had thought of it. There are situations in the movie than can make your hands get wet.[93]

Chandler, in other words, throws the emotional weight of the screenplay behind an ostensible father figure: an older man to look out for a younger one and warn him about women; yet that older man is *also* a homoerotic love-object.

Is Chandler's Double Indemnity the inverse of his experience of his own father and his parents' relationship? Studied closely, it becomes apparent that Chandler's canon, including Double Indemnity, is a reactive repetition of his early childhood. Chandler biographer Tom Hiney believes "Chandler would always be more influenced by having seen the effect of his father's neglect on his mother than he was by Florence herself."[94]

It was a hard marriage from the beginning, with little money, railroad work here and there, and the husband's drinking. But after a year there was a baby:

Raymond Thornton Chandler - the only child of Florence Dart Thornton, an Irish immigrant, and Maurice Benjamin Chandler, a first-generation Irish-American - was born in Chicago, in 1888. Florence and Raymond lived apart from Maurice for long stretches, staying with her sister and brother-in-law in Plattsmouth, Nebraska. By Chandler's later account, his father was "found drunk, if at all,"[95] in those early years.

In 1895 Florence weighed her two bad options, and decided divorce was better than "drink widow." After the break-up, Maurice dropped away and Chandler neither saw nor heard from him, nor did Maurice send money. His father was there and then he wasn't. Florence, only 35 years old, refused to ever speak her ex-husband's name, denied any culpability for her marriage ending, never worked, and never remarried. It was an absolute break.

Florence and Raymond sailed for England, where they became the responsibility of Florence's brother, Ernest Thornton. They lived with Florence's mother and a spinster sister in a house owned by the brother in Upper Norwood, near London, where Chandler first went to school. The seven-year-old boy was absurdly taught that he was "the man of a house" where three grown women lived, and that he had rescued his mother from his father.

It was all pretty grim; Chandler was the "boy whose father had gone to the bad."[96] If Chandler was tainted as being his father's son, he adamantly denied the identification, and thereby failed the next crucial task. Freud and Lacan scholar Richard Klein summarizes:

> In the normal development of the little boy's progress towards

> heterosexuality, he must pass … through the stage of the "positive" Oedipus, a homoerotic identification with his father, a position of effeminized subordination to the father, as a condition of finding a model for his own heterosexual role.[97]

It appears clear that Chandler never did this. Chandler consistently, flatly denied his own alcoholism and philandering, two behaviors he shared with Maurice Chandler. At age sixty-nine, Chandler was still referring to his father as an "utter swine."[98] In the course of his long and relatively prosperous life, Chandler never tried to find his father.

In 1900 the three women and Chandler moved to Dulwich so that he could attend Dulwich College, the local and respected public school, as a day student, his tuition paid for by Uncle Thornton. In his first year Chandler studied mathematics, music, Latin, French, divinity, and English history, in his second year he switched to "modern side" courses for "boys who are intended for business," and then, in his third, he made up the Latin and Greek he had missed the year before and studied "classical side" subjects: Latin, Greek, theology, French, English literature, and Roman history, and in his fourth and last year he was back to taking classes "for boys not proceeding to the university." It's hard to know what was going on: Chandler was nervous, high strung, and frequently sick[99] and maybe that contributed to the changes in his education's direction or it may be that Uncle Thornton didn't plan to fund a university education for his nephew.

Chandler was growing up in four doubles ambiguous states, beginning with the question of whether he was an American or an Englishman – of Irish descent. At home he and his mother were disapproved of because of the divorce, yet the entire household relocated just so he could go to Dulwich College. He hated being under his uncle's thumb but the man was generous to him. He was being taught at a prestigious school but as a rare day student, making it obvious that Chandler came from a lower class; he would earn the degree but couldn't acquire the pedigree. "His strange and reclusive upbringing," writes Hiney, "was in danger of making him feel odd. … In late Victorian England, he was without a clear social class, nationality or male role model."[100] Despite everything, Chandler was consistently first or second in his forms and, ever after, justifiably proud and respectful of his Dulwich experience.

Chandler left Dulwich at seventeen, and Thornton then paid for a year's study abroad. What Chandler studied appears to have been another compromise between his uncle and himself: German with a tutor in Munich, Nuremberg, and Vienna, preceded by French in a Parisian business school.[101] When Chandler came home from the continent, adulthood loomed. As he had made abundantly clear, Uncle Thornton was now through supporting him or his mother. His grandmother had died, and Chandler and his mother lived together in an apartment. His plan was to find a day job and write poetry at night. He came in third among six-hundred candidates on the civil service examination and first in its classics section; he was hired as an Assistant Store Officer, Naval Stores Branch, under the Controller of the Navy. Chafing under a new set of male

authority figures, Chandler hated his first job, recalling in a letter forty-four years later that "The idea of being expected to tip my hat to the head of the department struck me as verging on the obscene."[102] By this point it seemed clear that Chandler had problems with male authority figures, beginning with Uncle Ernest Thornton and continuing with his first boss.

He stuck it out for six months and then, in "an act that enraged his uncle and appalled nearly everybody connected with him,"[103] he quit, left his mother in their apartment, and moved, appropriately for a poet, to a rented room in Bloomsbury. He already had the wardrobe: pinstripe flannel suit, old school tie and banded straw hat, a cane and gloves.[104] Soon he was back in his mother's apartment but, between 1908 and 1912, he managed to get eight essays, four book reviews, and twenty-seven poems published in reputable magazines. What matters to his later writing was his poetry's "deep strain of romanticism"[105] and its accessibility; Chandler would be proud that he had never subscribed to what he termed the "I-dare-you-not-to-understand-what-I-am-talking-about"[106] school.

For all his passion and scrambling, in the end the money was not there; Chandler could not support his mother and himself with his writing in England. Chandler coped in the way he would continue to cope ever more frantically in his future: he moved. He talked his irate uncle into a 500-pound loan, told his mother he'd send for her, and hopped a steamer to New York. Chandler got lucky right away; his best chance at a father figure was already on board.
A man with a remarkably calm demeanor, Warren Lloyd's upper middle-class money came from the oil business, but his and his wife's enthusiasm was for

collecting eclectic, artistic friends. Chandler in his tweeds and aspirations was drawn to them and they to him. He was invited to look them up in Los Angeles.

Chandler worked his way to Los Angeles, running afoul of male authority figures as he did it, with, as he would later admit, “a beautiful wardrobe, a public school accent, no practical gifts for earning a living and a contempt for the natives.”[107] He got a job in St. Louis but was harassed and called “Lord Stoopentakit,” so he moved on to Plattsmouth, Nebraska and Aunt Grace and Uncle Ernest, a hard-working soul with a hardware store job. Thirty-four years later Chandler would remember: “Since I was fresh out of England at the time and a hardware store was ‘trade’ I could hardly be expected to get on terms of anything like familiarity with him.”[108] Forty-two years later Chandler didn’t like men-in-charge any better; he was busy checking himself out of psychiatric hospitals and sanitariums against doctors’ orders.

By 1913 he was in California (but not yet Los Angeles), enduring two very California employment indignities: picking apricots and stringing tennis rackets. Then, finally, he wound up on Warren Lloyd’s front stoop. Chandler rented a furnished room but used the Lloyd’s home as his mailing address and used Warren Lloyd’s business connections to get an accounting and bookkeeping job at the Los Angeles Creamery. This position was uncomfortably similar to being the Assistant Store Officer, Naval Stores Branch, Controller of the Navy. But picking apricots and stringing tennis rackets changes one’s perspective.

Chandler was at pains to prove that, although Lloyd had secured his Creamery job for him, Chandler himself proved outstanding: “As I knew nothing

about accounting, I went to a night school and in six weeks the instructor asked me to leave; he said I had done the three years' course and that was all there was."[109] Years later when Lloyd got him another job, this time in the oil business, Chandler would again inflate his own success.

Beyond the above largess, Lloyd helped Chandler marry Cissy. The couple had met under his roof. She was then married to the Lloyds' friend, pianist Julian Pascal, and there was a pleasant assumption that Chandler would someday marry the Lloyd's daughter. Nevertheless, when Cissy and Chandler announced their love, the Lloyds helped. Their son Paul remembered his parents, the Pascals, Raymond and his mother all agonizing "over it in an open and civilized way,"[110] and the group's eventually deciding that the Pascals should divorce. Later Chandler rewrote the circumstances, claiming that he had rescued Cissy from a bad marriage and gone on to be a model husband.

Chandler could not – or at least would not - acknowledge the considerable kindnesses of Lloyd. It appears that Chandler couldn't differentiate between male authority figures who may or may not have treated him as badly as he believed and a father figure with his best interests at heart.

Hammett, Chandler, and Macdonald: three men who won the Oedipal contest with their fathers – dangerous sexual ground in Freud's view. Macdonald, the only hard-boiled writer to explicitly tell Oedipal tales, is saying something *more*. First, Macdonald makes the experience universal. Second, for a boy to become a man he has to actively fight his father. Look at sons in Macdonald's novels: The Galton Case's John Galton loses his father through no action of his own but

later he kills Teddy Fredericks believing him to be his father, and The Chill's Alex Kincaid's triumph comes with his standing up to his father. It takes him two tries. Look at these writers: Hammett moved across the country and cut off contact from Richard, and Chandler never looked for Maurice and refused to acknowledge Lloyd's fatherly role. And Macdonald? He turned down Jack's invitation to a last adventure.

What happens next? What happens to sons and *mothers*?

Chapter Two: Sons and Mothers

As a student at the University of California at Davis, Linda Millar began to drink again. In May 1959, she disappeared into the streets of Los Angeles with two unknown men and was later spotted in Las Vegas. Her father, Ross Macdonald, was a reticent man but he went before television cameras to plead with his daughter to come home. He coordinated a massive search, working with the police in California and Nevada and hiring private detectives who found her in Reno two weeks after she went missing. Linda made an odd, evasive statement about what had happened. By leaving school and drinking she had violated her ongoing probation, and she was given a suspended sentence for probation violation and the probation was extended. When it was all over Macdonald collapsed and was hospitalized: severe hypertension with heart damage, and kidney stones. His whole family was sick and he felt culpable; he believed that he had "acted as a carrier of neurosis from his own ruined youth to his daughter's."[111]

Macdonald believed what Freud did: that humanity's basic unit is the family, not the individual, and that pathologies in families create pathologies in individuals.[112] Fathers in Macdonald's novels tend to harm their sons by *leaving* them to their mothers; mothers scar their sons by *staying* too close and using them as husbands.

Macdonald's The Underground Man features three son-and-father and two son-father-mother configurations. But the novel's fulcrum is the Snows: a low-I.Q., cleft-lipped, man-child, Frederick ("Fritz"), and his unstoppable mother,

Edna. She makes uncomfortable hints early on, telling Archer: "I'm afraid you don't understand. Frederick and I are very close,"[113] and brightly reminding Fritz that "I'm your girlfriend and you're my boyfriend."[114] Edna has killed three men over two generations, all, really, to deny her damaged son's sexuality. She has isolated him, spoken for him, and thwarted his pitiful attempts to "chase the chicks."[115] Mr. Snow, the husband/father, is dead before the novel starts and is mentioned briefly but remarkably: "Mrs. Snow put her fingers to her mouth. A gold wedding band was sunk in the flesh of one finger like a scar."[116] Also, "Her late husband was very much like Fritz."[117] The implication is that Edna treated her husband like a son and her son like a husband.

It is in The Chill, though, that Macdonald looks dead-on at what happens when the incestuous impulses of sons and mothers go wholly unchecked. A close reading of The Chill's last chapter raises the question: if the son-and-mother desire is acted upon, what might that look like?

Twenty years passed between Macdonald's mother's death and his daughter's drunken manslaughter and twenty-two years between Tony Galton's disappearance and his son's reappearance in The Galton Case: Macdonald is tracing *generations*. In that same way, The Chill's plot juxtaposes two marriages, one new and one a generation old, connected by three wrongly-solved murders over twenty-two years. In present time, Alex Kincaid marries Dolly McGee and the next day she goes missing; Alex hires Archer to find her. Archer hears that Thomas McGee saw Dolly's wedding picture in the paper, recognized her as the

daughter he hadn't seen in ten years, went to the hotel where the couple were staying, talked to Dolly, and disappeared with her.

Ten years earlier, McGee was convicted of murdering his wife: Dolly had found her mother's body and, as a pre-adolescent, been pressured into testifying against her father at his trial. Now Dolly is old enough to get married but emotionally stalled exactly at the point where she "won" the Electra-like battle with her mother when the latter was murdered. Still in love with her father, Dolly was then forced to testify against him – to effectively kill him. When her father – who ought to have "given her away" on her wedding - reappears the day after, Dolly chooses her father over her groom, demonstrably stuck in her childhood love.

Dolly is a student at Pacific Point College and works as Dean Roy Bradshaw's mother's driver. Archer learns that Bradshaw is involved with two women: Laura Sutherland, the Dean of Women, and a newly arrived professor, Helen Haggerty; he has secretly married the former and is being blackmailed by the latter. Helen is murdered, Dolly finds the body, suffers a psychotic break, and is hospitalized. Still more detecting and Archer learns that Bradshaw was having an affair with Dolly's mother at the time of her murder ten years ago.

A third murder, this one twenty-two years earlier, is brought forward. At that time, one of Senator Osborne's daughters, Tish, had an affair with her sister's husband, Luke Deloney. Deloney surprised Tish in bed with a student, Roy Bradshaw. While trying to pistol-whip the two, Deloney was killed when Tish grappled with the gun and it went off. Tish then married Bradshaw, twenty-five

years her junior, and paid for his Harvard education. They are living as mother and son in Pacific Point.

It's all too late for Roy Bradshaw: he participated in the cover-up of a murder twenty-two years ago and knew ten years ago that his wife had murdered his then mistress, Constance McGee. When he took no action to stop Tish then, he was caught for good, a party to murder. So now he sneaks around like the adolescent he was twenty-two years ago, manipulating a very sick "mother."

Going into The Chill's final chapter, then, there are two ostensibly grown characters, Dolly Kincaid and Roy Bradshaw, whose maturations were cut off in late childhood as a result of traumatic events beyond their control, and they have suffered or caused suffering ever since.

Archer sees Tish speeding away from her home in her Rolls Royce; she's unable to brake quickly enough to avoid crashing into her son, who is parked in his car in order to block the driveway.

> Old Mrs. Bradshaw had climbed down out of her high protected seat. She seemed unhurt. I remember thinking at that moment that she was an elemental power which nothing could ever kill.
>
> "It's Roy, isn't it? Is he all right?"
>
> "In a sense he is. He wanted out. He's out."
>
> "What do you mean?"
>
> "I'm afraid you've killed him, too."
>
> "But I didn't mean to hurt him. I wouldn't hurt my own son, the child of my womb."

> Her voice cracked with maternal grief. I think she half-believed she was his mother, she had lived the role so long. Reality had grown dim….[118]

Bradshaw wants to stop his mother, but his prudently worn seat belt doesn't save him from Tish's "elemental power" and the fast, slamming accident when the two cars *connect*. For her part, Tish has climbed down out of her "high, protected seat," and seems unhurt. In one sense, it is her money that protected her: money for a bigger, safer car and money that has provided Roy Bradshaw an education. But, in the larger sense, she isn't protected at all. All she has been able to buy was his grudging presence in her bulwarked house. Earlier in The Chill, Archer describes that college dean's residence: "The walls of books around me, dense with the past, formed a kind of insulation against the present world and its disasters."[119]

> "I was only protecting my rights. Roy owed me faithfulness at least. I gave him money and background, I sent him to Harvard, I made all his dreams come true."
>
> We both looked down at the dreamless man lying in the road.[120]

"Most of his killers are women," Matthew Bruccoli said in Ross Macdonald and "they kill not for love, but for security."[121]

"The jagged lines of blood across his face resembled cracks in a mask through which live tissue showed"[122]: Bradshaw has indeed been leading a masked life and, had he been able to remove the mask, the living tissue of his

intelligent mind would have had a chance, anyway, of getting out. Instead he is dead.

"But she had a doubleness in her matching Roy's, and there was element of playacting in her frenzy."[123] "Matching Roy's": Macdonald deploys a *folie a deux* to advance his fictional purposes.

The psychiatrist in Macdonald's The Barbarous Coast asks:

> "Are you familiar with the newer interpersonal theories of psychiatry? With the concept of folie a deux? Madness for two, it might be translated. A madness, a violence, may arise out of a relationship even though the parties to the relationship may be individually harmless."[124]

Psychiatrist John Utley explains that *folie a deux*, now called "shared psychotic disorder" in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV), "refers to shared delusion with an unalterable and psychotic state of belief agreed on by two people."[125] It's an apt description of Bradshaw and Tish in The Chill: Bradshaw is mentally healthy enough to have succeeded academically and professionally. Had Tish respected the boundaries between mother love and woman/wife love, Bradshaw might have been able to "grow up" sexually. As things stand, though, Archer tells Tish, "The two of you put on a pretty good act – Godwin [the psychiatrist in The Chill] would probably say it fitted both your neurotic needs – but it's over."[126]

Bradshaw's illness may have started as neurosis twenty-two years ago; by the night of his death he has careened to the far other end of a continuum, into astounding self-entitlement: "And even I deserve something more than I've had.

I've lived my entire adult life with the consequences of a neurotic involvement that I got into when I was just a boy."[127]

Roy Bradshaw stands in telling contrast to Alex Kincaid; Bradshaw remains an aging adolescent while Kincaid comes of age. Earlier in The Chill, Alex's father shows up, using the young man's love for his mother to persuade his son to annul his one-day, unconsummated marriage:

> It's true, isn't it, Alex, you want to come home with me and Mother? She's terribly worried about you. Her heart is kicking up again. …I'm only doing what's best for you, son. You don't belong with these people. We'll go home and cheer up Mother. After all you don't want to drive her into her grave."[128]

The reader is privy almost to the moment when Alex performs the necessary task of a boy's displacement of his erotic desire for his mother onto another, appropriate woman: Alex goes with his father but returns to his wife on his own later the same day. He tells Archer that when he was home with his parents he felt "as though I wasn't a man any more."[129]

But Bradshaw never completed the displacement; instead he "loves" an inappropriate woman – inappropriate because she acts as his mother. Tish makes sick, brief, teasing asides earlier in The Chill: "Roy is a bit of a mother's boy, wouldn't you say?' She looked up at me with complex irony, unembarrassed by his condition or her complicity in it."[130] Also, "Roy has always been attracted to women who are obviously mammals."[131]

By the end, the clutching, ruined, old woman, “an elemental power which nothing could ever kill,” is simply shrieking:

> “I wouldn’t hurt my own son, the child of my womb.” … Her voice cracked with maternal grief.
>
> ... “You were on your way to Laura Sutherland’s, weren’t you? What were you planning to do to her, old woman?”
>
> She covered the lower part of her face with her hand. I thought she was ill, or overcome with shame. But she said: “You mustn’t call me that. I’m not old. … You can see how young I am.”
>
> … She was still greedy for life, like the imaginary Letitia, the weird projection of herself in imitation leopardskin she had used to hide behind.[132]

Earlier in the novel, in a flailing attempt at imposed innocence, Tish offloads her sociopathy onto an imaginary, blatantly sexy Letitia Macready:

> She wore very heavy makeup, more appropriate for the stage than the street, and she was hideously overdressed. … she had on a leopardskin – an imitation leopardskin coat, as I recall, and under it something striped. Sheer hose, with runs in them. Ridiculously high heels. A good deal of costume jewelry. … Like a woman of the streets. A greedy, pushing, lustful woman.[133]

There is a lot of sex here: at The Chill’s start Bradshaw is involved with three women. He has had affairs before, as has Tish who twenty-two years ago

bedded her sister's husband and an adolescent student. For the two of them, sex is both "just sex" and the driving force behind multiple murders.

Now at The Chill's end,

> She flung herself on the dead man, holding him close, as if her old body could somehow warm him back to life and rekindle his love for her. She wheedled and cooed in his ear, calling him a naughty malingering boy for trying to scare her.
>
> She shook him. "Wake up! It's Moms."[134]

Macdonald is broadening and darkening the concept of a set of "family romances" which Freud first identified in 1897, wrote about in 1908, and published in an essay by that name in 1909. Family romances are conscious childhood fantasies fueled by feelings of frustration with faulty parents, rivalry with the parent of the same sex, and competition with siblings. In these romances, the child comforts himself by imagining that he is adopted - that his real parents are of a higher social class, braver, and love him more and exclusively. It's a way of dealing with the inevitable, private disappointments of childhood; Freud calls such daydreams "vents." The nature of the romances has at its core the child being erotically victorious. Literature, Freud proposes, works like family romances, dreamwork, and neuroses do: consisting "of the imagined, or fantasized, fulfillment of wishes that are either denied by reality or are prohibited by the social standards of morality of propriety."[135]

Macdonald creates a juvenile Bradshaw who becomes "erotically victorious" with Tish, a woman old enough to be his mother. It's a complicating but common

variation of Freud's family romances: a young man who is fixated on his mother - fixations meaning "an arrest of psychosexual maturation"[136] - marries a woman *like* his mother, thereby "winning" the Oedipal struggle he actually lost as a boy. He then unconsciously recreates his adolescence: she calls the shots and he manipulates her – in a mother/son, wife/husband scenario stretching into long years of marriage. Tish is playing with family romances, too: is she a "mother" getting to act on unconscious erotic desire for her "son," is she a "wife" getting back at a "husband" by cuckolding him with a "son"?

"Notes of a Son & Father," records four such romances in the Macdonald family:

First, Linda was five or six years old when she "couldn't grasp the meaning of what her parents, both full-time writers since the war, were doing alone all day. In search of concrete meaning, she attached herself for awhile to the family of a local postman." Second, the summer she was eleven, Macdonald went back to Ann Arbor to finish writing his dissertation and "the child expressed a wish to go along and 'keep house' for him." In both of her family romances, Linda's desire to "correct" her "actual life" - to see her wishes fulfilled - is clear.

Third and fourth are instances of Macdonald and his wife, as parents, also playing at family romances: an unmarried aunt who had sometimes lived with the Macdonalds and cared for Linda eventually married and had a daughter of her own. Macdonald acknowledges that his and Margaret's "loving treatment of the new child contrasts with their early treatment of their daughter." Then a "neighbor's daughter became almost a foster-daughter of the family especially of

the mother"; the girl was, for example, invited along on a family trip to Yosemite several weeks before Linda's catastrophic drunk driving.

> The parents' "foster daughter," the neighbors' daughter, has been perhaps a little too overtly dear to the mother; and this girl is a little prettier in the Hollywood sense, and more sought-after by boys, as well as a "boy-stealer."

Surely her parents' affection for their niece and "foster-daughter" must have felt to Linda like wishes on their part for a better daughter than she was. "The stage was set for a regressive crisis," Macdonald admits.

There is an instance of a family romance in The Galton Case when Teddy Fredericks tells her little child, John Galton, a fairy tale starring himself as a king's son who had lived in a palace in the sun. In The Galton Case, Macdonald revises the definition and purpose of Freud's family romance: while the fantasy provides a comforting alternative biography for John Galton, it is initiated by his mother rather than himself and she uses it to instill in him his actual, hidden biography.

Three years later, in 1962, Margaret Millar published a short story, "The People Across the Canyon," with an eerie ending: a girl child makes up a younger, more attractive and exciting set of parents and then goes away through a mirror with them.

In 1964's The Far Side of the Dollar, Archer recognizes the unfairness and uselessness of parents and children trying to fulfill each other's wishes.

> I'd just like to change the emphasis slightly. People are trying so

> hard to live through their children. And the children keep trying so hard to live up to their parents, or live them down. Everybody's living through or for or against somebody else. It doesn't make too much sense, and it isn't working too well.[137]

This too is a widespread phenomenon: family members believing they are acting out of genuine sacrifice, when what are really fueling the behaviors are unexamined wishes.

In Macdonald's The Instant Enemy, published in 1968, Bernice Sebastian, mother of a runaway daughter, eventually recognizes the unfairness of parent-imposed, impossible-to-live-up-to fantasies forced upon a child. "We started a game of let's pretend," she tells Archer, "without ever admitting it to each other."

> Keith was to be the rising young executive and I was to be his model homemaker, making him feel like a man, which is hard for Keith. And Sandy was to make us both feel good by doing well in school and never doing or saying anything wrong. What that boils down to is exploitation. Keith and I were exploiting each other and Sandy, and that's the opposite of loving each other.[138]

But it is in 1963's The Chill that a family romance schemed by two adults becomes a shocking malignancy. Outwardly successful Bradshaw is an erotic child and an accessory to mayhem and Tish, his wife/mother, is a psychopathic murderess. Moreover, the cancer has spread to innocents in three generations: four murder victims, Dolly, and McGee.

Macdonald used the inverse of his relationship with his mother (a mother who becomes a wife, a son who becomes a husband) and exaggerated it when he wrote The Chill (a wife who becomes a mother and a husband who becomes a son). Tish's dominance comes from her conscienceless, implacable focus on her husband whom on some level she believed was also her son. Anna ("Annie") Moyer Millar, Ross Macdonald's mother, was fragile and scattered, alternately grasping at her son or railing against him - as though he was her husband. Freud's theory of anxiety applies:

> Anxiety is the response to helplessness in the face of danger. If the danger has struck, the anxiety is automatic and immediate. If the danger is still in the offing, anxiety is the anticipation of helplessness in the face of danger. The overwhelming preponderance of anxiety falls into the category of anticipation.[139]

Annie must have felt helpless while waiting for Macdonald's birth: she had had three late term miscarriages, was forty years old, and in a shaky marriage with Jack Millar. She and Jack fought, Macdonald later said, "about the things that poor people argue about."[140] It was the beginning of Macdonald's lifelong worry about having enough money. By forty-five Annie looked like an old woman and her married life in California was effectively over, although there would be widely-spaced and brief reconciliations and never a divorce. She and her son were back living in her native, cold Canada with her dour Mennonite mother and sister. Annie was childlike, seeing reality in absolute ways: they were indeed poor but she did not need to sell homemade dusting cloths door-to-door or beg for food on

the street with her uneasy little boy at her side. There was a falling out at the house that Macdonald didn't understand and he and his mother had to move out. He felt guilty in the face of circumstances he could not possibly have been responsible for, much less controlled: his father's leaving, his and his mother's ouster from his grandmother's house, and his mother's hysteria.

Then Annie gave way altogether: "she brought the six-year-old to an orphanage and filled out papers to have him admitted. The iron gates of the orphanage were branded in his memory like the gates to the Mennonites' hell."[141] At the last moment Macdonald's sobs weakened Annie's resolve. She didn't know Rob Millar, a cousin of her husband's who stepped in and took the boy. But Macdonald had been given proof; the world was dangerous and he could not trust his mother to protect him.

When Macdonald was sixteen, he made a count: he had lived in more than fifty houses, "and committed the sin of poverty in every one of them."[142] He shuttled between relatives with interim stays with his mother in rooming houses, where they were shared a bed "far past a proper age." Annie "was devoted to him in ways that seemed unhealthy."[143] Certainly Macdonald was afraid of his mother. Annie couldn't check her own impulses in her relationship with her son. A boy, who desires his mother but senses that this is proscribed, is reassured by a mother who can be trusted. But, if you have a mother who might do anything, that's free-fall territory. And so Macdonald alternately fled from Annie and tried to "manage" her. In "Notes of a Son & Father," Macdonald describes her and him:

> Her devotion to this child was hysterically intense; periodic hysteria was

> the keynote of her last twenty years. Her relationship to her son swung between passionate love and violent upbraiding. He came to know her weaknesses very young, and tempered the wind to her as much as he could, loving and hating her….

"He's very good at deceiving people," Archer says of Roy Bradshaw in The Chill, "living on several levels, maybe deceiving himself to a certain extent. Mother's boys get that way sometimes."[144]

"Mother's boys" are the unfortunate norm. The template for ancient Greek families in myth and actual life was still there, in play, in how Macdonald experienced his childhood and in how he structured his later fiction. As Slater puts it, ancient family systems "intensify the mother-son relationship at the expense of the husband-wife relationship."[145] Mid-twentieth-century western cultural patterns lent lip service to that husband-wife connection but gave mothers, especially, little support. No extended family near by and no work outside the home:

> Both family systems tend to produce male children who are highly Oedipal. The systems are alike in depriving women of contact with and participation in the total culture, and in creating a domestic pattern peculiarly confining and unfulfilling. They thus encourage a vicarious involvement of the mother in the life of the son. Both systems, furthermore, place an emotional overload on the mother-son relationship: the Greek system by forcing the mother to put the son in the father's place, the American by making child rearing a full-time occupation and

removing the child in its earliest years from other socializing agents.[146] "My mother was without resources,"[147] Macdonald told an interviewer many years later. It was a sadly true summation of Annie's life. She was an utterly unfit mother, but it was hellish being *her* too. "It was a bad night for mothers," says Archer in The Underground Man. "And a bad night for sons…."[148]

"My mind had been haunted for years by an imaginary boy whom I recognized as the darker side of my own remembered boyhood," writes Macdonald about The Galton Case. "I couldn't think of him without anger and guilt."[149] In his sixteen years, Macdonald's anxiety had been manifest in myriad behaviors: bullying, theft, early onset drinking, and acting as sexual sadist with a mentally retarded maid and boys younger and smaller than he was. He was shamed by what he did, making no connection between his overt behavior and its underlying sources.

Kreyling delineates those sources in psychoanalytic terms:

> Freudian theory, of course, is dominated by sex; our development of consciousness is not possible without the somatic, or bodily, development of sexualized anatomies, the realization of desires that grow with them, and the guilt that inevitably comes with learning the rules. Nor do we develop in isolation; for better or worse we develop in families.[150]

Over and over again in Macdonald's fiction, the killers are parents who consciously or not use a child's sad confusion over knowing-without-knowing that he sexually desires that parent. As a boy, Macdonald was both aware of

societal taboos and absent patterning from his parents. Taboos – including the one against incest - are the stuff of rigid self-discipline, and Macdonald's rules for himself – no fighting, no stealing, no sexual bullying, no homosexuality - are not so different from Hammett's - no fighting, no driving, no shooting, and, later, no sex.

Somewhere in his late adolescence there was an endpoint to Macdonald's criminality: he did some last wrong "thing" and whoever caught him (a high school teacher, a store employee, a YMCA worker) made Macdonald run while tied to a moving car. After that, Macdonald said, "he did nothing from this time forth that causes strong remorse." Macdonald biographer Tom Nolan stresses how much this self-mastery mattered to Macdonald, who

> dealt with the worst impulses of his own personality – rage, self-pity, the urge to do harm – by suppressing them. He'd keep himself under rigid control. This was as serious to him as life or death, for he knew he had the strength and anger to kill. Thoughts of succumbing to evil terrified him.[151]

This was the beginning of a remarkably "successful" willed performance on Macdonald's part. It lasted for one generation of Macdonald's family.

In 1932 his father died, leaving a life insurance policy payable to Annie, who gave it to Macdonald, who went to college. During his sophomore year at the University of Western Ontario, "the boy was strong enough and had 'forgiven enough'" to invite his mother, who "was gradually breaking up," to live with him.

He came home one day in December 1935 to find her naked and helpless, and she died of a brain tumor before Christmas. Fifteen years and fifty houses after those iron gates, Macdonald was now an actual orphan.

Macdonald's fear of failure was a fear of the failure to love his father, mother, and daughter enough:

> [his father was] visited by the son, who was ashamed of him and also loved him, but not enough. …
> in her last days as she lay dying of a brain tumor, he loved her as one loves a child, but failed to love her enough. …
> the baby [Linda] was very beautiful and bright, but her parents could not love her enough.

What would "enough" have looked like? Would it have been the ability on Macdonald's part to make his father, his mother, his daughter "okay"? That inability, that not loving enough, engendered misplaced guilt. And because the guilt was misplaced, it couldn't be resolved. Moreover, with the death of his parents he lost any opportunity to go back and this time do the right thing and "love them enough." So he did what he could do now that Jack and Annie were dead; he turned his back on his past and fully reinvented himself.

But, when his adolescent daughter fell apart in terrible ways, Macdonald began to know that his refusal to look at his own childhood had stunted his daughter's – even though he had loved her enough. It all felt too late: as Helen Haggerty cries in The Chill, "Everything important – it was all over before I knew it had started."[152] First, Macdonald couldn't start all over, so of course his willed

performance hadn't worked: twenty-two years after his mother's death, Macdonald still felt guilty when he was writing "Notes of a Son & Father":

> He blames himself still for spending too little time with her on her deathbed, and when the time came ignorantly allowing her to die without his presence. Perhaps it was his twenty-year-old revenge on her for her failure to make a marriage and a home. Anyhow, the fact and circumstances of her death remain among his recurrent and most monumental images, sleeping and working….

Second, in turning his back on his mother, he cut himself off from future intimacy with other women. Therapist Terrence Real, who writes about male depression, argues against such disconnection in "The Loss of the Relational":

> the true meaning of psychological "separation" is maturity, and we humans stand a better chance of maturing when we do not disconnect from one another. … what maturity truly requires is the replacement of childish forms to closeness with more adult forms of closeness, not with dislocation.
>
> As devastating as the disconnection from the mother may be, it is merely the beachhead of a larger social mandate, the instruction to turn away, not just from the mother but from intimacy itself.[153]

What Macdonald is arguing in his best fiction extends psychoanalytic thinking: *disconnection is*, Macdonald believes, is *not only ill-advised but impossible*. Novels are really identity-quests, exercises in connection-realization, organized by archetypes-in-common in the minds of writers, characters and readers. In her

essay, “Finding the Connections,” published after Macdonald’s death, Welty analyzes how his novels work:

> Where, and from how long ago, out of what human fissure, did this crime start, and why at this moment did it erupt? What connections will lead us back to the source? The identity of the man or woman there to be found can be reached only through following this network of connections. It’s the connections that absorb the author and magnetize his plots into their intricate and daunting patterns.[154]

Macdonald describes his detective this way:

> His actions are largely directed to putting together the stories of other peoples’ lives and discovering their significance. He is less a doer than a questioner, a consciousness in which the meanings of other lives emerge.[155]

So Macdonald straightforwardly chose to be an identity-quest novelist and he redesigned Archer to suit that purpose. The journey in each Macdonald novel is Archer coming to understand, sympathize with, and forgive the connections between the other characters – and Macdonald’s readers participate in that adventure; they are identity-quest readers, seeing themselves not in Archer, who is only the explainer, but in the other characters.

Hammett and Chandler were unintentional self-realizing writers and their detectives share their unease with human connections. The posed question in Hammett and Chandler’s work is: can the detectives do the jobs at hand without compromising their personal code, i.e. without getting close enough to other

people to be changed by them? Readers hoping to be changed by the experience of reading a Hammett or Chandler novel have to puzzle out the connections and meanings because nobody's forthcoming: not the authors and not their alter egos. Connections and concomitant meanings are there because they can't not be – but they're harder to find, hidden by Hammett and downright lied about by Chandler.

The Smart Set published Hammett's first fiction in its October 1922 issue. "The Parthian Shot" is about Paulette Key, who realizes that her six-months-old son is as stupid and obstinate as her irritating husband. So Paulette gets the baby christened "Don," sends him home from the church with the baby nurse, and then boards a train heading west. The clever part, so to speak, is that the child's name is now "Don Key." The iconoclastic Hammett probably appreciated the guts it took for a mother to light out for the Territory. He and Jose, living with a baby in a tiny apartment, would have known how thrilling what Paulette did was. For all that a child gets abandoned in it, it's hard to read much thematic meaning into a 100-word, flippant story for which Hammett was paid $1.13.

A dozen years later, Hammett invented a mother for The Thin Man: Mimi Wynant beats her nearly grown children who are terrified of her, reflexively lies, and has collaborated for money with her ex-husband's murderer. As he does with the other deadly females in his canon, Hammett describes Mimi's psychopathic rage in inhuman terms:

> Mimi made an animal noise in her throat, muscles thickened on the on the back of her neck…. Mimi's face was becoming purple. Her

> eyes protruded, glassy, senseless, enormous. Saliva bubbled and hissed between clenched teeth with her breathing, and her red throat – her whole body – was a squirming mass of veins and muscles swollen until it seemed they must burst. Her wrists were hot in my hand and sweat made them hard to hold.[156]

It sounds like phallic excitement yet it's a description of a woman. It sounds like the "phallic mother" in one of Freud's delineated stages in a little boy's development, wherein he assumes his mother has a penis, and, when he finds she does not, he's horrified and begins fearing his own castration. Did Hammett study Freud? They shared Blanche Knopf as their editor. Was he consciously aping Freud in The Thin Man? It almost doesn't matter: what's telling is that when Hammett wanted to describe a very scary woman he unconsciously knew that a phallic mother would be terrifying.

There is a famous sexual reference to the above scene in The Thin Man: Nora afterward asks her husband, "Tell me something, Nick. Tell me the truth: when you were wrestling with Mimi, didn't you get excited?"[157] The New York Times carried a Knopf ad reading, "We don't believe the question on page 192 of Dashiell Hammett's The Thin Man has had the slightest influence on the sale of the book."[158] Hammett biographer and Englishman Julian Symons later wrote: "The question was omitted from the English edition. Erections did not exist in English fiction at that time."[159] Humor aside, it's revealing that Nick Charles is asked about arousal from a physical fight with an angry, out-of-control mother

and admits, “Oh, a little,” to which his wife laughs and says, “If you aren’t a disgusting old lecher.”[160]

In the twelve years between “The Parthian Shot” and The Thin Man, there are no mothers in Hammett’s fiction. It’s striking, really, and particularly so for an author who loved three mother figures, in some measure the mother of his children, and - first, steadily and devotedly - his own mother.

His full name was Samuel Dashiell Hammett but it was the “Dashiell” that mattered; it was his mother Annie’s maiden name. Which came first: Annie’s belief that Hammetts were inferior to Dashiells or her husband’s failure to keep jobs and marriage vows? In either event, Annie told her son that, “All men are no good.”

> Then she added, if you couldn’t keep your husband with love, do it with sex. She told him that a woman who wasn’t good in the kitchen wouldn’t be much good in any of the other rooms either, words he would remember all his life.[161]

It’s hard to know how to take this: Annie clearly thought her male child Dashiell was “good,” she wasn’t able to “keep” her husband faithful via love or sex or cooking, and after he left Jose, Hammett espoused neither domesticity nor monogamy ever again. In any event, all his life Hammett was closer to his mother than to his father. Partly it was appreciation and admiration: Annie more than Richard was the hardworking, reliable parent, despite her tuberculosis and the status of women. Hammett was scrawny and whip smart, a quirky little kid only a mother could love, and Annie did; she championed him.

While there are few mothers in Hammett's fiction, there are plenty of tough, disillusioned wives with weak, disappointing husbands especially in his stories, so he used Annie as a wife early in his career but didn't transfer her as a mother. Here's LeRoy Lad Panek in Reading Early Hammett: A Critical Study of the Fiction Prior to The Maltese Falcon: "He started out with a caustic look at marriage and 'The Parthian Shot,' skewer[s] the ways that women and men undermine the institution."[162] Eloise in "The Joke on Eloise Morey" is a large woman looming over her puny husband. She's a hammerer:

> You were a genius; you were going to be famous and wealthy and God knows what all! And I fell for it and married you: a milk-and-water nincompoop who'll never amount to anything. … Delicate! Weak and wishy-wash….[163]

Little Dudley slinks away and kills himself, leaving a final, groveling love letter to Eloise as his suicide note. Unnerved by the note, Eloise destroys it and is thereby undone. Neighbors volunteer recollections of Eloise wishing her husband was dead, and she's arrested as his murderer – which, of course, she sort of is.

Margaret in "The Ruffian's Wife" is identified in terms of her husband, aptly named Guy, and she begins by seeing him as a larger-than-life romantic outlaw.

> What she wondered with smug assurance that it never could have happened to her, would it be like to have for a husband a tame, housebroken male who came regularly to meals and bed, whose wildest flying could attain no giddier height than an occasional game

> of cards, a suburbanite's holiday in San Francisco, or, at the very most,
> a dreary adventure with some stray stenographer, manicurist, milliner?[164]

But when the Bolivian pearl concessionaire who lent Guy money for his latest failed scheme shows up, Margaret's view of her husband shrinks to realistic proportions. He's just a guy who needs her help. She does help him murder the Bolivian, but the marriage is over: "The plain truth was she had never seen Guy as a man, but always as a half-fabulous being. The weakness of any defense she could contrive for him lay in his needing a defense."[165] It's a recurring progression in what Hammett called his "sex stories": the bride adores her groom because she inaccurately and unfairly sees him as invincible, only to turn on him when he proves vulnerable. In the long, angry battle thereafter, the wife is the tougher combatant; in Red Harvest there are "men with the dull look of respectable husbands."[166] Marriage is the big cheat. This all looks like Hammett's parents' marriage rather than his own, and it introduces the larger issue of *men needing help*.

Nevertheless, Annie and Richard and were emotionally healthy enough to raise a son able to make his way, however imperfectly and incompletely, through Freud's tasks, and this successful journey rendered Hammett open to mother and father figures too. When Hammett was the father he gave his daughters permission to conjure family romances of their own, and Jo later wrote about it:

> Once when I was ten or eleven, he accused me of being ashamed
> of my parents. Then not waiting for an answer, he went on to say that
> it was okay; everyone was ashamed of his parents. When he was little,

> he said, he liked to imagine that he was adopted, and one stormy night his "real" father would come driving down the road to reclaim him. He didn't go on to explain what this "real" father would be like, but I imagined he would be very different from the one he already had.[167]

When Hammett sent the manuscript for "Poisonville" to Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., in February 1928, it was Blanche Knopf who wrote back: "There is no question whatever that we are keen about the ms.… Hoping that we will be able to get together on POISONVILLE (a hopeless title by the way.)"[168] Hammett's reply was:

> Somehow I had got the idea that "Poisonville" was a pretty good title and I was surprised at your considering it hopeless – sufficiently surprised to ask a couple of retail book sellers what they thought of it. They agreed with you, so I'm beginning to suspect which one of us is wrong.[169]

Knopf, Inc. published Hammett's first novel, duly renamed Red Harvest, one year later. Blanche became his editor, thus moving the pulp-writing Hammett into heavyweight company; she also edited Freud, Gide, de Beauvoir, Camus, Van Vechtan and Cather. Blanche was one kind of mother to Hammett: a steady taskmaster, hard-charging and without subterfuge.

Rose Evans was Hammett's motherly housekeeper and meddler. In an interview after her boss's death, Rose recalled (referring to herself in the third person):

> Women came around, tried to get money out of him; Rose tried her best to keep them away, but they came around at night too when

> Rose had gone home. She didn't know what went on when she wasn't there. Gold diggers. She knew what they were.[170]

When Hammett was about to be released from jail, Rose sent him two suits, two shirts, and two pairs of shoes, "so he'd have a choice."[171] She was there when he was dying, and Hammett scholar Richard Layman subsequently learned that "Hellman wanted to hire Rose Evans, but Hammett asked her not to take the job because he feared she would not be treated with the respect and affection which he had always felt for her."[172]

When Hammett was convicted of contempt of court for refusing to answer questions about the Bail Fund Committee of the Civil Rights Congress of New York, bail was set at $10,000. Hellman later claimed that she tried and failed to raise the money, but it was steady, loyal Muriel Alexander who showed up with $10,000 cash: "Hammett's secretary, Muriel Alexander, didn't look like the kind of girl who would have $10,000 – the first figure set – even though she said it was hers, and she couldn't bail out Hammett."[173] Fifty-eight years later Hammett's granddaughter was emotional and emphatic: "That woman went to her grave without ever revealing where she got the money!"[174]

Finally, as the years played out after their San Francisco years together, *Jose* became a kind of mother figure for Hammett. She was, after all, a nurse like his mother. Jo remembered:

> Papa would come and stay with us sometimes in the thirties – when he was drinking and things were not going well with him. Our house was a refuge from his other worlds. My mother cooked and tended to

> him, tried to get him to eat.[175]

When Hammett was in prison, Jose worried.

> I think Mother understood better than I did how hard prison would be on him. … And she was less deceived by the tough-guy front he always wore. She knew his physical frailty, had nursed him in the San Francisco days when they both thought he was dying. She knew how much he needed his privacy and understood what its loss would mean to him.[176]

For his part, Hammett tended to easily tease his mother figures, including Jose in later years, treating them like kid sisters – which may have been how he treated his mother too. The man who bloomed in male institutions certainly knew how to charm women. Jo marveled at his finesse:

> The servants loved him. "Mr. Hammett never asks for anything special," they said. He didn't have to. Somehow people were always trying to please him, to give him what he wanted before he asked for it. I'd noticed that before. It was some sort of trick he'd learned. Though I saw that it worked for him, I could never figure out how he did it.[177]

Chandler couldn't ever get to Hammett's kind of easiness. Doubleness led to loneliness in Chandler's writing and life, and most of that loneliness had to do with women, gay men, and sex. Chandler was unable or at least unwilling to draw nuanced, fictional female characters, much less complicated male/female relationships. This proved a weakness as his work moved from short stories to novels and from genre to mainstream. It was a startling deficiency in otherwise

thoughtful and beautiful work. Nevertheless, there is much to be learned by watching the deficiency play out.

Chandler's novels have double geographies and the outer one is crucially set in Los Angeles. Chandler was masterful and confident in this outer diegesis, with its poetry of place and empathetic characterizations. But he uncomfortably - and perhaps unconsciously - knew that this was not where the fundamental crime's motivations came from, nor where its solution could be understood. Chandler scholar Stephen Knight writes:

> Essentially the novels have double plots. There is an outer structure where what has gone wrong is loosely associated with corruption, gangsters, professional crime. … But none of these people or patterns turns out really to have been behind the central crime, and they fade from the action as the inner, personalized plot is steadily revealed, as the actual betrayer and killer becomes exposed.[178]

These inner narratives reveal their author. "The whole pattern is common in the novels," says Knight. "The villain is consistently a sexy woman who gets very close to the hero."[179] And the hero – the detective/first-person narrator/Marlowe -– is very close to Chandler. The great puzzle in Chandler is that he made Marlowe "a shop-soiled Galahad" who rescues women all over Los Angeles yet the women are fiends. Marlowe acknowledges in The Big Sleep that, "The move with the knight was wrong. … Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights."[180]

Chandler's illogical formula is, in fact, fully compatible with Hammett's espoused conundrum. One of the genre's descriptors is that the detective never wins: he never gets rich, never makes his mark, and never gets the girl. Layman elaborates:

> The burden of the tragedy was borne by the detective, who typically narrated the tale, acting as both chorus and hero. Physically, he was invulnerable; spiritually, though, he was jaded by the awesome knowledge that his job, which was to bring order to a chaotic world, could never be completed. He was a seedy Sisyphus afflicted with an unrealizable moral vision.[181]

Hammett and Chandler's narrating heroes simultaneously believe in the power of self-determination or self-will and that the self had no power in the world. Take an existential man, "existential" meaning meaningful interaction with his values and his environment, and put him in a nihilistic world, "nihilism" meaning meaningless - the cynical rejection of moral principles. It could be said that's what hard-boiled is: an *existential man in a nihilistic world*.

In Chandler's The High Window, Jasper Murdock had made advances on Merle Davis, his wife's neurotic little assistant. Then he was murdered – defenestrated. With his death, a rare category of Chandler monster is created: the widowed mother. "[T]he female threatens the male," wrote Knight about The High Window, "as a bogus mother rather than a bogus lover."[182] Elizabeth Murdock plays her regrettable son, Leslie, and, acting as a mother figure, overruns her assistant, Merle – and then hates them for their weakness.

Elizabeth has rendered her son superficial: his wife has given up and left him and he gambles extravagantly. Elizabeth tells Marlowe, "I have a damn fool of a son. …he is quite incapable of earning a living and he has no money except what I give him, and I am not generous with money. … I find him dull myself.[183] Elizabeth is masterful at using the psychological advantages that accrue to a mother: with time and cunning, and without conscience, Elizabeth has convinced Merle that she pushed Mr. Murdock out the window, that she owes her continued job to the forgiveness of her mistress, and that her mistress is so emotionally fragile that she must never be confronted with painful truths. Marlowe shows Merle a photograph of Elizabeth killing her husband and then tells Merle:

> You were made to think you had pushed him. It was done with care, deliberation and the sort of quiet ruthlessness you only find in a certain kind of woman dealing with another woman. … She had the strange wild possessive love for her son such women have. She's cold, bitter, unscrupulous and she used you without mercy or pity…. You were just a scapegoat to her. If you want to come out of this pallid sub-emotional life you have been living, you have got to realize and believe what I am telling you.[184]

And Merle's response? She tells Marlowe, "You must never show this to Mrs. Murdock. It would upset her terribly."[185]

There are sad pieces of Chandler in the novel's victims. Leslie, the cowed son, "a slim, tall self-satisfied-looking number," is similar to the Chandler who showed up at the Lloyds' Friday evening get-togethers, "an elegant young thing

trying to be brilliant about nothing,"[186] by his own description. And Merle with her "pallid sub-emotional life" and who is over-stimulated in the company of any man: she's Chandler-like too. "When it came to women, he was highly excitable," Chandler biographer Judith Freeman describes. "He was drawn to their beauty, but they made him nervous, overly anxious to please; they caused such an excess of emotion, an intense response."[187]

Macdonald, Hammett, Chandler: of the three, Chandler's childhood was the least amenable to his playing family romances. His mother had implacably appropriated the fantasist role: in her eyes and therefore in her powerless son's, she was "a sort of saint," and his father was "an utter swine." It's a cruel irony that, of the three, the young aspiring writer most needing a father figure was also the least equipped to recognize one.

When Chandler met Cissy Pascal at the Lloyds' one Friday night in 1913, she was overtly very different from his mother, Florence. Cissy was divorced and remarried, had lived in New York City, where she had posed nude – maybe for a painting over a bar - and may have smoked opium. She was a showy redhead, she was fun, and she was happy. He got the idea that he couldn't fail her. Hiney thinks that Chandler saw Cissy as

> without the fragility he was wary of in women. Her colorful past had given Cissy both a cynicism towards convention and an independent spirit. Having married twice, she had a wit and resourcefulness that Florence Thornton had never quite managed in the face of bad luck. Cissy was a worldly and beautiful woman whom Chandler could talk

> to on equal terms without worrying that her feelings might be easily hurt, or that she would be in need of constant reassurance.[188]

Freeman agrees: Cissy had none "of the vulnerability and sadness of his mother – the fragility of an abandoned woman. In her life, it was Cissy who'd done the abandoning, not the other way around."[189]

By 1916 Florence Chandler's son had sent for her. She fit right in with the Lloyds and all their friends, especially Julian and Cissy Pascal. There's an incongruous set of photographs: in one of mother and son on the beach, she's tentative and a little grim, in a buttoned-up wool coat, hose, and ladies' shoes and he's in a wool suit and vest, smoking a pipe; in another shot without his mother, Chandler is grinning, lounging in a bathing suit and a tan. Chandler was twenty-eight, living with his mother, and queasily in love with a married woman. Life got uncomfortably down to the nub, so Chandler moved.

In 1917 Chandler and Gordon Pascal (Julian's son and Cissy's stepson) joined the Canadian Army. Florence moved in with Julian and Cissy for the duration. By March 1918 Chandler had been trained as an infantryman and was suddenly on the front lines in France. Casualties mounted fast and Chandler found himself a stunned platoon leader way too soon. It took him thirty-nine years to write about what happened next and then he did so in just two brief letters to a young Australian correspondent whom he had never met.

> If you had to go over the top somehow all you seemed to think of was trying to keep the men spaced, in order to reduce casualties. It was always very difficult, especially if you had replacements or men who had

> been wounded. It's only human to want to bunch for companionship in face of heavy fire.[190]

In June 1918, German artillery shells blew up his entire outfit; every man died except Chandler; he had suffered a concussion and was removed from the front. He had enlisted just ten months before. "I have lived my whole life on the edge of nothing," he wrote. "Once you have had to lead a platoon into direct machine-gun fire, nothing is ever the same again."[191]

Chandler wrote an unfinished, unpublished sketch about that last bombardment called "Trench Raid" and he transposed that same terrible attack into a fleeting aside about the World War II experience of Terry Lennox in The Long Goodbye, his late and most autobiographical novel. Otherwise Chandler never spoke of what had happened to him in France. The war increased Chandler's tendency toward detachment. The subterfuges were there before the wartime slaughters and the slaughters only strengthened the subterfuges. Marlowe would affect that same stance: "It all depends on where you sit and what your own private score is," Marlowe says in The Long Goodbye. "I didn't have one. I didn't care. I finished the drink and went to bed."[192] But they both did care.

When Chandler came home from the war, he found his mother sick with cancer and spending increasing hours in her bedroom at the Pascals'. A poem that he wrote then, "Lines With an Incense Burner," includes the stanzas "The secret and silence and perfume … in the quiet house of all the dead."[193]

Cissy and Chandler wanted to marry, but Florence couldn't be appeased and Chandler wouldn't cross her. There was no way around it; he and Cissy would have to wait until Florence died. They would wait four years. Chandler supported two women in two Los Angeles apartments. He lived with his mother until she died at the end of January 1924.

Chandler's mother chose her response to her husband's neglect: she handed over the responsibility for her own life to her son. Of course this was what women alone often did at that time: divorce was a hard stigma in those days and she was frightened. But the fact that she made the expected moves doesn't contradict the truth that her decision damaged her son. In a very real sense she used him.

Chandler certainly saw his mother as the innocent victim and himself as having wanted to rescue her. At sixty-nine he still unreservedly adored her: "I knew that my mother had affairs – she was a very beautiful woman – and the only thing I felt to be wrong was that she refused to marry again for fear a step-father would not treat me kindly…."[194]

Psychologist John D. Gartner explains the tyranny of what Freud terms the "repetition compulsion":

> Put simply, there is a powerful unconscious drive to recreate in one's adult relationships the relationships you experienced as a child. In my twenty years of practicing psychotherapy, there is no single idea that I have found to be more useful or universal. … It is as if, when we are born, our minds are like wet plaster, and the structure of the relationships we

> encounter forms an impression that hardens into a mold. … What feels right to us, powerfully and compellingly so, are the comfortable and familiar relational patterns of the past.[195]

Certainly Chandler would experience and frequently misread women, using just such terms. It was as if he saw women in broad categories, as tropes. Because he had experienced Florence as ostensibly wholly fragile and a "sort of saint," Chandler would spend a lifetime hell-bent on saving complicated women. And his man in the novels, Philip Marlowe, did so too; Chandler could not write what he could not understand. And yet Chandler at some subconscious level did understand more about his mother, that "more" becoming apparent in his invented female monsters. As Freeman puts it:

> Ray's own mother bullied him, forcing him to wait until she was dead before he could marry Cissy. He never could say anything bad about his mother, certainly not while she was alive, but in his … fictional portraits of women – especially older women – what often leaks through is loathing, resentment, revulsion and fear….[196]

It all made Marlowe and Chandler lonely for and frightened of women. Jerry Speir, who also writes about Macdonald, agrees:

> Chandler was strongly affected by and often mistaken about women at various periods throughout his life. … Part of the impulse was to protect women, honor them, put them on a pedestal in the manner of the chivalric knight; the other impulse was to separate himself from them lest he be somehow contaminated by a foreignness which he has only vague

reasons for fearing.[197]

In Freud's version of family romances, they are the purview of the powerless child's. The fantasies provide a "vent" to ease the disappointment of having inevitably imperfect parents. As such, fantasies alleviate a little the "bone of my bone" bond between parent and child; "family romances" are a healthy, necessary stage in a child's maturation. But in Macdonald's retooled family romances, it's the adults who are conjuring perfect children, it's the all-powerful parents imposing their own fantasies on their inescapably disappointing sons and daughters. In Macdonald's finest novels, "playing happy families" is a deadly game ending in scarred children. Macdonald is writing cautionary tales that "ring true," that echo something we already, consciously or unconsciously, knew: parents really do impose their dreams on their child – which is to say they don't always see, much less celebrate, the actual kid.

Chapter Three: Sons, Wives, and Mistresses

When Linda Millar killed a boy in 1956 and when she went missing in 1959, Ross Macdonald was the parent who dealt with the crisis. Somewhere, in a long and frequently angry marriage complicated by an iron-willed and chronically troubled daughter, Margaret Millar had run through her emotional stores. At a grand jury hearing on Linda's vehicular homicide charges, Margaret told District Attorney Vern Thomas that she had never discussed the accident with her daughter. Moreover, she said, "I have never been present when Linda discussed the accident with anyone. … Her father took over all that. They were trying to – he has always spared me things, because I get upset."[198]

Like her paternal grandfather, Linda died young of a stroke, at thirty-one. Macdonald wrote to a friend that, "she was a valiant girl, one of the great moral forces in my life," and to another, "The people who knew her best, including her husband and me, felt that she was in almost unaccountable ways a great person."[199] The absence of references to what Margaret thought is striking. How much of a marriage was left at this point?

James Pagnusat, the seven-year-old son Linda left behind, spent nearly every weekend at the Millar's house for many months thereafter. Macdonald was desperate to protect the boy, and particularly to safeguard him from his mother's problems. Peter Wolfe, who would go on to write books about Hammett, Chandler, and Macdonald, was visiting Macdonald at that time and was struck by how fiercely Macdonald "loved that boy."[200] He taught him to swim, and the two

read to each other. And he wrote his grandson into The Underground Man as Ronny Broadhurst.

In Welty's 1971 landmark, front-page New York Times Book Review review of the novel she correctly sees that

> What really concerns Archer, and the real kernel of the book, its heart and soul, is the little boy of six, good and brave and smart. He constitutes the book's emergency…. Ronny is the tender embodiment of everything Archer is by nature bound to protect, infinitely worthy of rescue.[201]

In the novel, Archer doesn't even look for the killer until after three children, including Ronny, are found and safely home. Welty sees that in Macdonald

> the mystery and its solution are twin constructions in his hands, based on the same secret, which is always one of serious human import. This secret is often buried in a family's past, and it needs to be made known now – urgently, in order to save a life, often a child's or a young person's.[202]

It's curious to look at whom Archer considers children in need of loving protection. In addition to six-year-old Ronnie, the two other "young people [who] had slipped away over the curve of the world"[203] are adolescents and, in the novel's last pages, Archer goes back to rescue a fourth, Fritz, grown but retarded and playing husband to another angry mother. Archer's presence in the Snow family dynamites it. Peter Wolfe likens what happens to Oedipus: "Like the ruinous last interview between Oedipus and his mother, Jocasta, the mother-son

encounter rending the novel has the drive of tragedy."[204] Although a damaged Oedipus, Fritz stands his mother down and that is his triumph.

Fritz had bought a wig, a beard and a mustache from a movie magazine and tells Archer:

> "I wanted to chase the chicks on Sunset Strip. And be a swinger."
>
> "Did you catch any?"
>
> He shook his doleful head. "I only got to go the once. She doesn't want me to have a girlfriend."
>
> His gaze moved past me to his mother. …
>
> I turned to her. "Let him do his own talking, please."
>
> The sharpness in my voice seemed to encourage her son: "Yeah. Let me do my own talking. … What happened to my wig and stuff?"
>
> "Somebody must have taken it," she said.
>
> "I don't believe that. I think you took it," he said.
>
> "That's crazy talk."
>
> His eyes came up to her face, slowly, like snails ascending a wall. "You swiped it from under the mattress." He struck the bed under him with his hand to emphasize the point. "And I'm not crazy."
>
> "You're talking that way," she said. "What reason would I have to take your wig?"
>
> "Because you didn't want me to chase the chicks. You were jealous."[205]

The sexual dynamic between Roy and Tish Bradshaw in The Chill is ruinous but at least it's a bargain between two people who are otherwise functioning as adults. Here, in The Underground Man, Edna is exploiting her innocent, undeserving son.

The Underground Man has another mother, more well-meaning, but nevertheless unwittingly stunting her son's maturity too. Years before the novel begins, Leo Broadhurst had an affair with an adolescent girl, left his wife, Elizabeth, and disappeared, seemingly forever. Their eleven-year-old son, Stanley, was left to his mother. Edna Snow tells Archer, "Poor little Stanley was sick and shaking. … he couldn't help hearing the quarrel, and he was old enough to know what it meant. He ran out and tried to stop his father, but Captain Broadhurst roared away."[206]

Archer says, "I needed something to fill up the gap between those versions of her, something that would explain why her husband had left her or why her son hadn't been able to."[207] The last scene of The Galton Case has Teddy Federicks firmly telling her son, John Galton: "Don't bother about me."[208] She is "handing off" – relinquishing - her grown son to Sheila Howell, the young woman he can now love. It seems that Macdonald is expanding Freudian thinking about the family, arguing that it isn't only the child who has a series of tasks relating to how he loves his parents to progress through; parents too need to change the way they love their children as those children become adolescents and then adults. If the intense love, for example, of a mother for her infant son doesn't change as the boy grows, then that mother is fixated, stymied in her own growth. And, of

course, it's harder for a child to get through his tasks if his mother isn't keeping pace; it increases the peril of his being, like Stanley Broadhurst and Fritz Snow, sons who can't leave their mothers.

The explanations for Elizabeth's and then Stanley's respective marital implosions go back still another generation. Archer learns that Elizabeth Falconer Broadhurst has written an overwrought memoir of her father, ending with her assessment: "Robert Driscoll Falconer, Jr., was a god come down to earth in human guise."[209] Another character tells Archer that Elizabeth "was a frozen woman, a daddy's girl."[210] There had been no sex in her marriage for ten years when Broadhurst left her.

Stanley has replicated that damaged dynamic of his family-of-origin. The novel's opening scene ends with Stanley leaving his wife and going off in a convertible with a teen-aged girl, with his son as witness. Stanley's wife, Jean, tells Archer:

> My husband has been looking for his father for some time and gradually breaking up. Or maybe I've got it turned around. … He's angry at his father for abandoning him; at the same time he misses him and loves him. The two together can be paralyzing.[211]

A seconding opinion comes in a letter to Stanley from Reverend Lowell Riceyman:

> Your father chose to leave your mother and you, for reasons which neither you nor I can fathom. The heart has its reasons that the reason does not know.

> Think of your own life, Stanley. You have recently taken on the responsibilities of marriage…. Your wife is a fine and lovely girl, clearly more worthy of your living interest than those old passions of which you have written to me. The past can do very little for us - except in the end to release us. We must seek and accept release, and give release.[212]

But Stanley can't or won't: his obsessive search leads to his finding his father's grave, only to be murdered and buried there too, with his son a witness. "A déjà vu feeling gave me a twinge of basic doubt, as if the burial and the digging-up might be repeated daily from now on,"[213] Archer remarks.

"I hoped it was over," Archer says on the last page of the novel. "I hoped Ronny's life wouldn't turn back toward his father's death as his father's life had turned in a narrowing circle."[214] There is a courageous, if tentative, possibility for that in The Underground Man.

Macdonald's best novels close with the past acknowledged and moved on from, the present hopeful, and the future in sight. The books really are what Tutunjian kidded Macdonald about: the same story twelve times. The Galton Case finishes with singing birds and white rivers, a light in a window of a home, and John Galton and his girlfriend setting off to golden California. Alex and Dolly Kincaid are finally emotionally ready to begin their marriage in The Chill. What ends The Underground Man is surprising: Archer is thinking about becoming a husband and father himself. The last sentence is, "Before night fell, Jean and I and Ronny drove out of town. … We passed the steaming remnants of the fire

and drove on south through the rain."[215] "Macdonald ends the novel … with a powerfully ambivalent image," is Kreyling's description:

> a cobbled-together basic family unit poised on the edge of assent…. Macdonald exits The Underground Man with Archer poised dangerously between the vulnerability of love and the certainty of ruin. … Archer himself begins to emerge, but warily, from his own personal underground, suspended between isolation and connection.[216]

Earlier in the novel, when he first drives Jean to her mother-in-law's ranch, Archer tells his readers: "Her presence beside me sustained an illusive feeling that there was an opening there into another time-track or dimension. It had more future than the world I knew, and not so bloody much traffic."[217]

It's worth noting that by the time Archer gets to The Underground Man he is a long way from the code-bound Op and Spade, and the judgmental pilgrim, Marlowe. Archer comes to believe that The Underground Man's Elizabeth, perfunctory wife and dependent mother, murdered her husband by shooting him but decides not to bear down on her for answers, much less turn her over to the police. It's indicative of an evolved Archer, one capable of moral charity: "The hot breath of vengeance was growing cold in my nostrils as I grew older. I had more concern for a kind of economy in life that would help to preserve the things that were worth preserving."[218] He is grateful for his decision when the medical examiner tells him that Leo didn't die of his gunshot wounds.

It was Macdonald's belief that he, his wife, and his daughter had suffered from parents still enmeshed in their own sad childhoods. Indeed Linda said in reaction

to a Rorschach test picture: “That made me think of a half-built life - and of my parents. I was mad when I thought they did not show me how to build my life. … I was mad at being forced to grow up – without help – I tried … but I didn’t do well.”[219] That repeated pattern: the son (Macdonald) “being forced to grow up - without help” followed by the son’s daughter (Linda) suffering the same experience; that was what Macdonald tried to save his grandson from. It is hard to know what Jim went through and why, but he dropped out of school at sixteen and died of a drug overdose at twenty-six in Las Vegas in 1989.

Fifty-three years and three generations before, Annie Moyer Millar had died naked in her son’s college apartment. At her death, Macdonald had experienced several feelings: grandiose guilt, “black depression,” “the necessity of not hurting anyone” – and an exhilarating “first grasp on manhood.” He was premature in claiming the last. Macdonald’s childhood was still calling the shots. The greatest proof of this was his decision to marry at twenty-three, just two years after Annie’s death – and especially his choice of wife. Macdonald was still very much “the son” and Margaret Ellis Strum was definitely “the son’s wife.”

He married a girl he’d known when he was a boy, a girl who’d had the childhood he’d resented:

> My childhood was profoundly divided by the rich and the poor, the upright and the downcast, the sheep and the goats. We goats knew the moral pain influenced not so much by poverty as by the doctrine, still current, that poverty is always deserved.[220]

Margaret was student president of their high school, the daughter of the mayor, winner of a classics scholarship, in the debate club and on the school magazine's staff. In "Notes of a Son & Father," Macdonald is honest enough to admit that "He loved her for what she represented but also for herself."

Macdonald and Margaret went their separate ways after high school and then ran into each other five years later. Macdonald was an orphan now, bent on success and determined to never look back. Margaret may have been in that past he was rushing from, but she'd also had a rough time of it since high school:

> She was not in a good way. After several brilliant and arduous years at the University of "the City," a "nervous breakdown" had washed her out of the very difficult classics course. She had come to this other city to live with an aunt, had fallen out of a business course, had a mild schizophrenic episode, attempted suicide, was attempting to make new sense of her life by studying psychiatry and writing stories and verse.

The nine words that follow the above description from "Notes of a Son & Father" are powerful: *"The son knew his fate when he saw it."* Macdonald's description of the build-up to their wedding is chilling; he must not have been able to see then what was so clear seventeen years later.

> Within a few weeks they became lovers. She had had one previous lover, a doctor who seduced her and left her frigid. Her frigidity disappeared after some months. The son, with many backslidings - and she often hated him - considered their relationship a marriage, - and began to try to be a husband. More than a year after its

> inception, and the day after he graduated from college, the marriage was legalized. Both knew that it meant this for the son-husband, that instead of going to Harvard or some such for graduate work, he would go to teachers' college and become a high school teacher. The choice was bitter but he embraced it (not without many later recriminations), fearing that if he "deserted" her for even as short a time as a year, she would perhaps kill herself or fall back into despair.

It's all there. Macdonald didn't want Margaret when she was their high school's star; he wanted her *after* she had grown angry and prone to hysteria. Tom Nolan exclaims: "Only two years after his mother's death [Macdonald] was about to commit himself to an equally formidable and demanding relationship." Macdonald's friend Bob Ford "'deplored' the idea of two such egotistical people marrying each other and predicted nothing but strain."[221]

Did this marriage happen under the auspices of Freud's Oedipus complex? Macdonald appears to have been sexually attracted to a woman like his mother. He also may have been operating in accord with the repetition compulsion, treating Margaret as he had treated his mother and finding comfort in doing so. Part of Macdonald's anger at his father was at his having chosen a woman unfit for marriage and motherhood; maybe some of that anger at his father abated when he did the same thing.

"We re-create our childhood paradigm using three basic techniques," explains Gartner:

> We pick partners who are inclined to play their assigned roles; we

> provoke them to behave in these familiar old ways; and, finally, we project our past family figures onto them, distorting our perceptions to convince ourselves that they are behaving like figures from our childhood even when they are not. And, amazingly, we engineer all of this outside of our own awareness.[222]

And what about Margaret's attraction to Macdonald? What patterns from her childhood chimed again when she took him as her lover? Macdonald again, from "Notes of a Son & Father":

> Her father was a crude shrewd selfish self-made successful man who had gradually been humanized by misfortune, but not enough. In his early years he practiced a German authoritarianism in the home which fixed his daughter with, among other problems, a permanent eating problem, and a long hatred for him only lately tempered by tolerance. The mother, whom the father truly loved, was a woman of great goodness but poor insight. She passed her last seven years or so dying slowly and horribly of cancer, and masterminding, with a rod of silk, her brilliant daughter's life. Everything the daughter did, and she was immensely active in music ("concert pianist"), school politics, her studies (she learned six years of Greek in her final year of high school, and went to college on a scholarship, the family having just lost its money partly through the depredations of her older brother who was a psychopathic personality, forger, alcoholic, and who died under a freight train five years ago: there was some incestuous content, not likely overt,

> in the love of brother and sister) – everything the daughter did, she did for her mother, almost literally as if the mother's life depended on it.

Macdonald and Margaret thought with the excited logic of smart students and the erotic illogic of new lovers that they would be each other's salvation. Macdonald knew they shared "a true Kierkegaardian view of a tragic world, fed by ancient tragedy and by modern sensibility." For her part, Margaret said that he felt like "my other, better half, my miraculous twin."[223] They were counting on each other. But they had suffered hard beginnings and were therefore *more* likely to play their histories out again as adults. Gartner again: "The theory has it that recreating the traumatic situation allows us to feel a sense of mastery over it. It's not being done to us. We're doing it, which allows us to feel more in control."[224]

Within three months of the wedding she was pregnant. "That's when you really feel the entrapment," Margaret said later, "You know: 'Here I am – stuck.'"[225] For his part, Macdonald was afraid of passing on his mother's hysteria.[226]

But Linda was born in 1939 and they thought she was beautiful. Her exhausted new parents were aware enough to know that they lacked models of good parenting and believed therefore that they couldn't trust their own inclinations. They argued about how to raise Linda: Margaret followed behaviorist John Broadus Watson's strictures of letting babies cry, and making do with less kissing and holding; Macdonald "thought these notions were nuts."[227] They were exceedingly self-conscious parents yet they unconsciously and

compulsively repeated patterns from their largely disastrous families-of-origin. Macdonald admits to his psychoanalyst: "mother and father have never shared a room, because father snores and wife is nervous." But, in an approximation to Macdonald and his mother sharing a bed, Margaret and Linda shared a bedroom until the latter was eleven years old. Meanwhile, like her mother before her, Margaret, according to a family friend,

> was always revving Linda's engine as it were, stepping on the accelerator of her personality, making her do all sorts of things, making her a bit of a show-off…. … with Linda the box was always open, as it were, with people looking in, expecting, commenting, constantly stimulating in ways that somehow or other made for a nervous youngster.[228]

Macdonald admits, "Present resentment and the ill past sometimes made him cruel to the child. He would shake her sometimes; sometimes he slapped her face, in lieu of his wife's." And it all somehow had to do with sex, Macdonald began to realize, when his daughter was sixteen.

It was a doubled, self-defeating dynamic that was operating in Macdonald's early work and marriage. On the conscious level, he was fascinated by and well-versed in psychological scholarship. In 1947 Macdonald tried to write a "serious" autobiographical novel about "an adolescent boy [William] being shoved into delinquency by social and economic pressure."[229] Winter Solstice doesn't work because social and economic pressures are influences from the outside and less potent than those within William, and because when Macdonald tried to draw

upon his own past to address William's unhappy behavior he became "angry and upset."[230]

The Three Roads (1948), one of Macdonald's early, pre-Archer novels, takes its title from the three roads that intersected in Phocis where Oedipus killed his father. The Three Roads comes from Macdonald's reading and is heavily influenced by Graham Greene's sometimes surreal novel, The Ministry of Fear (1943), wherein Arthur Rowe is haunted by having murdered his wife years before and believes that someone is trying to kill him, even as London is being bombed on all sides. What The Three Roads is not drawn from is Macdonald's own life experience.

Macdonald's 1952 doctoral dissertation is titled "The Inward Eye: A Revaluation of Coleridge's Psychological Criticism." He focuses on the shift from the Age of Faith, as defined by Augustine, Aquinas, and Dante, to the Enlightenment, meaning Descartes, Marx, and Darwin. These latter three effectively ended "the hand of God" as the link between the seen and the unseen. Macdonald argues that Samuel Taylor Coleridge was "groping toward the universal model of the unconscious by way of human beings' response to stimulation of the imagination." Coleridge, therefore, was "Freud's indispensable precursor."[231] And Macdonald, therefore, some four years before his crisis and psychoanalysis, was already versed in and championing Freud. But, as is the case in The Three Roads, Macdonald himself can't be located in his dissertation. Late in his life Macdonald would say that he thought his last novels were better on Freud than was "The Inward Eye."

Macdonald and Margaret wrote a never-optioned screenplay together – a family romance, really - called "The Mastermind," about a former ethics professor now president of a Midwestern college, his irreverent wife, and their brainy daughter – that's who they wanted to be. But the compulsion to repeat childhood paradigms acted as an overriding and hidden agenda, insidiously undercutting their best efforts to do differently, to do better as husband and wife, father and mother than their parents had done before them.

In 1940, in cold Kitchener where Macdonald taught high school English and history, Margaret faltered, beset by ailments that she later admitted were probably psychosomatic. She went to bed and her husband brought home dozens of mystery novels from the public library. Margaret thought, "I could do this." She and Macdonald brainstormed some plots and settings, she concocted a handsome, William-Blake-quoting psychiatrist/detective, and then she started to work. The new mother who had prepared thirty-five of her husband's short sketches, verse, and stories for youths for submission on speculation to American magazines during Linda's first six weeks at home now wrote a sixty-thousand word detective novel in fifteen days, followed by two or three complete rewrites. She later said, "I had to do something to get out of that bed. To get out of that town."[232] The Invisible Worm, sold to Doubleday for $250, followed by The Weak-eyed Bat and The Devil Loves Me in 1942, was indeed their ticket out – that and the teaching fellowship and doctoral program the University of Michigan offered Macdonald. Like his fellow California-born John Galton, Macdonald went back over the border in 1941.

Macdonald landed in Visiting Professor W. H. Auden's course, "Fate and the Individual in European History." Auden, who was influenced by Freud and Carl Jung and who would write the celebrated essay "The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story" in 1948, became a mentor. Auden's respect for the detective story lent gravitas to "Margaret's" genre in Macdonald's mind. But, according to Tom Nolan, Macdonald was uneasy about Auden's homosexuality and turned down his offer to introduce Macdonald around Manhattan. The homosexuality was there in Macdonald's childhood and coming-of-age; it was part of what he wasn't going to think about.

In 1944 Macdonald, echoing his father, went to war in the Pacific. While gone from home, he sent Margaret his reaction to reading Karen Horney, "I don't regard myself as a neurotic (nor you either….) Concerning my basic motivations I'm pretty well fouled up. I think I know what will satisfy me … but I don't know why."[233]

Margaret replied with love letters:

> Oh Lord, it seems like a dream; but it isn't – after the war we'll both write; we'll share the housework and write ourselves silly. There are certain things I'd like to do before we start to write, but they'll be easy, natural, biological and wonderful. …We just fit, that's all.[234]

She signed one letter "Chuckles" and another "Your big blonde."[235]

Margaret kept writing: it got them out of Ann Arbor and "the whole academic thing,"[236] which she disliked. While Macdonald was off in the Navy, she made enough money to buy them a house she picked out in a California town she'd

found, Santa Barbara. Margaret was the breadwinner and the success in the family. That changed: in plain, Macdonald came home and stole her accomplishment.

Margaret eventually published twenty-eight books; she became a well-reviewed, financially successful, sophisticated writer. Her work is quick, glib, fun, and mean. All her detectives are amateurs who don't narrate, unlike the hired and hard-boiled Op, Marlowe and Archer; what fascinates Margaret are psychopathic personalities and their victims – not the idealized investigator. In The Fiend, the eponymous man at its center likes children: "The conditions were impossible, of course. He couldn't turn and run in the opposite direction every time he saw a child. They were all over, everywhere, at any hour."[237]
And then a child disappears.

Her early books are lighter and funnier, followed by some more seriously gothic and psychological, and, finally, by works that are an amalgam of satire and psychosis. None of them have heroines or heroes and Margaret's dead-on, confident, biting voice is present every time. In her best-known novel, Beast in View, a character gets called a liar and replies, "Oh, that. Sure."[238]

Her canon is full of angry families. In Beast in View the father says to his adolescent daughter, "Your punishment, Helen, is being you and having to live with yourself."[239] The mother in Vanish in an Instant, written presciently years before Linda Millar's troubles, has given up:

> All my life I've done everything possible for her. She's been hard to raise, terribly hard. It's been one crisis after another ever since the day

> she was born, and I've met each one with all the strength I had. Now I don't have enough left to go on with. … Virginia's on her own now. When she makes a mistake she must correct it herself. I won't be here to help her.[240]

Many of her plots have children overhearing what their parents really think of them or forceful women choosing emotionally weak men.

And that is of a piece with who Margaret was; a strong personality who thought she knew and never hesitated to say. Tom Nolan calls her an "avowedly unreligious teller," and Donald Pearce, the couple's friend, talks about her "proud penchant for truth-telling," and quotes Alexander Pope to describe her: "I can't be silent, and I will not lie."[241]

Eudora Welty was a sunnier soul, a quieter, less competitive writer, and she wasn't married to Macdonald. In January 1971, he wrote to thank Welty, whom he didn't know, for her review of The Underground Man: "As you know a writer and his work don't really exist until they've been read. You have given me the fullest and most explicit reading I've ever had, or that I ever expected. I exist as a writer more completely thanks to you."[242] In May of that same year, Macdonald met Welty by chance at the Algonquin Hotel and they spent a magical night: at a cocktail party hosted by Alfred Knopf and then talking and walking, up and down Broadway. The night expanded into the happiest, easiest, and healthiest romantic relationship Macdonald ever had. As for Welty, Macdonald was the love of her life. Her friend Reynolds Price tells what he was privy to:

> One night he and I had a few drinks and were sitting in the motel in

> Jackson when this one particular very memorable moment occurred.
>
> We were talking about Eudora and what a wonderful person she was; and I went on you know about how important she'd been to me.... And [Macdonald] stopped me and said, "No, you don't understand. I'm saying I love her as a woman." And I'll take a Bible oath that he said that to me.... I think that for both of them this was an emotional relationship of great importance, in both their lives.
>
> She took great delight in him, too. ... I think she was a great romance of [Macdonald's] life, at the end of his life. And [Macdonald] was of great importance to Eudora Welty; I think it ran very deep for her. My own sense is that they were in love with one another. And it was late in both their lives.[243]

The affair lasted twelve years – until Macdonald died. It consisted of visits in Santa Barbara and Jackson, books dedicated to each other, and love letters. After he was gone, biographer Ralph Sipper urged Welty to publish both sides of their correspondence: "someday the confluence (it is a wonderful word) of your lives should, in my view, be a matter of human record. What you and [Macdonald] exchanged was a pureness that need not be buried."[244] Sipper was wooing Welty with her own word, "confluence," from The Optimist's Daughter and One Writer's Beginnings, but he had no luck; she quietly refused.

The affair brought, perhaps, only a qualified happiness, or maybe it is that the pleasures in a long affair or friendship are different from the joy that can come in a marriage that prevails after all – and that all happiness is qualified. Macdonald

has Archer say in The Doomsters: "I'd like to see that house destroyed, and that family scattered forever."[245] In The Blue Hammer, he wrote, "There are certain families whose members should all live in different towns – different states, if possible – and write each other letters once a year."[246] Yet Welty and Macdonald probably never consummated their affair and Macdonald never left Margaret. "I guess I don't believe in endings," he wrote to a friend going through a bad time in his own marriage.[247]

Hammett did *not* believe in marriage and *ended* his own. He said monogamy was unnatural and untenable for men. Hammett's plots have a curious trajectory, wherein violence and sex both ramp up as the detective/hero loses control. Over and over in Hammett's fiction, there turns out to be mortal danger in a man's letting down his guard, particularly in the presence of his wife. These women don't enjoy sex. They have it for other, dangerous-to-men reasons. The sole exception is Nora Charles, who is a member of the most demoralizing hard-boiled sorority of all: wives with money.

Women who aren't wives are treacherous too but often they're more straightforward about it all. "I gathered she was strictly pay-as-you-enter,"[248] the Op says about the prostitute Dinah Brand in Red Harvest. Dinah charges by the hour for sex or information, and then invests her income in successful stocks. She's seedy and greedy but unapologetically corrupt and utterly transparent; Hammett, who hated sanctimony and artifice, probably loved her. But in The Dain Curse, the other Op novel, the *married* Alice Dain is a sexual savage:

> This was a blonde whose body was rounded …with the cushioned, soft-

> sheathed muscles of the hunting cats, whether in jungle or alley. … She was simple as an animal, with an animal's simple ignorance of right and wrong, dislike for being thwarted, and spitefulness when trapped.[249]

The Dain Curse is a strange, three-part tale with a forgettable-because-pure female, perpetual victim. In part one, the Op figures out that once upon a time four-year-old Gabrielle Leggett got tricked into killing her own mother. In part two, the Op rescues the now-grown, morphine-addicted Gabrielle from the California-slick "Temple of the Holy Grail." In part three, Gabrielle is newly married until her husband gets murdered. This time the Op gets it right for good: a novelist murdered Gabrielle's groom and her aunt/stepmother; he also got her addicted to morphine and took her to the temple. Gabrielle just gets flung from part to part. Gregory agrees: "she is passive and helpless to the point of catatonia, unable to control or interpret anything that happens around her, and constantly needing men to rescue her from other men."[250]

Hammett has figured out how to write a *fun* good woman by the time Effie Perine shows up in The Maltese Falcon. But Sam Spade is tempted by and beds canny Brigid O'Shaughnessy. Nevertheless he later turns her in for murdering his partner: she saw the sex as a *quid pro quo*; he did not. For both Alice Dain in The Dain Curse and O'Shaughnessy in The Maltese Falcon sex is the weapon they use to get something *else*.

Hammett's view of sex and love is even more jaded in The Glass Key. Ned Beaumont leaves town with the girl at the end but, as Wolfe describes it in his study of Hammett:

> The book's last two sentences read, "Janet Henry looked at Ned Beaumont. He stared fixedly at the door." … His inexpressiveness is well judged. Sex can kill you dead. To show a woman love is to ask for trouble. … The first time they met, … she began panther-tracking him.[251]

Sex and violence are urges from the same primal ("panther-tracking") source ("sex can kill you dead") – it's women doing the tracking and the murdering, and money is in the mix.

Violence is innocent in Hammett's first *de facto* novel: Black Mask published two long stories, "The Big Knock-Over" and its sequel, "$106,000 Blood Money," in February and May 1927. Together the stories are full of exuberant mayhem: the most successful one-hundred criminals "from all over Rand-McNally"[252] meet in San Francisco and simultaneously stick up two major banks across the street from each other. Here's who dies: sixteen cops, twelve bystanders and bank clerks, and seven robbers. Forty-eight cops are hurt and thirty-one dinged-up crooks are put in jail. It's a funny premise and the wily brains behind the knockover, a little old Greek named Papadopoulos, tricks the Op into letting him go at the end. The stories are a hoot, the violence is light-hearted – and there aren't any women.

The body count begins to go down - Red Harvest has twenty-four murders, The Dain Curse twelve – but the violence turns sick and the Op gets compromised. Ned Beaumont is beaten for days, nearly to death in The Glass

Key; finally left alone, he breaks down and attempts suicide. One of the hard-boiled protocols has been breached, leaving the reader disoriented and queasy.

The Thin Man, the one that spawned so many spin-offs, is an unsatisfactory last novel whose meaning is found just under the double entendres and cocktails. Nick Charles doesn't work and lives on his wife's money. If he wasn't cynical, he wouldn't be hard-boiled at all.

"The hard-boiled detective sets out to investigate a crime," writes John G. Cawelti in Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture, "but invariably finds that he must go beyond the solution to some kind of personal choice of action."[253] The personal choices – and the fictional detectives' vaunted personal codes – have to do with violence, anger, and sex. Hammett himself was uneasy about all three. He feared that he had a tendency to hurt people: hence his rules against fighting, shooting, and driving. He certainly knew he was an angry drunk. He shied away from monogamy, and appears to have been more comfortable as an exuberant womanizer. Hammett was productive and happy in exclusively male enclaves.

Hammett's only wife is downplayed in the biographies, much less in the critical studies. Jose was a hard luck kid. Born into poverty to an alcoholic coal miner and his wife, both parents were dead by the time she was six. She and her little brother were put in an orphanage; she *mothered* that boy. Nursing schools generally required two years of high school and incoming students were eighteen but Jose talked her way in at fifteen; it was a practical choice for a girl unafraid of hard work and fond of looking after other people.

It should be lost on nobody that Jose fell in love with Hammett when he was under her care in a TB hospital and that Hammett's beloved mother was also a nurse. He followed Jose around; he was her private orderly. He took her on walks and ferry rides. Mostly they just talked. Later she remembered, "Of all the patients, [he] seemed to stand out. I thought he was very intelligent and striking…. Also he was very gentle. … Mostly we just talked."[254] After Hammett was transferred to a veteran's hospital in California they wrote to each other. Those that were published make clear that two of them lived on those letters. An important few have gone missing: Jose wrote to tell him she was pregnant; Hammett, out of the hospital and working again as a detective, wrote back, "Come to San Francisco and I will marry you." All in 1921: she did, he did - "he bought me flowers"[255] - and Mary was born in October.

But the pregnancy came to be an issue seventy-one years later when Mary died, and Jose and Hammett were already gone. Hellman abruptly claimed that Mary was not Hammett's child, that Jose had had an affair with a different soldier and that when she came up pregnant she wrote to Hammett. That he had played knight errant and married her. Trying to debunk Hellman's assertion, the Hammett family proffers an incomplete Hammett-to-Jose letter written in May 1921:

> I didn't know if you were a "wild woman" or not before I went out with you, Lady, but I did know that you were a wonderful little person from head to heels, from shoulder to shoulder, from back-bone to wishbone, inside and….[256]

However, excerpts from a March 1921 Hammett-to-Jose letter might have alluded to Jose's having denied him sex:

> … we ought to be out on the bridge … staging our customary friendly, but now and then a bit rough, dispute over the relative merits of "yes" and "no." … if I'm ever to get it [a picture Jose had promised to send] I'll most likely have to come up and take it away from you. Maybe that's what I should have done about something else I wanted."[257]

It's hard to know. Hammett was a rare man who could have made such a decision quietly and then abided by it for the rest of his life. Any reader of Hammett's fiction can imagine that the inventor of the Op and Sam Spade could have seen, in his real life, the chance to do a good thing for a good woman and a child and simply done it. On the other hand, this is the kind of lie that Hellman was likely to tell, and she wanted to deny that Hammett had ever loved Jose or had considered her and their children his family.

Hammett's granddaughter, Julie Marshall Rivett, says that Hellman's "disclosure" was sad.[258] True or not, neither Hammett nor Jose would ever have wanted it said. Hellman would have known this when she decided to say what she did.

The San Francisco years, the writing years, and the marriage years were one and the same, 1921-1929. The realities of a domestic situation with children mandated a work ethic, a responsibility-laden and scheduled-every-day lifestyle that made possible and in a sense necessary the writing of sixty stories and four

novels in eight years. Hammett wanted badly to do what his father hadn't; he wanted to reliably support his family.

The Hammetts began living apart in 1928, on the order of his doctors, who believed Hammett's frequently active and thereby contagious TB endangered his family. This reason for the separation became an excuse for an arrangement that suited Hammett better. For the next two years they all lived in San Francisco but not together. Jose had a husband who came and went. Hammett was still writing to Jose thirty-three years later, in the year he died.

In 1929 Hammett hatched a plan: he put Jose and the girls on the train to Los Angeles where, so this new excuse had it, she would like the weather. Besides, he'd frequently be in Hollywood, writing for the movies. You take care of the girls and I'll take care of you, Hammett told Jose. Then he hopped the train to New York with a pulp novelist named Nell Martin. In 1930 The Maltese Falcon was dedicated "To Jose," but Hammett never lived with her again. Jose, people said, was the woman Hammett outgrew.

When Hammett met Jose in a hospital in Washington, he was an unpromising prospect: active tuberculosis, an eighth-grade education, no money, and a peripatetic resume. Ten years later, when Hammett met Hellman in Hollywood, he was the man of the hour in the sexiest city in the world: an accomplished writer, a strikingly handsome older man, and happily spending all his money.

As for Hellman, she was young, smart, determined to write, and willing to live recklessly when she met Hammett. She was also preternaturally angry; in Pentimento she recalls a childhood friend asking, "Are you as angry a woman as

you were a child?"[259] When Hammett pushed, she pushed back; he liked that. On her part, she fell prey to her own variety of repetition compulsion:

> Fearing infidelity, as her father had been unfaithful to her mother, Lily had chosen the quintessentially unfaithful man. It was an attempt to re-create the primal experience hoping it would turn out differently. Of course, it could not.[260]

Hammett's kneejerk, rigid response to those three minor instances of violence was echoed, tellingly, in another realm in 1942: one night Hammett was drunk and pawing at Hellman. She told him "she wouldn't sleep with him when he was like this." Hammett's response was a unilateral decision to never make love to her again.[261]

In the thirty years they had together, they lived apart for extended months and sometimes years, they had sex with other people, they drank too much together, she raged at him and he went elsewhere. They were active communists together, he taught her how to write, and she cared for him when he was dying. It was an enduring, remarkable love affair.

Cissy Pascal was a full-bore wife of a different stripe to Raymond Chandler, whom she married less than two weeks after his mother's death. Chandler listed his age on the marriage register as thirty-six, which he was; Cissy listed herself as forty-three, which she was not. The new marriage was happy. They went ballroom dancing, took drives in Chandler's fancy car, had pet names for each other, and collected little glass animals. Chandler, who was uneasy and obsessive about intimacy in any form, could relax into his comfortably sexy wife.

Cissy did her housework naked, was perfumed, and wore theatrically feminine clothes: “Cissy kept a stagily erotic pink boudoir, filled with Hollywood-style French furniture and a pink ruffled bedspread.”[262]

Warren Lloyd came through again and got Chandler a bookkeeping job with Dabney Oil. Chandler decided to be a successful businessman, and for ten years he was. But somewhere in those years he began to drink in an implacable way. There were blackouts, manic episodes, and middle-of-the-night phone calls to friends threatening suicide. Yet the ramped-up drinking helped his sexual excitability and Chandler bedded younger office girls. “You know how it is with marriage – any marriage,” says a character in The Lady in the Lake. “After a while a guy like me, a common no-good guy like me, he wants to feel a leg. Some other leg. Maybe it's lousy, but that's the way it is.”[263] At work, Chandler was warned, and then warned again. In the depths of the Depression, Chandler was fired for chronic alcoholism and absenteeism. Chandler left his wife of six years on February 3, 1930. On March 8, 1930, Cissy had a “Memorandum of Agreement” – a property settlement between herself and Chandler – notarized.

The hard-boiled stories Chandler started to write in the 1930s contain a number of threatening women. Here is the beginning paragraph of “Red Wind”:

> There was a desert wind blowing that night. It was one of those hot dry Santa Anas that come down through the mountain passes and curl your hair and make your nerves jump and your skin itch. On nights like that every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husband's necks. Anything can

> happen.[264]

The short stories came first and were Chandler's training ground. The strengths of those stories are sympathetic character study, meticulous and apt description, the language of emotion, dialogue in the vernacular, imposition of literary sensibility, and sense of place twinned to loneliness. As good as his short stories are, the novels are better. All of the stories' strengths grow stronger still in his novels. And the novels have that friendless raconteur and doomed romantic hero Philip Marlowe and he makes all the difference. "As soon as he was free of the short-story restrictions imposed by the cheaper pulps," says Clive James in his Chandler essay, "The Country Behind the Hill,": "his way of writing quickly found its outer limits: all he needed to do was refine it. The main refining instrument was Marlowe's personality."[265]

It is Marlowe's behaviors around *women and gay men* that largely define him. The women he rescues are in troubles of their own making. In Chandler's first novel, The Big Sleep, Vivian Sternwood has a missing bootlegger husband and gambling debts. Her sister Carmen is a sexy psychopath, with

> little sharp predatory teeth. … Her eyes were wide open. The dark slate color of the iris had devoured the pupil. They were mad eyes. ... The tinny chuckling noise was still coming from her and a little froth oozed down her chin. ... The hissing sound grew louder and her face had that scraped bone look. Aged, deteriorated, became animal, and not a nice animal.[266]

When Marlowe finds her nude and giggling in his apartment, he “tore the bed to pieces savagely.”[267] Crime novelist and Chandler’s English solicitor, Michael Gilbert, says that “Carmen is the first in a long line of little witches that runs right through the novels, just as her big sister, Vivian, is the first in a long line of rich bitches who find that Marlowe is the only thing money can’t buy.”[268]

In Farewell, My Lovely, Velma Grayle is the murderer: a “blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained-glass window.”[269] She’s Marlowe’s type: “I like smooth shiny girls, hard-boiled and loaded with sin,”[270] but also an animal, “When I got to her mouth it was half open and burning and her tongue was a darting snake between her teeth.”[271] The Lady in the Lake has the requisite Chandler murderess, but he saves the more memorable description for the lady in the lake:

> The thing rolled over once more and an arm flapped up barely above the skin of the water and the arm ended in a bloated hand that was the hand of a freak. Then the face came. A swollen pulpy gray white mass without features, without eyes, without mouth. A blotch of gray dough, a nightmare with human hair on it.[272]

Chandler’s fictional women are often evil in ways verging on the fantastical.

Chandler fancied himself and Marlowe as lovers, by which he means men who protect and honor women. But reverence is a distancing, self-protecting, doubled stance.

Hammett’s detectives know they have uncomfortable capacities for violence against men, and are wary of sex because they know women use it to control

men. But Chandler's canon includes troubling *combinations* of violence and sex. As Wolfe argues,

> A darker manifestation of Chandler's sexual fears is the recurrence in his work of violence directed to women. … Even in hardboiled fiction, such violence is rare. It can't be explained by saying that the detective's contempt for civil law had driven him to seek redress privately. Lew Archer never hit a woman, nor did Sam Spade.[273]

In The Long Goodbye, Eileen Wade beats Sylvia Lennox's face to a "bloody sponge,"[274] and then comes after Marlowe:

> "Put me on the bed," she breathed.
>
> I did that. Putting my arms around her I touched bare skin, soft skin, soft, yielding flesh. I lifted her and carried her the few steps to the bed and lowered her. She kept her arms around my neck. She was making some kind of whistling noise in her throat. Then she thrashed about and moaned. This was murder. I was erotic as a stallion.[275]

Chandler's women are often bestial murderers and only Marlowe is man enough to take them down violently or sexually – except that he doesn't because he keeps women *away* – on pedestals. If the women he writes are evil enough, then Marlowe's detachment is rational and not odd. Somehow, Chandler is insisting, these clashing axioms are all true.

It's curious that Chandler came back when Cissy was hospitalized with pneumonia. That was the tipping point: not that he came back but that he came because she was sick and thereby needed rescue. They rented an apartment on

Greenwood Place; it was the fifteenth place Chandler had lived since coming to Los Angeles, and he would live in twenty-one other places in Los Angeles and La Jolla before his death. It made no sense to move so frantically; maybe dislocation felt right to a man who was born in America to Irish parents and then raised in England.

In 1932 Cissy not only took him back, she agreed to his chancy plan to write fiction for a living. Although Chandler had drunk his way out of the second business job Lloyd had found for him, now Lloyd gave Chandler $100/month until he was self-sufficient. In his unmoored Seattle years, Chandler had discovered the pulps. The man with the accountant's mindset now decided to be a pulp writer; it took him five months to write his first short story, "Blackmailers Don't Shoot" – and he rewrote it five times. Joseph T. Shaw was nothing-but-happy: "All I did was buy it; Chandler had done all the work and the skill and talent existed on paper from his first page!"[276]

Chandler would write eighteen more short stories before concocting Philip Marlowe for The Big Sleep in 1938. By then Chandler's marriage had become an overlay of the paradigm that was his childhood experience with his mother – in ways he could not have foreseen when he and Cissy got married in 1924. As a little boy he had been inculcated with the belief that he had rescued Florence from a terrible marriage and must care for her ever after because she was somehow unable to care for herself. He had done that. When his mother died after a long illness, he quickly married the sexy, red-haired, independent woman he loved. In 1938, he knew that his wife was not seven years his senior but

seventeen years – she was truly old enough to have been his mother – and Cissy was sick with a chronic, degenerative lung disease.

Cissy had had a pattern of gutsy moves. She'd been born Pearl Eugenia Hurlburt in 1870 in Perry, Ohio. Many Hurlburts still live in that tiny town, but as soon as she could Pearl got *out*. She moved to New York City's Harlem, changed her name to Cissy, played the piano and made money. She stayed single longer than most women in those days and she would divorce twice, both at her choosing. Her second husband, Julian Pascal, was a distinguished concert pianist and composer, a professor at the Guildhall School of Music in London. He and she eventually relocated to Los Angeles, hoping the climate would ameliorate his neurasthenia, a disease marked by lassitude, fatigue, headaches, and irritability. The Pascals became friends of the Lloyds and through them Cissy met Chandler.

But by 1930 she was ready to divorce him. In 1932, she took Chandler back: maybe because she was sick, maybe because he wasn't drinking, and maybe because the first four years of their marriage had been happy ones. As of 1938, Chandler had published seventeen well-received stories, and he'd been sober and faithful. And so Cissy would continue to devote herself wholly to him, encouraging Chandler's romantic notion that he was her rescuing hero, calling him "Raymio" and "Gallibeoth." Freeman argues that:

> Cissy nurtured the sense he had of himself as her white knight whose task it was to stand as the moral force in the corrupted universe, of which Los Angeles, … was perfectly emblematic. He would not have

> become the writer he did had he not had this vision of himself to impart to his fictional hero, and he needed Cissy to fulfill this idea, just as he needed Los Angeles to provide him with atmosphere and stories.[277]

It's important to see that Chandler *already had* the above romantic sense of himself before Cissy and before Marlowe. Chandler was hell-bent on being a rescuer because this is what he knew from his early childhood and so he could not help but believe that he has rescued his wife. And when Chandler invented his fictional better self, Marlowe, of course he made him a paladin.

Eventually, however, there was weariness in Chandler's devotion. In the 1939 story "I'll Be Waiting," Miss Cressy, the redheaded, has-been singer's response when asked if she contemplated suicide is, "Redheads don't jump, Tony. They hang on – and wither."[278] By 1942, Cissy was seventy-two; Chandler, fifty-four, wrote a poem, "Kashinmor the Elephant," named for two of the "amuels," what the Chandlers called the many tiny glass animals they collected.

> His lady is not young
> Her smile is thin and tarnished filigree
> Mascara melts beneath her haggard eyes
> Between her breasts the powder dampened lines.
>
> He will lie still and hear her snore again
> Filling the night with particles of pain
> He will lie still and listen to her flute,
> With the face of a stillborn child that no one loved.[279]

In 1954's The Long Goodbye, Eileen Wade's suicide note includes the following sentences: "Time makes everything mean and shabby and wrinkled. The tragedy of life … is not that the beautiful things die young, but that they grow old and mean."[280]

Certainly there could be an edge to Cissy's constancy too: she "had not particularly liked" The Big Sleep[281], his first novel, published in 1939, nor in fact any of those that followed. Also in 1939, Chandler set down a detailed plan for future work: he would write three more detective novels, a dramatic novel, and a set of six or seven "short-long stories." He showed his list to Cissy, who added a note: "Dear Raymio, you'll have fun looking at this maybe, and seeing what useless dreams you had. Or perhaps it will not be fun."[282]

All in all, in 1943 Chandler went to Hollywood to co-write Double Indemnity. Soon he was losing ground again to alcoholism and womanizing. It all smelled like the oil business days but this time the Chandlers didn't separate. David Wyatt writes:

> It is nearly impossible to imagine the life Cissy managed to live during these years, shuttled about as she was from flat to flat, without friends, or money, or work of her own. She has no voice that has survived. She collected editions of her husband's work. Above all, she stayed.[283]

Chandler's fiction and his marriage hold profound doublenesses. Cissy had tricked her husband into marrying her by not telling him she was seventeen years

older than he was. Somewhere in the long years of their marriage, Chandler learned of this lie and began to deal with it, although in complex ways.

How did Macdonald, Hammett, and Chandler experience marital love and where are the parallels in their fiction? The three writers did almost all – and clearly the best - of their writing while living with their wives. Each man unwittingly wed under the influence of a repetition compulsion, marrying women with whom they could reenact their first childhood encounters with love. Margaret Millar brought her own repetition compulsion and fragile emotional health to her angry marriage – and influenced Macdonald's decisions to write detective stories by going first and to undergo psychoanalysis by her own interest in it. Jose Hammett, with her quiet work ethic and even temperament, tacitly discouraged her husband's self-destructive tendencies – and she and her elder daughter may have been the recipients of a great, unspoken act of generosity on Hammett's part. Cissy Chandler devoted herself wholly to her husband, and nurtured his need to believe that he was a romantic figure who could and had rescued women. And all of this is crucially there, in the books they wrote.

Chapter Four: Sons and Would-Be Lovers

Remember that Linda wanted to go with her dad to Ann Arbor Ann for the summer of 1952, just the two of them. She would, she said, “keep house” for him. “This in spite of a long history of what can only be described as emotional neglect where it counted most, an inability to love enough, to father his own flesh,” Macdonald sadly writes in “Notes of a Son & Father.”

The Electra complex, as it is formulated by Freud and used in psychoanalysis in the 1950s in the United States, is axiomatic in the sexual development of girls. Its stages parallel the Oedipus complex, and begin with a little girl’s attraction to her mother. Soon, though, she comes to believe that her mother has already castrated her and therefore the child turns against her, becoming libidinously attracted to her father and fantasizing about being impregnated by him. In a later stage, achieved if all goes well, the complex is successfully resolved: the girl, not wanting to give up her mother’s love, allows her hostility to ease, in fact, she both “internalizes” her mother and becomes attracted to other, appropriate males. But all doesn’t always go well: “the mother may simply lose interest in the father,” Kahn summarizes,

> and send the message that she would like the daughter to take over for her.
>
> … unconsciously the daughter passionately desires the victory. That is the reason the victory is so terribly costly. We recall once again that in the realm of primary process the wish is equivalent to the act: “I wanted to take him away from her and I have done it.”

> Now the daughter unconsciously believes that she has willfully committed what may be the two most terrible sins: incest and matricide. She is certainly better off if the incest has only been symbolic, but psychic incest and matricide it is nevertheless, making her prey to consuming guilt."[284]

When eleven-year-old Linda asked to keep house for her father, he turned her down. When he came back in August, he "found wife and child in a bad way, and 'attempted suicide.' The wife … suggested that he should have himself committed, but nothing was done. The husband resisted any thought of help, and is not sorry, except for the child's sake."

When Macdonald was twelve, his father had invited him to come along on a last, west-wandering adventure and the boy had turned him down. It was at about that same time that Macdonald stopped sleeping in his mother's bed and that she talked to him about her marriage, referring to "'incompatibility' with sexual implications." Thereafter the almost-adolescent boy's anger ratcheted up.

When sixteen-year-old Linda drank two quarts of wine and got in her car and started driving, the dynamic equation of Macdonald, Margaret, and Linda was sexually precarious. In "Notes of a Son & Father," Macdonald refers to:

> the wife's real need for a jealous and exclusive love (the father was half her world; the converse is less true) and I think hyper-awareness of the fairly normal incestuous content in the father-daughter relationship. This has its other side: the daughter has been perhaps unhealthily aware of her parents' sexual life and

> jealous of it. But it is hard to know where normality ends.

Shortly thereafter, Macdonald composed an essay, "Memorial Day," which includes:

> On the eve of Memorial Day, I stared at my wife in helpless pride and longing…. She railed at me, saying I was sick, would always be sick. I held myself in silence for the most part, but there was trouble and the shadow of blackmail. Linda slammed a door.[285]

A different man might have witnessed his teenager's self-destruction in shocked surprise, but Macdonald admitted recognition; he had been here before. Knowing without knowing gave way to *knowingness*, and his canon turned a corner.

"Time pressing, time lapsing, time repeating itself in dark acts …is the wicked fairy to troubled people, granting them inevitably the thing they dread,"[286] writes Welty in her review of The Underground Man. And, more often than not, a child who needs help now is the emergency that hastens Archer and the reader through Macdonald's novels. "We find at the center of Ross Macdonald's complicated novels," George Grella avers in his New Republic essay "Evil Plots," "as at the center of Dickens' complicated novels, a suffering child."[287] Nelson concurs:

> Those stories of fractured families, reckless runaways and damaged young people who are haunted by eerie, early memories that something has happened – something terrible, but they aren't quite sure what – seemed both jinglingly immediate

> and terrifyingly tribal, daring to fiddle with the fuse of that timeless bomb within us all, planted somewhere in the past and set to go off who knows when.[288]

It took Macdonald five years to write the apology that is The Ferguson Affair. He wanted badly for Santa Barbara to see that the adolescent girl who killed a boy and maimed another was herself wounded by a malfunctioning childhood not of her own making. The novel's plot involves a faked kidnapping wherein a young woman claims amnesia afterwards and a speeding car that causes mortal injury. The boys whom Linda had run down were Mexicans, and Santa Barbara's Hispanic community believed there was racism in the light sentence given to Macdonald's white and comparatively well-to-do daughter. Macdonald acknowledges the truth of this, having his detective say, "No one with strong financial backing is ever executed."[289] Reference is made to there being two towns: "the ambiguous darkness between two towns, two magic's."[290] But the concerns of racism in a small and wealthy town are in an outer plot inadequately connect to the under-addressed inner plot of immaturity and personal forgiveness. The novel is sad but not strong, and Macdonald probably knew this, since he decided to leave Archer out of The Ferguson Affair and use Bill Gunnarson instead, and only in this one novel. Nevertheless, this book's outward reach towards a community of men is the antecedent to two of the best, last Archer novels, The Underground Man (1971) and Sleeping Beauty (1973). "[O]ne writes on a curve, on the backs of torn-off calendar sheets," said Macdonald.

> A writer in his fifties will not recapture the blaze of youth, or the steadier passion that comes like a second and saner youth in his forties, if he's lucky. But he can lie in wait in his room – it must be at least the hundredth room by now – and keep open his imagination and the bowels of his compassion against the day when another book will haunt him like a ghost rising out of both the past and the future.[291]

Macdonald was right: he had ten more book-ghosts in him after The Ferguson Affair. "He was like a ghost from past, you know?" says Archer of a character in Sleeping Beauty. "A poor little roughed-up hammered-down ghost, … that shriveled little throw-away of a man without his clothes."[292] Macdonald's life and work was haunted: by his wife, his daughter, his grandson, and himself as tiny children in need of good parents - and their real and failed mothers and fathers who were unequal to the task.

Macdonald is able to link the collective unconscious to warnings about our collective future in The Underground Man. Two cuckolded spouses, for example, become real estate developers, recklessly overbuilding tract housing – in plain, "raping" the landscape. Stanley Broadhurst is not only neglecting his wife and son with his obsessed search for his father. He also distractedly starts a southern California forest fire and that too is a kind of murder; Archer hears the fire "breathing," as if it is alive and even somehow human.

Sleeping Beauty focuses on beautiful and missing young Laurel Russo and her parents. "They were one of those couples who don't pull together," says Archer:

> When there's trouble in a family, it tends to show up in its weakest member. And the other members of the family know that. They make allowances for the one in trouble, try to protect her and so on, because they know they're implicated themselves.[293]

Misplaced guilt has damaged the family's members for generations, now injuring this sad daughter. "He seemed to feel responsible for her death," Archer says of another character, "But he may not have done what he thought he did. Sometimes a man like Nelson feels terribly guilty simply because he's been punished so much."[294] The same family is responsible for a gas spill in 1945 and an oil spill in the novel's present. Remember Kreyling's contention that in Macdonald's novels dysfunction in the intimate family pushes outward into the wider arenas of past and future, political and natural worlds. Macdonald considered environmental crimes to be moral ones and his canon's shift after 1956 from physical to moral excitement made possible twinning familial guilt with ecological culpability. It's an apt combination: ecology has to do with the connections of live organisms to one another.

Uncared-for children haunted Macdonald and consistently motivate Archer. Children are rare and unprivileged in Hammett's canon – you need to go back to "Don Key" - yet "a child who needs help now" was the circumstance that had precipitated Hammett's marriage in 1921 and became an incident of repetition

during an anomalous few months in 1937. Hellman told Hammett she was pregnant, demanded that he divorce Jose after all these years, and marry her. Hellman must have known that a baby was the one argument for marriage that would work with both Hammett and Jose. So he did it: he showed up at Jose's house in Santa Monica with papers and, after hushed conversation, Jose signed them.[295] They had a Mexican divorce with no standing in the United States, something Hammett knew and Jose found comfort in. Still, Jose, the little girl who had been a surrendered child was now a *surrendered* wife, and Hammett, the man who had married a pregnant nurse, was now prepared to marry a pregnant playwright. Hellman subsequently told Hammett that she had unilaterally decided to have an abortion and had already gone through with it. Marriage between them was apparently never mentioned again.[296]

His daughters drove much of the best of Hammett's biography: the proof is in how much effortful time he spent with them, in his (posthumously published) letters to them and to Jose abou*t* them, and in his long attempt to live with Mary and find her help. After Jose and Hammett's tacit separation in 1929, the man-about-town saw his children once or twice a week in San Francisco, and later brought them to Hollywood and New York City for lengthy visits. Jo remembered baking lemon pies and bread with her dad, his making soap pictures on mirrors and little books of drawings and poetry for them, his taking Mary "to the fights at the old Olympic Gardens and [her] to the races at Santa Anita."[297] Hammett wrote Jo from the Aleutian Islands on her birthday: "So now you're eighteen and I'm all out of child daughters. My family is cluttered up with grown women.

There's nobody who has to say, 'Sir,' to me and there are no more noses to wipe."[298] In 1948 Jo got engaged and wrote Hammett asking if he would give her away. He wrote right back, "Give you away? Why I'll drop you like a hot potato!"[299] When Jo had children, Hammett was a joyful grandpa, once taking a one-year-old granddaughter across country in an airplane by himself.

They wooed their father differently, these Hammett Electras. Hammett got his young daughters subscriptions to The New Yorker and New Masses; they would pore over "Talk of the Town" because it felt sophisticated in the same way their dad was, and Mary, especially, would come up with political questions that Hammett carefully answered. "Be in favor of what's good for the workers and against what isn't,"[300] he told her. He would write to his elder daughter about politics for the rest of his life.

But, as they grew, Jo was still easy to love; Mary wasn't and Hammett loved her anyway. Hammett had told them that he "admired people who went too far"[301]; maybe Mary was aiming to do that. Jo remembered her big sister throwing their mother's nursing mementos in the gutter and "slugging a nun at the Catholic school."[302]

> She grew into a beautiful girl – Lillian said that at sixteen she was one of the most beautiful she had ever seen – and the house was always full of boys. In the beginning they were neighborhood kids, but soon they became older and more scary. … Her drinking started early, and by fourteen she was a full-blown alcoholic. Later there were pills.[303]

Mary was nineteen when she and Jo went to New York again to stay with their father for a month. Mary boasted to Hammett about her sexual abandon. "I learned later," Jo said,

> that she had told him all about herself and men. I imagine she sort of bragged about it, thinking he'd understand, admire her daring and to-hell-with-bourgeoisie spirit. Of course, he didn't. He was terribly hurt. What she never understood was that although he might have lived that kind of life himself, he never approved of it, even for himself, and certainly not for his daughter.[304]

"We carry invisible templates as ineluctably ourselves as fingerprints," writes Doris Lessing, "but we don't know about them until we look around us and see them mirrored."[305]

At twenty-four Mary was worse. Hammett took Mary with him to New York and got her psychiatric help. She didn't get better; she lived with her father intermittently for five years. Then she came home to Jose, permanently. When Mary married feckless Kenny Miller, she and he both lived with Jose. I asked Jo's daughter, Julie Marshall Rivett, why her grandmother didn't make a new life for herself after Hammett, and she said simply, "There was always Mary." Rivett added, "I wonder what Mary would be diagnosed with today."[306] Mary died undiagnosed, obese, and vengeful in a nursing home in 1992.

Hammett didn't put his steady attendance to his children into his fictional families; he used his family-of-origin as a template instead; Jo admitted "the loving family holding hands … had not been his experience. That attitude shows

in his work, where families have rapacious mothers, wandering daughters, even fathers who kill their sons."[307] True enough, but the more glaring proof is that the combined number of mothers and fathers in all his fiction could probably be counted on two hands.

It's curious: the number of gay men in all of Macdonald's work can probably be counted on one hand. For all Macdonald's courage as a confessional writer, he only briefly admitted to homosexuality – much less to his suicide attempt - in "Notes of a Son & Father" and he never circled back to either subject, nor did they appear more than fleetingly in his fiction. What happened to all the predatory homosexuality of Macdonald's youth? He appears to have gained self-control over the behavior and it then stopped, and it seems that what troubled him most was his forcing himself on smaller boys, even as he had forced himself on the retarded maid. Still, this was a frequently occurring, urgent-feeling activity and yet Macdonald didn't elaborate.

It's useful to know what the thinking on sexual orientation was in the 1950s when Macdonald began analysis. Freud's "inversion theory" postulates that all babies are born bisexuals and then influenced by biological and environmental factors in their early childhoods to eventually become predominantly homosexual or heterosexual. William Masters, of Masters and Johnson renown, building on the findings of Freud and Alfred Kinsey, believe that

> We are not genetically determined to be homosexual and we are not genetically determined to be heterosexual. We are born man and woman and sexual beings. We learn sex preferences and our

> orientations, be it homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, and, not infrequently, we change voluntarily our sexual preference.[308]

Macdonald appears to have shared similar views. "For whatever else he may be," says Edward Margolies in his study of the private eye in Hammett, Chandler, Macdonald, and Chester Himes, "Macdonald is a child of the post-World War II neo-Freudian zeitgeist that has posited that human beings of either sex are composites of so-called masculine and feminine traits."[309] Sexual orientation, then, is a continuum. "Bisexual" – or at least "have had homosexual experiences in my youth" – may have been a label Macdonald could live with.

Maybe Raymond Chandler could too – but very, very privately. In just one letter, Chandler allowed as how bisexuality was "a matter of time and custom."[310] If he was bisexual or homosexual, he was fully engaged in repression as a defense mechanism against lifelong anxiety. Kahn outlines the underlying mind-set of that repression:

> The erotic desire for a forbidden person is dangerous. If the person I desire is … a person of my gender, being aware of that desire would put me in danger of painful guilt feelings. Were I to disclose the desire I would be in further danger, that of being shamed or punished. If I am aware of the impulse and manage to keep it entirely hidden, I must deal not only with the guilt but also with the frustration of a strong need that can never be satisfied. It seems clearly to my advantage not to be aware of the desire.[311]

Is Marlowe gay or bisexual? Chandler doesn't mean for him to be either, yet he gives Marlowe erotic descriptions of men to say. Marlowe gushes when he describes Red Norgaard in Farewell, My Lovely:

> His voice was soft, dreamy, so delicate for a big man that it was startling. It made me think of another soft-voiced big man I had strangely liked. … He had the eyes you never see, that you only read about. Violet eyes. Almost purple. Eyes like a girl, a lovely girl. His skin was as soft as silk. Lightly reddened, but it would never tan. It was too delicate. … His hair was that shade of red that glints with gold.[312]

The details Chandler uses to describe Chris Lavery in The Lady in the Lake are in that same vein:

> He had everything in the way of good looks the snapshot had indicated. He had a terrific torso and magnificent thighs. His eyes were chestnut brown and the whites of them slightly gray-white. His hair was rather long and curled a little over his temples. His brown skin showed no signs of dissipation. He was a nice piece of beef….[313]

In 1950 Chandler was commissioned by director Alfred Hitchcock to write the screenplay for Patricia Highsmith's novel, Strangers on a Train. Hitchcock came daily to check on Chandler's progress; they drove each other nuts. Donald Spoto wrote about Hitchcock's own "inner experience of division" and suggests about Hitchcock and Chandler that "they were surprisingly similar; the tension between them derived not from a confrontation between complementary talents, but from a smoldering suspicion that each knew the other's soul rather more fully than

either desired."[314] Certainly Highsmith's Strangers on a Train is all about doubleness and duplicity. Here's a passage from the novel:

> Each was what the other had not chosen to be, the cast-off self, what he thought he hated but perhaps in reality loved. … there was that duality permeating nature…. Two people in each person. There's also a person exactly the opposite of you, somewhere in the world, and he waits in ambush.[315]

The finished movie starring Robert Walker and Farley Granger added its own secrets. Patrick McGillian, another Hitchcock biographer, explains that

> The director got Walker; the studio got Granger – but Granger's casting changed a key idea of Hitchcock's. Bruno's homosexuality is implied in the script, but there's no question of Guy's heterosexuality; he's in the middle of a messy divorce and has a girlfriend. … But as it was, the director had to accept an odd crisscross in the casting: a straight actor (Robert Wagner) playing a homosexual, who comes on to a "super straight" (to borrow Robert L. Carringer's word) played by a homosexual (Granger).[316]

Hitchcock later said that the casting saved him a reel's worth of storytelling because audiences would sense hidden qualities in the actors that wouldn't need to be spelled out. There is available now a pre-release British print of Strangers on a Train in which Bruno is flamboyantly attracted to Guy.

The Long Goodbye is Chandler's last solid fiction and his most honest. "I wrote this as I wanted to because I can do that now," he said.[317] It includes the

self-loathing suicide note of Roger Wade, a novelist: "I was lying like that once in bed and the dark animal was doing it to me, bumping himself against the underside of the bed, and I had an orgasm. That disgusted me more than any other of the nasty things I have done."[318] The more crucial relationship is Marlowe's with Terry Lennox, a drunk with Chandler's war experience whom Marlowe helps get to Mexico when Sylvia Lennox is murdered. Safely there, Lennox writes to Marlowe in farewell:

> So forget it and me. But first drink a gimlet for me at Victor's. And the next time you make coffee, pour me a cup and put some bourbon in and light me a cigarette and put it beside the cup. And after that forget the whole thing. Terry Lennox over and out. And so goodbye.[319]

Marlowe finally beds a woman and gets a marriage proposal from Linda Loring, but he demurs. That scene, however, is not the long goodbye. Afterward Marlowe goes to see Lennox one more time, telling him, "It was nice while it lasted. So long, amigo. I won't say goodbye. I said it to you when it meant something. I said it when it was sad and lonely and final."[320] And *that's* the long goodbye.

In his introduction to Trouble Is My Business (1950), Chandler writes: "the fictional detective is a catalyst, not a Casanova."[321] In The Long Goodbye (1954), Marlowe is inarguably more Casanova than catalyst, the argument being, whom does he love?

Chandler is at pains to make Marlowe homophobic: for example, in The Big Sleep he has him brag: "I took plenty of the punch. It was meant to be a hard

one, but a pansy has no iron in his bones, whatever he looks like."[322] Openly gay men are repeatedly the victims of sadistic brutality, to wit Marlowe's "butchering of the homosexual youth, Carol Lundgren, in The Big Sleep"[323] and, in Farewell, My Lovely, Mrs. Grayle's pounding "Lindsay Marriott's head until he has 'brains on his face.'"[324] Knight sees that, "As far as men go, Marlowe is very hostile if they are effeminate."

> Arthur Geiger in The Big Sleep and Lindsay Marriott in Farewell, My Lovely are clearly homosexual and they both die grotesquely, immediately after being examined with disfavour by Marlowe. Intriguingly, he also disliked men who are fully dependent on women, gigolos such as Chris Lavery in The Lady in the Lake and Louis Vannier in The High Window. They also die in ugly ways. Evidently, feminine power over men is not enjoyed at all, and sexual unease come strongly through all Marlowe's encounters with men and women. None of these feelings, it is interesting to notice, is in the least related to the unveiling of urban corruption.[325]

The man who wrote Marlowe may have needed to insist that he was like Marlowe. Certainly Chandler was an unapologetic homophobe too:

> pansies, queers, homos, whatever you want to call them…. These are sick people who try to conceal their sickness. My reaction may be uncharitable: they just make me sick. My dead wife could spot one entering a room. Highly sexed women invariably seem to have that reaction.[326]

Chandler was given to blustering heterosexual bravado, telling a friend in 1956, "the most strict and puritanical woman I had ever met had been in bed with me a week after I met her,"[327] and another friend in 1957, "Thank God I can still copulate like a thirty-year-old."[328]

One of Chandler's doublenesses was that he was both an Englishman and an American. There were ramifications beyond geography: in the United States he was professionally regarded as an adept, popular, genre writer; in England he was lionized as a mainstream, literary novelist. In the United States he was considered to be heterosexual but within his circle of English friends the usual assumption was that he was in the closet. Patricia Highsmith quietly said, "Maleness sat uneasily on him."[329]

John Houseman, citing the effects of an English public school of which he was also a graduate, thought Chandler was "too inhibited to be gay,"[330] and Natasha Spender, who was Chandler's friend in his last years and whose husband, Stephen Spender, was bisexual, remembers in her essay, "His Own Long Goodbye," that "we all without a second thought, assumed that he was a repressed homosexual."

> His mother had divorced his drunken and violent father, taking her seven-year-old son to England to live with her mother and sister in Dulwich – in a middle-class household of high Victorian rectitude. … Raymond always talked of his own schooldays at Dulwich College with pride … for his character of exceptional sexual purity. … Clinically this pattern of childhood situations is often recognized as a

determining factor for later homosexuality."[331]

Upon hearing that Chandler had claimed, yet again, "My wife hated them and she could spot one just be walking into a room,"[332] Don Bachardy, Christopher Isherwood's lover, remarked: "Well, it's perfect, isn't it? He married his mother. A woman who hated queers. It's the perfect cover. How much more protective can you get?"[333]

Yet Chandler incontrovertibly loved his wife. He had bought her the house in La Jolla in 1946, and in 1952, when Cissy was eighty-two and very sick and they had been recluses for years, they took a trip to England and New York City. He wanted that badly to show her where he came of age and to see where she did. That's more than reverence: that's curiosity born of wanting to understand and be understood better. "She was the beat of my heart for thirty years. She was the music I heard faintly at the edge of sound,"[334] he wrote at the time she died. Dilys Powell, the film critic of the Sunday Times, and her husband, Leonard Russell, literary editor of the same newspaper, had had a dinner for the Chandlers. In a gentle essay written after their deaths, "Ray and Cissy," Powell remembers her first impressions:

> Looking back now, I realize that, leaving aside the brilliant literary gifts which first seduced me, I like Raymond best in his relationship with Cissy, that smiling propitiatory figure whom he guarded and defended. … In a world with Cissy he showed another kind of gallantry; he shielded her.[335]

If bisexual was Chandler's place on the continuum, then the sexually knowing and sophisticated Cissy would have figured that out somewhere in the years of

their marriage. She may have accepted her husband's complete nature, even as he forgave her her own lie; they may have protected each other's secrets. Wyatt again: "If the novels were a product of the marriage, they grew out of its darkness and secrets as well as its love. Love and marriage become, in Chandler's novels, the site of secrecy itself."[336] Maybe the story of Cissy and Chandler's marriage is as simple and as complicated that they came to love and forgive and shield each other.

Secrecy: "addiction grows in the dark places created by secrets," writes John Cheever's daughter in Desire: Where Sex Meets Addiction.

> There are many causes, of course: there is brain chemistry and genetic predisposition, and there is character and opportunity. Most of all, there are secrets and fakery, worlds created to mask the real world and images meant to fool everyone. Addicts are brilliant storytellers, and my father was one of the best.[337]

Chandler, too, was an addict and storyteller, a keeper of secrets, and a denier. Although he certainly never said so, maybe he denied his alcoholism in part because it would have made him like his father. In any event, in his oil business years Chandler made lame excuses, during his Hollywood tenure he gave unlikely explanations, and as a widower he told unbelievable stories that eventually became self-delusional.

"In all addictions," claims Cheever, "there is a rupturing of the individual's connection to society – a breaking of the social contract, the divorce of a single man or woman from the human race. … An addict is a community of one."[338]

But not Chandler: he had Cissy and they became recluses together, a community of two.

In 1946 for the first time they both moved away from Los Angeles to La Jolla and bought their first house there. Artistically this last move was a mistake; Chandler's is in significant part a fiction of place:

> I know now what is the matter with my writing or not writing. … Los Angeles is no longer my city…. There's nothing for me to write about. To write about a place you have to love it or hate it or do both by turns…. But a sense of vacuity and boredom – that is fatal.[339]

Socializing was tense: Cissy fussed and Chandler was anxious. It was easier not to try. A schedule was reassuring: Chandler dressed every day in a shirt and tie, tried to write in the mornings, had lunch at home with Cissy, then drove into La Jolla to run his errands. Chandler liked this, chatting with the lady at the post office, nobody getting too close. Cissy insisted on tea at 4:00 p.m. and they ate dinner at home because they were hard to please when it came to food. Cissy went to bed early: breathing made her tired and the medicines made her vague. And so Chandler started writing letters. Although he wrote mostly to his agents, publishers, editors, critics, and other writers, including J.B. Priestly, Somerset Maugham, and S.J. Perelman, the business-at-hand was just his starting-off point. Taken together, the letters fed Chandler's need to be creative and are nearly a writer's notebook and a self-assessment of his canon. Cissy, the post office lady, and the letters: life safely at a remove.

After Cissy died, Chandler began his own dying after long years of the alcoholism that he denied he suffered from, still casting about for extenuated explanations:

> Anyone who can drink a great deal steadily over a long period of time is apt to think of himself as an alcoholic, because liquor is part of his life and he is terribly let down without it. Yet he is not an alcoholic.
>
> ... I said: "Doctor, am I an alcoholic? They told me I was in New York."
>
> He said: "… If you can become a controlled drinker, and personally I think you can with the right sort of life, you are not an alcoholic.[340]
>
> … Finally the head guy said: "You think you are depressed, but you are quite wrong. You are a fully integrated personality and I wouldn't dream of trying to interfere with it by psycho-analysis or anything of that sort. All that's the matter with you is loneliness. You simply cannot and must not live alone. If you do you will inevitably drink and that will make you sick.[341]

Alcoholism *rode* Chandler, and of course he knew that it had for most of his adult life.

A doctor talks about addicts in Chandler's Hollywood novel, The Little Sister:

> all the little neurotic types that can't take it cold. Have to have their little pills and little shots in the arm. Have to have help over the humps. It gets to be all humps after a while. … They can be deprived of their drug. Eventually after great suffering they can do without it. That is not curing them, my friend. That is not removing the nervous or emotional

> flaw which made them become addicts. It is making them dull negative people who sit in the sun and twirl their thumbs and die of sheer boredom and inanition. … A hopeless alcoholic. You probably know how they are. They drink and drink and don't eat. And little by little the vitamin deficiency brings on the symptoms of delirium. There is only one thing to do for them …needles and more needles. … I practice among dirty little people in a dirty little town.[342]

Hammett became a drunk and a mean one after leaving Jose. In 1932, Elise De Vianne, a "starlet" as people used to say, sued Hammett for sexual assault and battery; she won a $2,500 judgment. He used a friend as go-between to give money to a different woman "in trouble." His venereal disease recurred.

> At another party Hammett was seated next to a formerly well-known actress who had aged beyond the roles for which she was famous. During the meal, tomato sauce spilled on her beige dress and Hammett boomed, "Doesn't it remind you of when we were both still menstruating?"[343]

Years later, when Mary came east to live with her father, they drank together and there was a rumor that he slapped her around. Be that as it may, his other daughter, Jo, writes that alcohol made

> my father … sarcastic-mean. … drunk he had a kind of lashing-out desperation about him that scared me to death. I couldn't understand how anyone so funny and kind could turn so awful; why a man who cared for his privacy and dignity so much could trash them.[344]

Most of what Hammett did when he was drunk seemed *unleashed*: anger, threatened physical violence against men and mostly verbal violence against women. He was a famously, remarkably "unangry" man when he was sober. Maybe, sober, he could fully control the rage he really felt; then, drunk, the anger spewed out, unrestrained.

Alcoholism wrecked Hammett's writing career. His last Op story was published in 1930, he couldn't write reviews for the Saturday Review of Literature anymore – a job he had taken pride in. Except for Watch on the Rhine, he never made much of a go of screenwriting.

But he wrote The Thin Man, published in 1934. Dedicated "To Lillian Hellman," it was his last, saddest novel although it made Hammett wealthy. It is two-leveled, in the same way that Hammett's frantic spending on starlets, hotel suites, and expensive eating and drinking, and incautious generosity to strangers and drinking friends was sophisticated, arch, and glamorous on its surface with a distraught dissipation at its root. It says something about the American reader during the Depression and about what the reader expected to find when he read a detective story that The Thin Man was a huge hit as a madcap comedy. Detective fiction writer Donald Westlake did recognize The Thin Man's double structure:

> When I was fourteen or fifteen I read Hammett's The Thin Man (the first Hammett I'd read) and it was a defining moment. It was a sad, lonely, lost book, that pretended to be cheerful and aware and full of good fellowship, and I hadn't known you could do that: seem to be telling this,

> but really tell that; three-dimensional writing, like three-dimensional chess.[345]

The novel is a cautionary tale: retirement is dangerous. Nick Charles has been retired for six years. All the suspects come to him in The Thin Man and the minimal hard-boiled thinking he does is spaced between drinking, flirting with women, and being witty. In Hammett's 1924 short story "The Scorched Face," a cop named Pat Reddy has married a rich wife but refuses the chance to change his life. The Op comments approvingly: "I don't know what his wife did with her money, but Pat didn't even improve the quality of his cigars – though he should have."[346] Now, ten years later, here is Charles living off his wife. Critic and poet John Irwin realized an interesting connection:

> It seems only appropriate that Hammett's last novel was published in the same year, 1934, as Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night, and the structural resemblance between the two books is noteworthy – each is the story of a man who marries an heiress and of the effect the wife's money has on his career.[347]

The Thin Man is facile: if everyone is amusing all the time maybe they don't have to admit to despair. The novel ends with Nick and Nora Charles doing just that:

> "This excitement has put us all behind in our drinking."
>
> "It's all right by me. What do you think will happen to Mimi and Gilbert now?"
>
> "Nothing new. They'll go on being Mimi and Dorothy and Gilbert just as you and I will go on being us and the Quinns will go on being the

> Quinns. Murder doesn't round out anybody's life except the murdered's and sometimes the murderer's."
>
> "That may be," Nora said, "but it's all pretty unsatisfactory."[348]

In 1948, a doctor told Hammett he would die if he continued drinking and so, in a very Hammett-like move, he quietly quit for good. He was surprised when Hellman was surprised that he could do it like that; "But I gave my word," he said. "It would be good to say that as his life changed the productivity increased, but it didn't," she said afterward. "Perhaps the vigor and the force had dissipated."[349] Soon Hammett was referring to "reformed drunks who 'should have stayed drunk, so that they don't wake up to find out they haven't any talent.'"[350]

But what is the real answer? Why did Hammett really stop writing? There are three answers – or approaches to three answers. First, he did other things instead. He lost aggregate years to alcoholism and to lung cancer at the end. He found that he liked teaching and was good at it. He began by substantively mentoring Hellman. He found her a true story about a disturbed girl in a Scottish boarding school who conjured up an accusation of lesbianism against two of her teachers. He then coached Hellman, painstakingly vetting and exhorting, and the result was The Children's Hour. The man who girded himself against revealed introspection drove Hellman to write about her mother and her mother's family in The Little Foxes, a second critical success. Years later a friend suggested to Hellman that she needn't put up with Hammett's drunkenness. Hellman replied, "You don't understand. He gave me The Little Foxes."[351] In 1943 Hammett won the Oscar for Best Screenplay of Hellman's Watch on the Rhine.

Hammett flabbergasted everybody, including the U.S. Army, by successfully enlisting in World War II. He was forty-eight, with bum lungs and a membership in the American Communist Party. The military sent him to bleak Adak, one of the Aleutian Islands, where he created a camp newspaper with local and national news. Hammett had a ball: he got Jose to send him wool socks and Lillian to send him news clippings daily, he wrote controversial editorials – "Don't Let 'Em Kid You into Buying War Bonds"[352] was one – and he taught his young staff of GIs, who called him "Pop," how to be journalists. William Marling, who writes about Hammett and Chandler, thinks that

> the Army provided Hammett with an opportunity: service was patriotic, it was a political statement, it removed him from the Los Angeles-New York circuit, and allowed him to practice the egalitarianism that he preached. He probably suspected that the structured environment, and the calm spaces it afforded, allowed him to compose a new Dashiell Hammett to meet the world.[353]

"Maybe a life ruled over by other people solved some of the problems,"[354] said Hellman.

Or maybe living and working only with men, as Hammett had also done as a happy Pinkerton, was easier. Not so surprisingly, he later kind of liked prison. The man who said "I like women, I really like women"[355] and who literally had them crossing each other on the stairs, may have felt off-balance in their company.

After the war and later after jail, Hammett taught at the Marxist Jefferson School of Social Science in lower Manhattan. His course, “Mystery Writing,” was billed as “devoted to the history of the mystery story, the relationship between the detective story and the general novel, and the possibility of the detective story as a progressive medium in literature.”[356] A student remembers, “he taught us that tempo is the vital thing in fiction, that you’ve got to keep things moving, and that character can be drawn within the action. … He was very serious, very intense when he talked about writing.”[357]

Hammett was a nonviolent Marxist who loved his country and had no interest in visiting, much less championing, communist countries. His views, that were communist in 1937, are still around and merely liberal in 2010: voting rights for blacks and other minorities, pro-union, immigration for victims of political persecution in their homelands, and the right of federal and state employees to voice their political beliefs without reprisal. Hammett *worked* at his politics, assuming offices in, signing petitions for, endorsing public letters from, acting as spokesman for, and donating money and his services to myriad leftist organizations.

Hammett was one of three trustees of the Civil Rights Congress’s bail fund, which was used to bail out persons arrested for political reasons. The fund’s contributors were kept secret. In 1949 the CRC bailed out eleven men convicted under the Smith Act, “criminal conspiracy to teach and advocate the overthrow of the United States by force and violence.” Four of the eleven jumped bail. The U. S. District Court, Southern District of New York, subpoenaed the three trustees,

wanting to know where the four fugitives were and who the contributors were. On July 9, 1951, Hammett appeared in District Court and refused to answer questions. Found guilty of contempt of court, the judge asked him if he had anything to say before being sentenced. Hammett said peaceably, "Not a thing," and went off to federal prison for six months.[358] Hellman later said that "he talked about going to jail the way people talk about going to college."[359] In 1957 journalist James Cooper asked Hammett why hadn't written while in prison. Hammett said, "I was never bored enough."[360]

A second approach to why Hammett stopped writing is to look at the nature and path of the writing he had done. Red Harvest and The Maltese Falcon are Hammett's best novels and are more hard-boiled than his other three, i.e. they operate within more of the hard-boiled conventions. Hammett was in a frustrating situation: he wanted to break out of the hard-boiled genre and write serious, mainstream novels, yet the further his work got from being hard-boiled the less critically successful it got.

Beginning in 1926 Hammett wrote longer hard-boiled fiction. Both he and Shaw believed that was the direction in which to go. Yet the detectives in Hammett's novels are "softer" than those in his stories, that is to say more fleshed-out. Critics have said that when the detectives acquired human weaknesses they stopped being hard-boiled. It is true that the trajectory from the Op to Spade to Beaumont to Charles is in the direction of no detective at all. But the latter two characters aren't less hard-boiled because they have depth and flaws. They're less hard-boiled because they make no attempt to resist checking

their worst impulses, in part because they lack or have abrogated a personal value system, a code. Which is to say that Hammett could – and did in Red Harvest and The Maltese Falcon – create human hard-boiled detectives.

Reconsider too this working definition of hard-boiled fiction: an existential man in a nihilistic world. Black Mask historian Herbert Ruhm points out, “The left-wing periodicals of the Thirties had given Hammett no play … perhaps because his work suggests no solution: no mass-action … no Emersonian reconciliation and transcendence.”[361]

In the 1930s, Hammett’s politics made him more hopeful about the world. As an active Marxist and a humanistic philosopher, Hammett came to believe in a different worldview: man can effect change for the good in the world. Gregory thinks that

> As a Marxist, he believed in the pursuit of economic and personal freedom; a cohesive, meaningful world was possible and all his political efforts worked towards that end. … He was carried by his fiction to an aesthetic and philosophical position that is chaos and random transformation. … Thus his deeply-felt political convictions clashed with his artistic beliefs.[362]

In his introduction to a collection of Op pieces, Steven Marcus elaborates on the same insight:

> His creative career ends when he is no longer able to handle the literary, social, and moral opacities, instabilities, and contradictions that characterize all his best work. His life then splits apart and goes

> in the two opposite directions that were implicit in his earlier, creative phase, but that the creativity held suspended and in poised yet fluid tension. His politics go in one direction; the way he made his living went in another – he became a hack writer, and then finally no writer at all.[363]

Can there be a hard-boiled detective in a world that can be imbued with meaning? He needn't actually make the world better, he just has to believe that he could, i.e., believe in the aim and in the hope. Hammett didn't invent such a man but Macdonald did – so it can be done. On different paths Hammett and Macdonald came to a similar place. Through political study and work as an activist, Hammett came to believe that man as a collective could make the world better. Through Freudian psychoanalysis and work as a writer, Macdonald came to believe that each man can get past primary wounds, which are axiomatically shared, and into a collective, better-but-not-perfect future.

Hammett was famously averse to introspection and, so the theory goes, that's why he couldn't break out of genre work and write mainstream, serious fiction. There is plenty of evidence that he was unwilling or unable to talk about his motivations, fears, and loves, but this doesn't mean he didn't think about these warring forces. Indeed the proof that he did is in the best of his writing. Over the years of the Op stories and novels, the Op changes, becoming aware of beguiling appetites he is loathe to own up to. Hammett could not have written the later Op pieces if he had not experienced that kind of private shame himself. Hammett makes The Thin Man flamboyant on the surface and depressed

beneath. He could not have written it that way if he did not experience his own life at two levels.

Hammett's letters are full of ghosts-of-books:

> I keep plugging away at the book – which I hope to finish next month - …. I'm trying to get a book – tentatively entitled Man and Boy started…. I was hoping I'd do enough on the book to brag about in this space. I did some, but not enough to brag about. So…. [A]nd I haven't done much work on the book…. Not working on it is partly a sort of stage fright, I think – putting the finishing touches on a book can be kind of frightening.[364]

What the letters and Jo's memoir make plain is that "he didn't stop writing. Not until the very last. What he stopped was finishing."[365] That Hammett continued to start for twenty-seven years suggests a sort of suffering. Anna Freud suggests that depression is a defense mechanism against anxiety, that depression is what people who can't get angry experience. Perhaps the enraged-when-drunk Hammett stopped drinking, still couldn't get angry sober, and got depressed instead.

When Hammett was dying, Hellman once asked, "Do you want to talk about it?" Hammett said, "No. My only chance is to not talk about it."[366] In 1961, the year Hammett died, his friend Nunnally Johnson wrote:

> From the day I met Hammett, in the late 20s, his behavior could be accounted for only by an assumption that he had no expectation of being alive much beyond Thursday. … Once this assumption was

> accepted, Hammett's way of life made a form of sense."[367]

And Sam Spade says to Effie Perine, "Somebody ought to write a book about people some time – they're peculiar."[368]

In December 1954 Cissy died; she was eighty-four but the death certificate read sixty-eight. She had been married to Chandler for nearly thirty-one years and lived in thirty-five different apartments and rental houses in Los Angeles. Eight people came to her funeral. Chandler was lost, threatening suicide and claiming, "I never wrote anything … that I could dedicate to her. I planned it. I thought of it, but I never wrote it. Perhaps I couldn't have written it."[369]

In February 1955, Chandler shot off his revolver into the bathroom ceiling. He was committed to the local hospital's psychiatric ward and then moved to a private "drying-out" facility. He checked himself out against doctors' orders. In March he sold his house and in April took the train to New York, en route to England. While in New York he was hospitalized for alcoholism. Back in his hotel, he called his secretary in California to tell her he was going to jump out of the window. He did not. He went to England.

Chandler talked incessantly about Cissy, in naked, runaway monologues that embarrassed his listeners. His letters were fulsome:

> My sister-in-law says I was the most wonderful husband a woman ever had. But isn't it easy to be a wonderful husband if you have a wonderful wife? ... But if you find an ideal and an inspiration, you don't cheapen it. ... I wasn't faithful to my wife out of principle but because she was completely adorable…. I already had perfection.[370]

In London, Natasha Spender organized a “shuttle service” of women friends to take him to lunch, listen to him, and coax him not to drink so much. It wasn’t easy. Chandler misconstrued the women’s genuine but not sexual affection for him. He sent sprays of orchids. He bought them expensive jewelry that they had to diplomatically refuse. He called them after midnight: long, lugubrious monologues hinting at suicide.

He was literally hell-bent on finding a new woman in need of rescue, someone *stricken*, whom he could marry. The women he found weren’t all as kind as those in the shuttle service. After drying out yet again in New York and La Jolla, Chandler went to San Francisco to meet a woman who had written him after one of his suicide attempts. Chandler already loved her, had changed his will, and was planning a wedding; a weekend together ended things. There would be another woman like the San Francisco woman who would take advantage of him, tell him about her divorce problems, and he would give her too much of his money and too much of his dignity.

Overlapping and nearly outlasting that mess was Helga Greene, Chandler’s English literary agent, an able, efficient, single and self-supporting soul. With her substantive encouragement Chandler wrote a last novel, the only one he wrote while drinking. In Playback, Marlowe is weary:

> Give up? Sure I give up. I’m in the wrong business. I ought to have given up before I started. All you get out of this racket is problems you can’t solve, clients who beat you out of your fees, people you don’t want to know, and cracks on the noggin that make

> you punchy as a stand-by prelim fighter who gets fifty bucks to wait in a cold dressing room with broken hands and a face full of scar tissue in case the main event ends too quick to give the customers their bucket of blood. The hell with it.[371]

Greene grew worried about Chandler and agreed to marry him; that way he could live permanently in England with her and get free medical care. In a bizarre scene in New York, Chandler insisted upon asking Greene's father for her hand in marriage. H.S.H. Guinness was disinclined to encourage his daughter to marry a seventy-year-old groom with significant problems. And Chandler acquiesced. He and Greene would have to wait for Guinness to die. So this time Chandler didn't go to England, and he didn't marry Greene. Instead he went back to La Jolla, lived alone for three weeks, drank heavily, and died on March 26, 1959.

Afterward, Jon Tuska set out to interview people who had known Chandler. "No one I have spoken with who knew Chandler has the foggiest notion of what he wanted from life,"[372] Tuska subsequently reported. "He was a chronically unhappy man,"[373] said George V. Higgins. "Nobody understands me," Philip Marlowe says, "I'm enigmatic."[374]

In 1978, Macdonald stopped seeing his psychiatrist, telling him that he thought his problems were now less psychological and merely "the encroachments of age."[375] The encroachments proved hard: Macdonald soon had symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and was diagnosed with it in 1981. Margaret had had lung cancer surgery in 1977 and now began to go blind from

macular degeneration. "Here we are, two people who live by books," Margaret told a friend:

> What has happened has taken ninety percent of our lives away. I keep reminding myself of what we have left. I can't get out of it anyway. I've faced my own problems pretty well. I haven't faced his well, as least not as well as I think I should…. I lose my temper and then I go on guilt trips. The trips aren't as big as they used to be, but the temper remains the same.[376]

Ever candid and one knew where one stood with Margaret, but the above quotation speaks to an eventual, tenuous contentment with each other, to which another of Margaret's friends attested:

> Margaret told me of one conversation where she sat down at his bedside and asked him, "Who am I?" and [Macdonald] looked at her and smiled and said, "The boss." Well, at once that's marvelously clever and marvelously sad. And marvelously true: she had taken his life over.[377]

Welty came to see him: "He looked at me and he said, 'I can't write.' And he looked at his hands."[378]

Macdonald was sixty-seven when he died in 1983. Lung cancer killed Margaret at age seventy-eight in 1994. When Ross Macdonald was gone, his friend, English poet Donald Davie, said,

> I thought he was a brave man, very brave. I think he had a very curious and unhappy life. Born into an extraordinarily dislocated

situation: Californian, lost his father, raised as a poor relation in Canada, then going to Michigan…. Nah, he'd started with most of the strikes against him. That he'd managed to put it all together and get steadily better for a long time – I thought it was very wonderful.[379]

Conclusion

"You are what we want,"[380] Shaw tells Hammett. Hammett, then Chandler, and then Macdonald determinedly hammer their talents through to canons of unprecedented genre fiction.

Hammett invents the urban cowboy: the first lawman who never cleaned up the town, never made his mark, never got a girl, never got any money - never won. Hammett brings plausibility and realism to pulp fiction, mostly by making his detectives working-class wise guys of average smarts and unprepossessing physical prowess, who solve cases by getting all the suspects mad at each other and then seeing what happens. The Op cheerfully explains his strategy for closing the case in The Dain Curse: "I piled up what facts I had, put some guesses on them, and took a jump from the top of its heap into space."[381] In other words, in Hammett's fiction the figuring-out aspect of the plot is negligible.

Chandler poeticizes Hammett's prose and gives true-feeling voice to his hero. "The things [the reader] really cared about, and that I cared about," Chandler says, "were the creation of emotion through dialogue [what he would also call 'the music'] and description."[382] So Chandler, concerned only about what the detective feels, isn't invested in plot at all. In 1946, William Faulkner was hired to write the screenplay for Chandler's The Big Sleep. He called Chandler to ask who killed the chauffeur and Chandler told him he didn't know.

As Macdonald puts it, "A close … relationship between writers and detective is a marked peculiarity of the form. Through its history, … the detective has

represented his creator and carried his values into action in society."[383] Hammett borrows the hard-boiled detective from his own reports as a Pinkerton operative. He makes his first and most sustained character a fellow whose name is his function: the Continental Op. In Hammett's best novels, Red Harvest and The Maltese Falcon, the reader's attention is on what the detective does. Will the Op wind up blood simple in Red Harvest? Will Sam Spade turn in Brigid O'Shaughnessy?

The Op and Spade see working as intrinsically worthy, and set rigid personal codes for themselves that protect their adherence to that ethic. If working is worthy and requires a code, and you undercut that code, who are you then? Being a detective provides an identity. In Hammett's novels, you are what your job is, which begs the question, what happens if you don't work?

The detective becomes a hero in Chandler's canon, the sole paragon of goodness in Los Angeles. "I'm a romantic," says Marlowe, "I hear voices crying in the night and I go to see what's the matter."[384] Chandler makes him a knight errant in a realistic novel, and Philip Durham explains the dynamic in Down These Mean Streets a Man Must Go:

> As a symbol the detective hero was superb, but as a symbol he could never achieve reality. The result was that Chandler was actually writing romantic fiction, by simulating reality through a hard-boiled attitude he could stay within an American literary tradition.[385]

For all that Chandler became the bard of American dislocation as fully realized in Los Angeles, Marlowe is implausibly and unrealistically not tempted by all he comes upon as he restlessly roams. It makes him lonely; it means he has no one at all. "Let the phone ring, please," Marlowe says in an unguarded moment in The Little Sister. "Let there be somebody to call up and plug me into the human race again. Even a cop. … Nobody has to like me. I just want to get off this frozen star."[386] In Chandler's last letter, he mulled over Marlowe: "he is a lonely man. … I see him always in a lonely street, in lonely rooms…."[387]

The murderers are hard-boiled women and sex is always mixed up in it. In a Hammett novel, sex is fighting and winning; it's revenge and murder. "She was a beautiful fight-bred animal going to a fight," the Op says in "The Big Knock-Over."[388] The good woman is as dangerous to men as the bad. She may begin by adoring her man but, when he proves human and therefore sometimes in need of help, the veneration falls away and she leaves him. A good one might soften an incautious man into weakness. In "Nightmare Town," Hammett writes: "He was afraid that if she tried to patch him up he would fall apart in her hands. He felt like that."[389] A good woman gives sex to get love and to get somebody to love. Hammett's stories and novels are frequently cautionary tales about what happens when women have the money, when women are in control, when women are too close.

Marlowe plays knight-errant to female monsters but he doesn't quite pull it off. Marlowe cannot be seen as a fully romantic hero – and nor can Chandler. This is a key irony: Chandler is like Marlowe, yet neither is what Chandler insisted on

establishing. The dominant fault of his canon is the hackneyed descriptions of Marlowe's overheated attraction to sadistic women.

> The endless come-on to the certain cheat, that is the sort of women Marlowe dreamily desires. They arouse in him lust's nervous equivalent of infatuation. They are sex appellant and they do not promise love; yet it is never the pleasures of sensuality they want. They want to use him for some other end of their own.[390]

In psychoanalytic terms, Marlowe's showy interest in women is a reaction formation: exaggerated, affected, and counterfeit.

Genuine attraction and affection is between men. Would-be homosexual love is described by Chandler in inescapably wistful prose; it creeps in through the edges of the battened-down hatches of Chandler's fiercely heterosexual stance. Marlowe is a tough and funny wise guy but his loneliness is what soars and it is sexual. Chandler makes Marlowe a man longing for other men, a cynic who believes in good and evil, and a lonely soul with a sense of humor – a man, in other words, very like himself.

Hammett may have been afraid of his own attraction to women because it gave them control over him. Chandler was likely afraid of his desire for men, so he simulated an artificial interest in women. Both men stayed away from what they wanted most.

The back stories of Hammett, Chandler, and Macdonald are testament to the impotence of the willed performance. A fair reading of Hammett is that anger, violence and sex had made him feel guilty as a child, that that same stew of

urges became wed to his feelings about women when he became a man and made him guiltier still. That he protected himself against these intolerable feelings by removing the triggers to his sources of shame - by having a code: no fighting, no driving, and no shooting; and by keeping himself safely aloof from women and calling that stoicism: no monogamy, no domesticity, and, eventually, no sex. That when he drew on his experiences as an operative to invent the hard-boiled genre, he also transferred his rules – personal/Pinkerton – to his detectives. That, willy-nilly, the fundamental pull of repressed feelings undercut Hammett's absolutist mindset and espoused forebearance. That alcohol and womanizing breached his self-control faster and worse. And, finally, that, in the long run of his detective/heroes from pulp heroes to full-length novel protagonists, they too derail their privileging of work and obedience to a code and are the authors of their own downfalls. And so the Op is beguiled by violence, Spade is seduced by Brigid O'Shaughnessy, and Nick Charles is a frantic alcoholic and self-conscious wit.

Dualities abounded in Chandler's life: he was anxious in the company of women but stayed in a long and reclusive marriage with a wife he loved and forgave. He was an unfaithful husband but after Cissy's death he made extravagant claims of fidelity and adoration. He was a nasty homophobe but his close English friends thought he was a closeted bisexual or homosexual. Chandler couldn't bear close scrutiny, by himself or anyone else, so he created an imaginary self and then lived as a recluse. When the loneliness hurt too much he used alcohol to effect even an ersatz human connection, and then he drank

too much. Chandler's odd childhood had set him up for an odd adulthood in which he chronically misread people in general and women in particular, in which being honest about himself to himself was so terrifying that he couldn't do it, and in which a writer of soaring prose for the disenfranchised urban little guy was himself sad and mad and drunk and alone and couldn't let himself think about why.

It's curious to think about Hammett's being able to stop drinking, while Chandler never stopped nor admitted to the alcoholism that finally killed him. Hammett may have acknowledged only to himself his penchant for combinations of violence, anger, and sex and then managed the triggers. Chandler seems to have denied his desires even to himself. Apparently both men believed that their private feelings were so deserving of contempt that they could not safely be shared. Probably neither man set out to write self-realizing novels, and Chandler certainly set out not to. In plain, Hammett and Chandler know without knowing; the evidence is there in their fiction.

Macdonald just knows:

> All men are guilty and all human actions are connected. The past is never past. The child is father to the man. True reality resides in dreams. And most of all, everyone gets what he deserves but no one deserves what he gets.[391]

Because Macdonald privileges connections between family members and repeating patterns between generations, he values plot over character and voice. "I see plot as a vehicle of meaning," Macdonald writes. "The surprise with which

a detective novel concludes should set up tragic vibrations which run backward through the entire structure. Which means that the structure must be single, and intended."[392] The unlikely combination of genre detective fiction and psychoanalysis turned out to be apt: both start at a crisis point of suffering and work backwards along chains of causality, looking at the ramifications of secrets.

Macdonald draws Archer as an acknowledger of universal fears. It's a complicated process because Macdonald writes himself into multiple characters and his own story into the connections between characters. "Certainly my narrator Archer is not the main object of my interest, nor the character with whose fate I am most concerned,"[393] Macdonald says.

> He is less a doer than a questioner, a consciousness in which the meanings of other lives emerge. This gradually developed conception of the detective hero as the mind of the novel is not wholly new, but it is probably my main contribution to this special branch of fiction. Some such refinement of the conception of the detective hero was needed to bring this kind of novel closer to the purpose and range of the mainstream novel.[394]

Archer is, that is, almost as anonymous as a good therapist.

The murderer in Macdonald is frequently the angry mother of a son. She's killing to keep her son close, and there's a sexual feel to a motive grounded in perceived weakness. The mother Macdonald got and the wife he chose used weakness to keep him off-balance and on the hook. His mother was psychologically fragile and given to hysteria. He could not rely on her.

Macdonald's wife had had a history of depression and suicidal thinking; throughout their marriage he would spare her the hardest parts of marriage and parenthood. He did not want his daughter to suffer her mother and grandmother's pain. In "Notes of a Son & Father," Macdonald begs for the power to "free her from fear and its false excitements, free her of the need to act out ever again an old heritage of trouble."

Macdonald's later novels turn on suffering children – usually sons – in fractured families and on what passes for love in those families, misshapen and usually between mothers and sons. Fathers in Macdonald's best novels fail to protect their sons by leaving them to mothers who then treat their sons like husbands. Macdonald's father left him to his wife, and she was unequal to the task – without resources.

Macdonald is conflating the guilty-feeling, secret wounds of his childhood with psychoanalytic archetypes and the plots of classical myths to craft his fictional families. He is embracing what analysis and art have acknowledged for a long time: that poetry, painting, music, and fiction are like dreams in that they express overpowering yet repressed emotions. The feelings exposed are also personally meaningful to the viewer, the listener, and the reader. The conventions of the venue carrying the emotions, in Macdonald's case hard-boiled detective fiction, provide both a structure in which author and reader alike can safely wrestle dangerous feelings and a shared language that both parties understand. Unlike the anxious neurotic, the insightful participant in the author/reader conversation that is self-realizing fiction controls his dreams and fantasies. Moreover, the

emotions in question are powerful because they are repressed; once they have been expressed they are no longer determinative. So there is an informed, qualified optimism in Macdonald's work, carrying with it an indispensible feeling of membership in the wider world. "Tragedy happens when you lose what is most valuable to you," he says in an interview. "But that means you have found out what is valuable – and even have had it."[395]

Macdonald stretches Freud: mothers and fathers have Oedipal and Electra complexes too, says Macdonald, and they must not act on them. Mothers and fathers must relinquish their sons and daughters. In Macdonald's fiction, parents play at family romances too, conjuring perfect children. Parents must be mindful that these fantasy children - these vents – don't hurt their imperfect, actual daughters and sons. Oedipus and Electra complexes, family romances, *folie a deux*, the repetition compulsion, and the inversion theory: these are the psychoanalytic terms for the sufferings-in-common of us all, Macdonald shows in his last, best novels. And if the anxieties truly are universal, then it's both always too late and never too late.

The Op, Spade, and Hammett believe that they can delineate right and wrong. Marlowe and Chandler think that they can judge what is good and evil. But Archer and Macdonald? They openly concede their own fallibilities. Each Macdonald character carries within him a capacity for and a history of right and wrong. As he says in The Drowning Pool, "Hers was one of those stories without villains or heroes. There was no one to admire, no one to blame. Everyone had done wrong for himself and others. Everyone had failed. Everyone had

suffered."[396] Macdonald's is a forgiving worldview: let compassion and even acceptance trump judgment and even personal responsibility. "My stories lack a powerful contrast between good and evil, because I don't see things that way," Macdonald says.[397] After his death, Welty writes, "What [Macdonald] was signaling to us in these fine and lasting novels is plain and undisguised: find the connections; recognize what they mean; thereby, in all charity, understand."[398] Forgiveness is always available in the simple recognition of one's shared humanity.

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