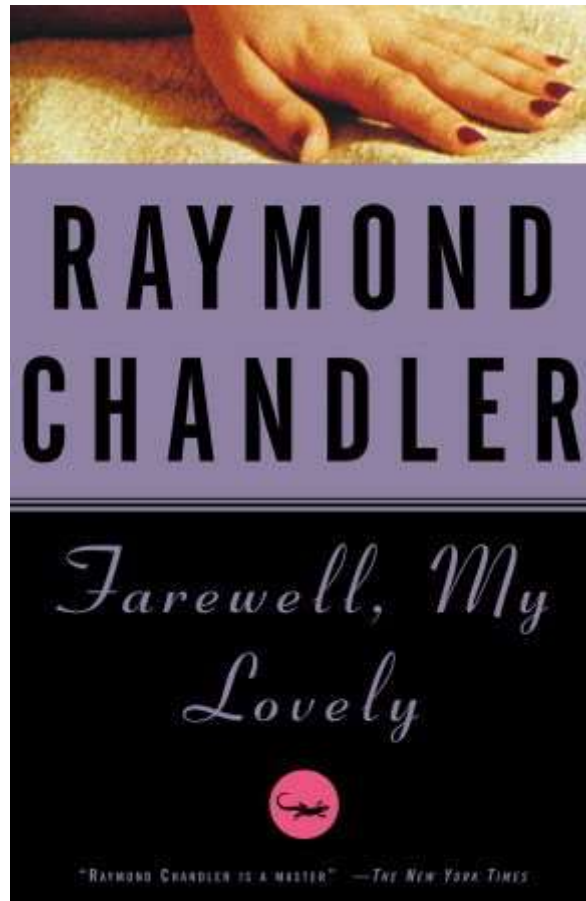


Synchronization of Noir and Hardboiled Concepts in Twentieth Century Crime Fiction

Dr. J. John Sunil Manoah

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Abstract

Noir fiction is the name sometimes given to a mode of crime fiction regarded as a subject of the hardboiled style. According to Noir aficionada George Tuttle, in this sub-genre the protagonist is usually not a detective but instead a victim, a suspect, or a perpetrator. He is someone tied directly to the crime, not an outsider called to solve or fix the situation. This genre is most commonly associated with detective stories distinguished by the unsentimental portrayal of violence and sex. “Hardboiled” didn’t refer exclusively to a type of crime fiction; it meant any tough and violent fiction, which also included adventure and western stories. My study traces the unity and the synchronization of Noir and Hardboiled concepts in Twentieth Century Crime Fiction.

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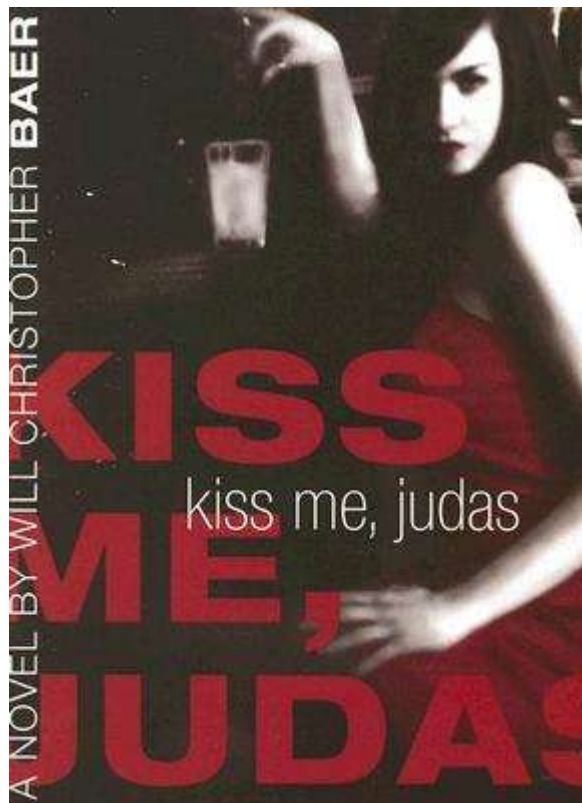
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Key Words: Noir, Hardboiled, Crime.

Introduction – What Is *Hardboiled*?

‘Hard Boiled’ style was pioneered by Carol John Daly in the mid-1920s, popularized by Dashiell Hammett over the course of the decades and refined by Raymond Chandler beginning in the late 1930s.

Hardboiled detective fiction can be recognized by four main elements: **the language, the settings, the detective, and the detection.**



Hardboiled Language

Hardboiled language describes things rather than ideas. Adjectives are kept to a minimum. It reports what happened and what was said, not how it felt. Perhaps the most famous writers of non-detective fiction in this style is Ernest Hemingway, and many writers of Hardboiled detective fiction have said that they began by imitating him.

The Outlook of Hardboiled

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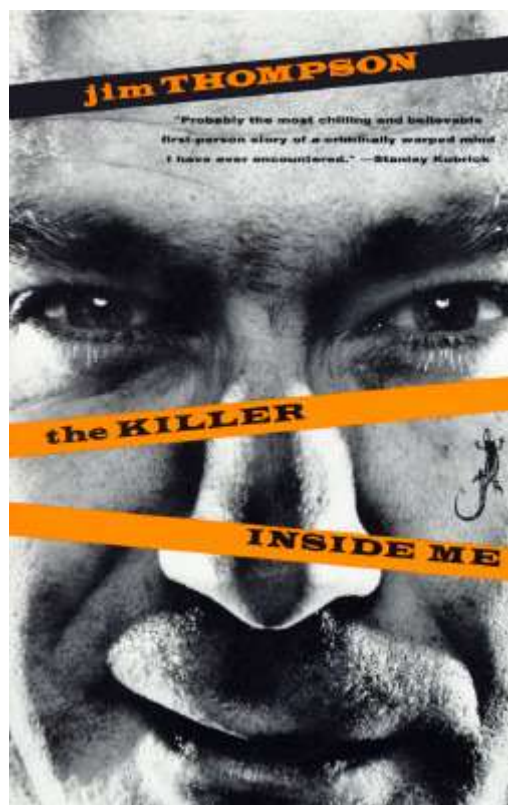
The setting of the hardboiled detective fiction is almost always urban, perhaps because of its origins in the period of prohibition and the Depression of the 1920s. The cities it describes tend to be dark, dangerous places run by corrupt politicians and gangster syndicates. The sort of crime that takes place in the stories also could be read about in newspapers. As Raymond Chandler puts it (Chandler 1993:161), the world they describe is “not a fragrant world but it is the world you live in”.

The hero of Hardboiled detective stories is most often, though not always, a private detective hero, a frontier hero of the nineteenth century. It could be argued that both the hero brings order to the lives of the people he chooses to help.

Method of Detection

Another defining characteristic of hardboiled detective fiction is the method of detection itself. In keeping with the origins in western and romance stories, the hardboiled detective is usually presented as being on a quest. The predominant element of hardboiled fiction was derived from the incidents that happen very common in society.

The Hardboiled Genre



In one of his foundational statements on “hard-boiled” crime writing, Raymond Chandler enshrined a number of apparent truths. Over the years, these have proved to be remarkably difficult to dislodge. In no particular order, he dismissed the English “Cheesecake Manor” detective novels of the golden age as contrived and whimsical and praised Dashiell Hammett for trying to write “realistic mystery fiction” for being spare, frugal, hard-boiled, and for writing, scenes that seemed never to have been written before. He also held himself and ‘Hammett up as examples very rare examples- of detective novelists who might also be said to write literature or something approaching “good serious novels” (Joyce 2001:312). In doing so Chandler wittingly or otherwise gave to the hard boiled crime novel a critical orthodoxy which is only now undergoing revision.

If an impetus to reappraise the hard-boiled constitutes one of the main jumping off point for this paper, it is perhaps worth taking a moment to asses Chandler’s claims in more detail.

Hard-Boiled Masculinity

Dora Suarez (Priestman 2003:144) deconstructs the hard-boiled persona to reveal the unnamed detective as anxious, wounded, and internally divided, and shows the violence of both the detective and killer to be projections of these insecurities. Raymond (Chandler 1993:82), therefore, makes explicit what had been implicit since Philip Marlowe (Horsley 2009:72) first walked down the mean streets of hard-boiled crime fiction. The hard-boiled male’s toughness, like his neutrality and objectivity, has always been little more than a ruse or façade. Chandler’s Marlowe is usually cited as the worst example of the hard-boiled unreflective sexism and masculinity insecurities. Philip Marlowe seeks to construct and legitimize his own masculinity - and indeed his whiteness. More recently, Rzepka (Rzepka 2010:183) has ‘tried to modify the conventional views of Chandlers’ unregenerate masculinism by pointing to his use of homoerotic and homological tropes.

Noir

The label ‘noir’ itself make it difficult, if not impossible to come up with a precise definition. The term has been used and abused by readers, writers and critics so long and so often that as with most literary labels the meaning of noir has become blurred.

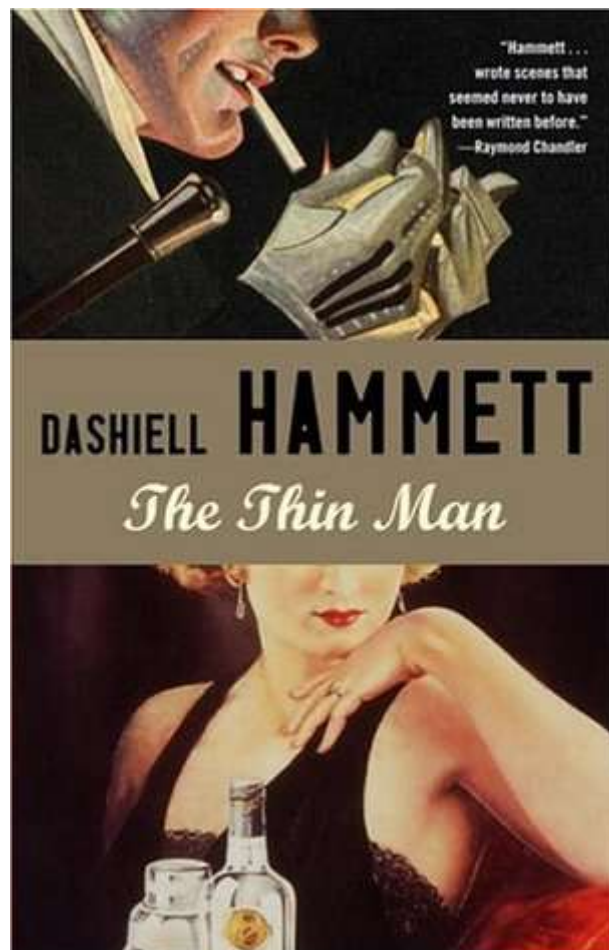
The Noir Character

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The Noir crime story deals with disorders, disaffection, and dissatisfaction. Throughout the genre's seventy year history this had remained a constant and central tenet. The typical noir character (if not the typical noir writer) has a jaundiced view of government, power, and the law. He (or sometimes she) is often a loner, a social misfit. If he is on the side of the angels, he is probably a cynical idealist. He believes that society is corrupt, but he also believes in justice and will make it his business to do whatever is necessary to see that justice is done. Clashes between good and evil are never petty and good does not always triumph, nor is justice always done.



A quality noir story must emphasize character's conflict. The crime or threat of crime with which the story is concerned is of secondary importance. Moreover, it reflects the society to the people. Thus my study reveals the actual contribution of Noir crime to the departments of crime and gives the possible utilization with effective consequences.

The Noir Style and Procedural Application

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Noir Fiction is the name sometimes given to a mode of crime fiction regarded as a subset of the hardboiled style. According to noir aficionado George Tuttle, in this sub-genre, the protagonist is usually not a detective, but instead a victim, a suspect, or a perpetrator. He is someone tied directly to the crime, not an outsider called to solve or fix the situation. Other common characteristics are the emphasis on sexual relationship and the use of sex to advance the plot and the self-destructive qualities of the lead characters. This type of fiction also has the lean direct writing style and the gritty realism commonly associated with hardboiled fiction. The seminal American writer in the noir fiction mode was James M. Cain, regarded as the third major figure of the early hardboiled scene. He debuted as a crime novelist in 1934, right between Hammett and Chandler. Other important U.S. writers in the noir tradition are Cornell Woolrich, Dorothy B. Hughes, Jim Thomson, David Goodis, Charles Williams, and Elmore Leonard.

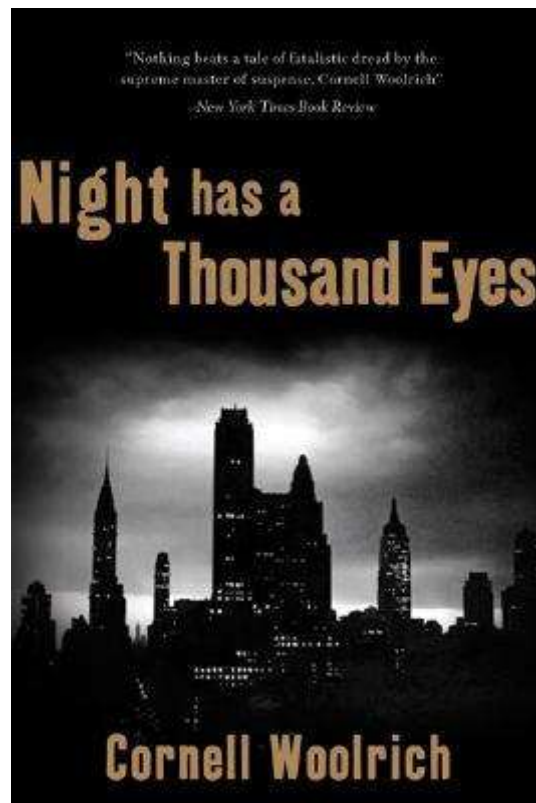
The term “noir fiction” may evoke unrelenting gloom. In fact, the work of all major authors in the field might be characterized by a fatalistic attitude. It has been expressed in a variety of tones. Woolrich and Goodis indeed often portray what seems to be a sunless world, but Leonard is frequently bright, even when the color is blood red (Horsley 2009 234). Hughes and Williams are somewhere in the middle and their work is serious, yet with a lot of hardboiled attitude, while their forte is the philosophical smile and shrug. As for Cain and Thomson, each wrote some of the blackest of American genre fiction, and some of the funniest.

The popular use of “noir” in the term “noir fiction” derives immediately from “film noir” as it has been used to characterize certain putatively dark Hollywood crime dramas and melodramas, many early examples of which were based on works by the original hardboiled writers. In turn, noir, first applied to American films in the mid-1940s by observers in France was used there in similar senses. Most relevant term *roman noir* was employed to describe a range of books, some that an English speaker might think of as mysteries, others as gothic melodramas. Note that while the meanings of “noir fiction” and *roman noir* are closely related, the derivation is not direct.

Making the connection even tighter in 1945, the French publisher Gallimard brought out a new series of paperback thrillers, many of them translations of hardboiled American fiction. The line was called “serie noire”.

Important Features of Noir

A quality noir story must emphasize character and the problems inherent in human behavior. Character conflict is essential. The crime or threat of crime with which the story is concerned is of secondary importance. It must be reflective of the times in which it was written, providing an accurate, honest, and realistic depiction of its locale and of the individuals who inhabit that locale. Even more important, it must offer some insight into the social and moral climate or its time.



The hard-boiled detective is a much more ambiguous character, less an upholder of social order than “an emblem of personal honor, a knight operating within a social structure of civic corruption, decadence and dishonesty”. The first hard-boiled detective appeared in the pulp magazine *Black Mask* during the 1920s giving rise to a story type identified by Michael Walker as one of the three noir narrative patterns.

Conclusion

In conclusion, noir and the hard boiled psycho thriller share many common features, as this brief survey has demonstrated. One of the most obvious connections between the two

forms is the structural focus on violent crime and the individual psyches of those who perpetrate crime and those charged with preventing it.

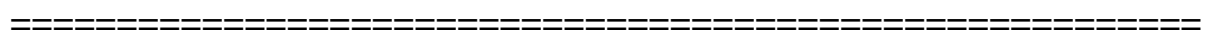
The noir movement focuses on social deviants and outlaws, and so does the hard boiled psycho thriller. In both forms, notions of right and wrong are always up for grabs. The noir movement focuses on social deviants and outlaws, and so does the hard boiled psycho thriller.

In both forms notions of right and wrong are always up for grabs. The characters must make moral decisions based on individual circumstances, which leads them inevitably into conflict with other individuals making their own fateful decisions. Little moral differences exist between the characters, no matter which side of the traditional “hero/villain” binary they are on.

The universe in which these characters clash is both existential and deterministic. Arbitrary chance may strike down the most virtuous of characters for no good reason whatsoever, but the essence of a character also usually determines his or her ultimate destiny in the narrative.

Finally, noir and the psycho thriller critique the deleterious impact of social institutions upon psychological development. The tone of much fiction within the two genres, and the many other that are cousin to them, is one of paranoia. We fear that the institutions we depend on for our shared existence are not only fundamentally unsound but downright rotten. The psycho thriller enacts this fear for us in unforgettable fashion.

In concluding the Hardboiled genre appears to be an extremely fluid entity which is at odds with Priestman’s assertion (Priestman 2003:121) that the genre possesses astonishing stability. The infusion and hybridization of noir into other genres, explicitly the gothic and science-fiction modes, allow noir to progress and delineate from the path that it had previously been restrained too. Noir is plot driven with the denouement of a text surprising the reader and delighting them in equal measure. However, in its postmodern and fantastical incarnation, noir is able to surprise the reader by providing resolutions which undermine the previous stability and expectation of the genre.



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