

# Typology and Meaning of Violence in Dashiell Hammett's *RED HARVEST* and in Chester Himes's *THE BLIND MAN WITH A PISTOL*

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**Abstract:** The hardboiled novel, a narrative that represents the investigation of crimes and its horror in the early twentieth century, enriched American literature with a new mode of representation and expression. Though violence is the cornerstone in American crime fiction, it should not prevent us from analyzing what does it really stand for in these novels. The private eyes and the police detectives, by investigating crimes committed by the criminals, inquire the same time about the societal deeds such the profound motives of the murders and the criminals. So, the objective of this article is to analyze the types of violence depicted in Dashiell Hammett's and Chester Himes's hardboiled novels by linking them to the real context of their occurrence. It reveals that violence is not forcefully noticeable at firsthand view and that further investigation is need to thoroughly apprehend that it is in keep with the reality of American culture of violence. In doing so, the combination of the social approaches to the close readings of these novels allow us to clearly notice that despite the desire by these authors to paint violence, they succeeded in drawing a faithful portrayal of the societal deeds (mischief) of the American period of the thirties by showing that the culprit is not the criminals that pervade these novels but the society.

**Keywords:** Violence, Hardboiled, Brutalities, Crimes, Societal, Psychology, Dashiell Hammett, Chester Himes

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## 1. Introduction

The hardboiled novel, a narrative that represents the investigation of crimes and its horror in the early twentieth century, enriched American literature with a new mode of representation and expression. This newly born crime fiction flaunts violence and horror as pervasive in the developing urban cities of that time. In this article, we aim at discussing the different kinds of violence developed in the crime fiction and their meaning specifically in Dashiell Hammett's detective works *Red Harvest*<sup>1</sup> (1929), and in Chester Himes's Harlem detective novel and *Blind Man with a Pistol*<sup>2</sup> (1969). The representation of violence is omnipresent in the hardboiled novels, hence the fact that it is important to analyze the types of violence in these novels and to see what

it really stands for.

Actually, the concept of violence wears two dimensions: its physical aspect which we refer as "overt" and its invisible aspect as we refer to it to "covert" aspect encompassing racism, sexism, economic exploitation, and ethnic and religious persecution, involving constraints that abuse people psychologically, morally. Though many critics such as John Scaggs, Raymond Chandler, Lee Horsley and so on, have pondered over the hardboiled novel, they all attempted to classify authors and their works as belonging or not to the crime fiction. By using the close reading approach in this article, we will explore where violence is developed and what it actually represents.

## 2. The Invisible Violence

Visible violence is the one that is not noticeable at the first glance. We have to go further in our analysis to be aware these types of violence. They may be psychological or moral.

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<sup>1</sup>Dashiell, Hammett. (1929) *Red Harvest*, (RH) New York, Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

<sup>2</sup>Chester Himes. (1969) *Blind Man with a Pistol*, (BMP), New York, Vintage Books.

Whatever it is, violence in the hardboiled novel hardly hides the harsh reality from where the author draw their inspiration as José Vicente Tavares dos Santos accordingly states in his article "Violence in Literature: The romance of violence in Latin America" that: "*Violence brings us into contact with an otherwise hidden and inaccessible reality, and that ordinary speech habitually occludes and falsifies the real*". [14]

### 2.1. Fear as Psychological Violence

Psychology is the study of human mind and feeling. This field of study allows us to enter the mind of people in order to analyze the forces that make them to act the way they do. So, the psychological violence, as we mean it in this part, is why the characters act or react the way they are doing.

The exploration of the first the works of Dashiell Hammett would be useful to understand the psychological forces that bring his characters to be so violent. In his first book, *Red Harvest*, which is for sure, the bloodiest of his hardboiled novels, the criminals and the private detectives who are investigating the crimes are all of some unconventional brutalities. The boss of the small town, Elihu Willsson, lives in permanent fear, though knowing that he almost "owns" Personville. Fear is the psychological react to the unknown. People are afraid of what they do not know or of what they do not want to know. The old Willsson is losing his strength and the people he was hiring are now taking the power, to beat the miners, Hammett says, "*he had to let his hired thugs run wild. When the fight was over, he couldn't get rid of them. He had given his city to them and he wasn't strong enough to take it away from them. Personville looked good to them and they took it over*" [1]. The figure of Willsson is here important at least in two ways: the first one is that his capitalistic desire urges him to hire criminals to break the strikes of the workers who were asking for better living conditions, the second reason is that, now after breaking out the strikers, he is afraid of his own "thugs".

We could continue in the same path in *Red Harvest* with fear that pushes people to commit criminalities as it is the case with Dinah Brand who fears that Whisper would kill her if he had the opportunity to do it. She tells it to the Op for protection. In Hammett world of fiction, fear is obliquely represented as the major source of crimes. This is also justified by that fact that lie is the main features of this because everyone has something to hide, something that if known, it would lead to prison or to death.

Then, in Chester Himes's Harlem detective series, fear constitutes a real birthplace of problems between black and white communities. Besides the social and economic sources of trouble there are some other factors that intervene and make difficult the Blacks and Whites cohabitation. The psychological reactions that affect the mind of the oppressed people lead us to refer to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis as an approach to our analysis. According to Freud every human action is stimulated by his "*ID*" that is the animalistic side of a person and no action occurs at random. The psychological reactions push people to act violently because when a person is determined to revenge a wrong, everybody think one day

they underwent it, they become blind and do not see anything else but our aim to revenge. For instance, In *A Rage in Harlem*, Grave Digger, shoots at the dead a man just because he is angry that his partner Ed Coffin is thrown the acid that burnt his face. Likewise, in *Red Harvest*, the chief of the police Noonan, in his blind seeking for revenge of the murderer of his brother, is trying hard to kill Whisper, though he does not have sufficient evidence against for the killing of his brother Tim Noonan.

What is more, fear, which constitutes one of the psychological aspects, leads people to commit murders. Fear as a feeling can cause disaster and leads to destruction of people and their family.

Both the black people and the white people take for granted the images they make for another group. This prevent the Whites from seeing Blacks as human but as former slaves and subhuman and the Blacks see the Whites as overwhelming forces; what create a serious lack of communication that leads to confrontations. Psychology constitutes a real source of problem between the two communities. Black community being oppressed by the white people seeks to take revenge. Their quest for vengeance constitutes a serious handicap for them to be sensitive and to analyze the situation they are living.

coming back to the works of Dashiell Hammett permits see how this silent suffering affects some of his characters. The killer of Donald Willsson, Albury, confessed that he did not know how he shoots at the son of the boss of Personville. He is feared that if Don's wife does not shoot at her husband his plan would collapse and he would be in danger:

*I [The OP] didn't mean to kill him ... I don't think I meant to. ... I don't think I meant to kill him," he repeated, "though I took the gun with me. You were right about my being cuckoo over Dinah. ... I watched her house that night and saw him go in. I was afraid of what I might do, because it was one of the bad days, and I had the gun in my pocket. Honestly, I didn't want to do anything. I was afraid. I couldn't think of anything but the check.* [1]

As in *The Red Harvest*, Robert Albury shoots at Donald Willsson, the son of the superman of Personville Elihu Willsson because he is in love with Dinah Brand and she is having an affair with Donald Willsson because he is rich and he gives the check of five thousand to Dinah Brand; "*a young man named Robert Albury was in prison, having confessed that he has shot and killed Donald Willsson in a fit of jealousy aroused by Willsson's supposed success with Dinah Brand*" [1].

### 2.2. The Stereotypes Conformity

Stereotypes are characteristics assigned to groups of people related to their race, nationality and sexual orientation, to name but these few. Because they generalize groups of people in manners that lead to discrimination and ignore the diversity within groups. Stereotypes are oversimplifications of people groups widely circulated in certain societies. In the United States, for example, racial groups are linked to stereotypes such as being Black or

White. Stereotypes are essentially dangerous in the sense that they do not permit people to consider each other as distinctive individual capable of doing good things or wrong thing, but rather as a whole group. People take for granted everything that is said to a group or a community. In the American society, myths have long time been taken for granted and thus allowing people to act according to the general acceptance of these myths. Literature and even the cinema have drawn their primary sources from it.

Dashiell Hammett's California setting of his novels clearly shows his inspiration from these ancient widely acknowledged beliefs. However, this urban setting allows him to criticize the American people of his period by flaunting the darkest side of their life. Hammett shocks the moral of his readers by drawing a nasty map of the Americans from the officials, businessmen, gangsters, bootleggers, criminal of great caliber, senators, policemen, to name but these few.

In addition, the authors of the crime fiction depended on the myth of their period to create heroes that became famous in their periods. Myths are widely beliefs that existed long before these authors started writing. Dashiell Hammett, when creating his hero Samuel Spade, he does not create him ex nihilo, but out of the widely shared acceptance of what an American hero should be. In the American myth of the Frontier, American consciousness has long been prepared to receive archetypes like Spade. *As rightly said by John G. Cawelti in his article entitled "Myths of Violence" in American Popular Culture, that "the American public has made its legends of violence a primary article of domestic consumption, and of export."* [6] In addition to what Cawelti said, it is up to John Scaggs to confirm our purpose by mentioning that:

*The identification of the frontier hero as the archetype of the private eye is well established, ... These include 'professional skills, physical courage affirmed as masculine potency, fortitude, moral strength, a fierce desire for justice, social marginality and a degree of anti-intellectualism' (...) The 'moral strength' associated with the frontier hero, for example, is not lightly carried by characters like the Op or Sam Spade, despite their fierce adherence to a personal code of honour. ... In particular, the Op's prime motivation is always to finish the job, come what may, even when his client attempts to call him off the case, as Elihu Willsson does in Red Harvest.* [5]

Dashiell Hammett has no reserve about his criticism of the American society. He describes what Sachin Subrav Gadhire says *"hard-boiled fiction is a harsh, unsentimental kind of American crime fiction that added a gritty realistic, or naturalistic style to the detective fiction form. Through vibrant but sometimes sordid urban surroundings and fast-paced, slangy language, it made graphic sex and violence the center of interest."* [12]

Hammett uses all the possibilities given to him in order to show the black side of his contemporaries by using the more anchored stereotypes of the northern frontier. In these stereotypes, people believe that once in the North life is like

heaven. What he says about the northern life is totally the contrary. There is no Eldorado to talk like the French writer Voltaire. But in these cities, there are not but violence, corruption, organized criminality, to name these few. John Scaggs in his book *The Crime Fiction*, quotes Mendel in these words:

*Hardboiled fiction translated the romanticism of the Western into a modern urban setting, and this movement from the Western frontier to a hostile urban environment was accompanied by an abrupt shift from the artificial gentility of the classical detective story to the creation of a fictional world of social corruption and 'real' crime* (Mandel 1984: 35) [5]

Furthermore, Hammett makes a wittily use of the more shared stories of his time as subject in his writings. He draws his inspirations by looking keenly at his society in order to make a logical analysis. Cawelti mentions that: *"in fictional works, acts of violence appear in a complex context established by generic conventions, cultural stereotypes, and the specific treatment of motive, act, and emotion, in the story in which the violence occurs."*<sup>3</sup> [6] In this quotation, Cawelti confirms the fact that the crime fiction authors use the generic conventions in order to discuss them or reject them. What is important to say is that the stereotypes deny from the individual any ability to act according their own will but put them all in the same bag.

Now let us come to "The Harlem Cycle" to see how Chester Himes uses the cliché of the black community to make his point. He bases his detective novels on what is largely acknowledged as black men's behaviors to generalize when it is now necessary. We scrutinize firstly how these facts of seeing people only as a group and not as everyone is unique and individual create lack of communication between Blacks and Whites and this is one source of brutalities between the two communities, then finally how fear and hatred are psychological facts that made the cohabitation between black people and white folks even more difficult in Chester Himes's detective works. Stereotypes can also be seen in the sense of the poor and the wealthy and thus the source of misconceptions and hence as source confrontations.

Besides the social and economic sources of trouble there are some other factors that intervene and make it difficult as people are supposed to live in peace and harmony. But unfortunately, the partition of people into different groups seriously affects the cohabitation of persons. It is what Ayan Meryem calls "the special logic" [8] of separating the two groups of people. It is the case between the black community and the white people who do not see themselves as human beings but through the lens of color line. Both Blacks and white people take for granted that the images they make for one and another group are not only true but also should be maintained. This prevents the Whites from seeing Blacks as human but as former slaves and subhuman and Blacks see Whites as overwhelming forces; this dichotomy of black and white, poor and rich creates a serious lack of communication

<sup>3</sup> John G. Cawelti, *Op Cit.*, p. 523.

which leads to confrontations and antagonism. This is essentially shown in the works of Chester Himes in *The Blind Man with a Pistol*, where the theme of invisibility is more than the motif, but it is the leitmotiv.

The title of this novel itself shows from the outset the sense of misunderstanding that will lead inevitably to confrontation between the communities. The blindness is a motif in almost all of Himes detective novels. In *A Rage in Harlem*, the idea of blindness is developed by the fact that Ed Johnson, who is one of the two detectives, is thrown acid in the face making him blind. He blindly shoots in this joint and hits one of the comen. Even the Cops Grave Digger and Ed Johnson have blind people as pigeons. This symbolizes, to what extent the white people and the black folk are incapable of seeing each other as human beings and thus confirming their stereotypes they have from one to another.

It was then when the white man had been killed that was revealed how misunderstanding is blinding the two communities. The white detective cannot understand anything without their partners black Grave Digger and Ed coffin. *"The white man thought they (black people) were all talking in a secret language."* [3] The result of this confusion is that the white man will be found, dead; *"throat cut"*. [3]

Here the white man is wandering in the black area. To Himes, whenever one people enter into the other side, the result is disastrous. This case in point is revelatory. The black man thinks that *"all he wanted was to get with the sissies, the tan-lipped brown bodied girl-boys, strip off his clothes, let himself be ravished. The thought made him weak as water, dissolved his bones, dizzied his head. He refused to think more than that."* [3]

If the black man sees the white man as a merely man in short, they will talk as man to man and there will never be animosity in their conversation. But unfortunately, it is not the case. In the eyes of Chester Himes, the two communities cannot not see themselves as people but as Black people and White people. Let us see what comes out from the idea of brotherhood developed by Marcus Mackenzie in *The Blind Man with a Pistol*. Himes theorizes a wonderful view based on the brotherhood. He says:

*The greatest boon to mankind that history will ever know can be brotherly love' he was saying. 'Brotherhood! It can be more nutritious than bread. More warming than whine. More soothing than song. More satisfying than sex. More beneficial than science. More curing than medicine.* [3]

To Marcus Mackenzie, the problem between blacks and the whites was just a problem of integration. If people are taught how to know one another there will never be a problem. *"The Negro Problem existed there as it had everywhere else, he had ever lived. But still he was treated well he came to the conclusion that it was a matter of black and white people getting to know each other"* [3]

Himes laughs at this idea he considers as senseless. Himes firmly believes that the salvation of the black community cannot gain but only through violent struggle. He does not believe in any integration, as in all of his novels, whenever Blacks and Whites gather, it only results in disaster. They do

not speak the same language as mentioned above, they do not see each other as the theme of blindness indicate, and they do not even live in the same area as evidenced in the idea of "the south" and "the north". So how can they integrate in these conditions? The result of Marcus Mackenzie's brotherhood campaign has consequences as something like confrontation and anything beneficial was taken from it. This failure is allegorical of what Chester Himes thinks about what should be the fight of black people. He claims violence, but organized one. He criticizes those who think that assimilation can be the way out of Black and White antagonist.

What is more, violence in *A Race in Harlem* by Chester Himes can be seen in the context of naturalism too. At the beginning Jackson was a fervent Baptist Christian but the circumstances make him to become a conman and commit act of violence. This is shown in the fact when he hits the man who was getting close to him in his attempts to scape. This scene is similar to the one Himes developed in *If he Hollers*. Bob, a passive man, wants to kill a white guy just because he is cornered. When Bob was on the verge on winning, the white guy knocked him and he bleeds and loses his conscience, when he came back to conscience, he was determined to revenge himself:

*I was then decided to murder him cold bloodedly, without giving him a chance... I wanted to kill the son of a bitch and keep on living myself. I wanted to kill him so he'd know he didn't have a chance. I wanted him to feel as scared and powerless and unprotected as I felt every goddamned morning I woke up. I wanted him to know how it felt to die without a chance; how it felt to look death in the face and know it was coming and know there wasn't anything he could do but sit there and take it.* [7]

Coming back to Chester Himes's detective novels, it is obvious that Chester Himes continues with his idea of misunderstanding by blurring even his main protagonist absorbed by this sense of invisibility. He darkens them to the extent that no one can see them in their black Plymouth sedan car. *"It passed along practically unseen, like a ghostly vehicle floating in the dark, its occupants invisible."* [3] The darkness of the night, combined to the darkness of black people in a ghostly comparison confirm that there would not be any light to brighten the situation.

In this world so dark, it is very easy to smash one another. And as there is not any catalyzer to calm down the situation, the result is that confrontation between people that can turn to disaster. The lack of the white people to see the Black as shown in the double combination of the darkness; the darkness of the night and the darkness of the black people's skin emphasizes his idea of the misconception. He adds to this the Whiteness of the White men to the whiteness of the days to show that in the day white people are invisible and they do their dirt in the day. All this combined shows that there is no moment when the Black community and the white community can exchange themselves as there is no time appropriate for their exchange.

Choosing to have black detective is a way for Himes to point that even in the American administration this kind of

relationships exist. Grave Digger and Ed Johnson are detectives. They investigate the cases implying black people (more often). The white cops cannot elucidate the crimes committed by black people in the black area because they do not understand them. They do not consider Blacks as individual distinctive from the society. Trying to investigate a crime as a society-committed-crime is not efficient. That is why they need the black cops to have black eyes to start investigating the murders. This dialogue between the white cops and the black cops is revelatory of this remark:

*Then maybe you can tell me why he was killed, too,' he said sarcastically.*

*'That's easy,' Grave Digger [black cop] said with a straight face. 'There are only two reasons a white man is killed in Harlem. Money or fear.'*

*The [white] sergeant wasn't expecting that answer. It threw him. He lost his sarcasm. 'Not sex?'*

*'Sex? Hell, that's all you white people can think of, Harlem and sex — and you're right, too!' He went on before the sergeant could speak. 'You'r right as rain. But sex is for sale. And all the surplus they give away. So why kill a white sucker for that? That's killing the goose that lays the golden egg.'*

*Color drained from the sergeant's face and it became white from anger. 'Are you trying to tell me there are no sex murders here?'*<sup>4</sup>[3]

Whatever the risk Digger and Ed Johnson take to ensure order and enforce law, in about twelve years of service, they do not benefit any promotion and they do not expect this situation to change as if, to Himes, this will go everlastingly:

*Their faces bore the lumps and scars they had collected in the enforcement of law in Harlem. Now after twelve years as first-grade precinct detectives they hadn't been promoted. Their raises in salaries hadn't kept up with the rise of the cost of living. They hadn't finished paying for their houses. Their private cars had been bought on credit. And yet they hadn't taken a dime in bribes. Their entire careers as cops had been one long period of turmoil. When they weren't taking lumps from the thugs, they were taking lumps from the commissioners. Now they were curtailed in their own duties. And they didn't expect it to change. [3]*

It is clear that the black cops Digger and Coffin Ed take it for granted that their situation won't improve because they are Black and it does not bother them as it is as normal as any other thing in the United States and because of this Grave Digger says "*We don't blame the Captain,*" Grave Digger said." [3] Though, whenever there are crimes within the black belt of Harlem, they intervene and their intervention is always decisive for apprehending the criminals because the white cops cannot lead the investigation when it is committed by black people. The reason for this fact is the white cops are incapable to know the reason why black people commit murder. It is evidenced in *Blind Man with a Pistol* by when the white man was murder in the Black belt, the first thing the Sergeant thinks of was about "money" and the answer he

receives from Grave Digger reveals that white policemen do not understand the black people:

*Sex? Hell, that's all you white people can think of, Harlem and sex — and you're right, too!' (...) But sex is for sale (...) So why kill a white sucker for that? That's killing the goose that lays the golden egg.'* *'Color drained from the sergeant's face and it became white from anger. 'Are you trying to tell me there are no sex murders here? [3]*

### 3. Firsthand Visible Brutalities

Acts of brutalities are the most frequent deeds in the hardboiled. The criminals, the detectives and all other characters make their own use of it depending on what it is meant by them. If the criminals commit murders in order to get money or save some position, the detectives also, in their investigations, commit the same brutalities in order to have information from the criminals. The investigators risk their lives in going to the underworld to find the murderers who are dangerous the most of the time. Even if the mobiles in the works of Dashiell Hammett and in the works of Chester Himes are different from one author to the other, and also from one work to another, it still remains that in all of their works physical violence constitutes an important element in their writings as shown by the frequent murders, homicides, fights, shootings, and so on.

#### 3.1. Hammett: Physical Violence as Systemic Criticism

*The realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, ..., and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket, where the mayor of your town may have condoned murder as an instrument of moneymaking.*<sup>5</sup>[9]

The epigraph above shows the world in which Dashiell Hammett throws the readers of his hardboiled fiction. To Hammett, violence in the American society is systemic. It pervades all over his writing as if violence feeds him in his artistry painting of it. The world becomes dangerous, the streets become dangerous, the houses become dangerous and even the police station becomes dangerous too. It is as if the criminals have taken the power and they are leading the cities. Hammett in doing this notice is shifting the detective novel from its classical main feather. The focus is no longer who has killed, but the reader follows his hero into the underworld where the private detective fights the criminals. Raymond Chandler, in article "Art of Murder" says that:

*Hammett took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it into the alley; it doesn't have to stay there forever;*

4 *Op. Cit.* p. 56.

5 Raymond Chandler. "The Simple Art of Murder", 1950. Note that The Simple Art of Murder is an essay, which, with Pickup on Noon Street\_ were originally published, in hardcover, by Houghton Mifflin Company, in 1950, and in paperback, by Ballantine Books, in 1972.

*but it was a good idea to begin by getting as far as possible from Emily Post's idea of how a well-bred debutante gnaws a chicken wing. He wrote at first (...) for people with a sharp, aggressive attitude to life. They were not afraid of the seamy side of things; they lived there. Violence did not dismay them; it was right down their street.*<sup>6</sup>[9]

To examine the physical violence in *Red Harvest*, Hammett's first novel published in 1929, we have to go through some scenes where there are direct confrontations. The brutality used by the Chief of police Noonan, hitting MacSwain when the Op has taken him there shows that violence pervades the entire novel as even in the police station brutality and its horror is used systematically. The Chief of Police's contempt is not even orientated to the investigation of the murders but to avenge his brother's death because he is made to think that MacSwain is the murderer of his murdered brother Tim Noonan.

Moreover, there are the fights between the criminals who have their gangs armed with guns and ready to shoot at anything that moves and the Private Detective included. The fight at Dinah Brand's house is a striking evidence. There were shootings between Max Thaler and his crew and the Op. Max accuses the Op of trying to hang the murder of the Chief of police Noonan's brother on him. So, he says: "*So you and Noonan are trying to paste his brother's death on me?*" [1] This is enough to raise the ire of Jerry, the gunman of Whisper. Jerry fights hard with the detective who says:

*Jerry wasn't tough to handle, but I (the Op) had to work quick. There was Thaler behind me. I socked Jerry twice, kicked him, butted him at least once, and was hunting for a place to bite when he went limp under me. I poked him again where his chin should have been—just to make sure he wasn't faking—and went away on hands and knees, down the hall a bit, out of line with the door.* [1]

In hardboiled fiction, violence pervades all scenes and all characters are liable. The private now goes to the scenes of the crimes or even sometimes he takes part in the fight. In the quotation we have just mentioned above, it resulted from this fighting the death of the racketeer Jerry and the arrest of Max Thaler called also Whisper. This opens another series of killings in Poisonville and raises the fear of Dinah Brand, the female materialistic and pigeon for the Op. Dinah Brand is now looking for protection in the Op asking him to kill Max Thaler because she is afraid of him, and Max would kill her now that he knows that she had tried to double-cross him:

*You don't know the worst of it. Max didn't kill Noonan's brother. Tim didn't say Max. He tried to say MacSwain, and died before he could finish."*

*She grabbed my shoulders and tried to shake my hundred and ninety pounds.*

*She was almost strong enough to do it.*

*"God damn you!" Her breath was hot in my face. Her face was white as her teeth. .... "If you've framed him and made me frame him, you've got to kill him—now."*

*I don't like being manhandled, even by young women who look like something out of mythology when they're steamed up.*

*"Stop bellyaching. You're still alive.* [1]

There is no doubt that *Red Harvest* is the most violent and the bloodiest novel written by Dashiell Hammett. From the title of the novel we can read by the word "red" that is the color of blood that the readers are prepared to spend a terrifying reading. In *Red Harvest*, Hammett shows his view of the systemic violence. Poisonville is the actual name of this town where violence is part of everyday life of its inhabitants; it occurs everywhere and in its all forms. There have been "*sixteen of them (murdered) in least than a week and more coming up*". [1] even the chief of police Noonan is now getting tired of the killings in Poisonville. After Lew Yard "*is knocked off*"; Noonan who is the chief of police is exceeded by the events and the brutalities to the extent that he is obliged to recognize it. He confesses:

*To tell the truth, I don't want to. I don't know as I could stand it just now. I'm getting sick of this killing. It's getting to me—on my nerves, I mean."*

*I (the Detective) sat down again, considered his low spirits, and asked: "Who do you guess killed him?"*

*"God knows," he mumbled. "Everybody's killing everybody. Where's it going to end?"*

*"Think Reno did it?"*

*Noonan winced, started to look up at me, changed his mind, and repeated: 'God knows.* [5]

This quotation shows how Poisonville is ripe for physical violence. Deaths are becoming daily life of people. If it the chief of the police, who is supposed to protect the civilians, is the most worried about his own safety, now who to take care about the safety of other people? Strangely, it is Noonan himself who allies with the racketeers, the one of the corrupted persons, and he is in combines with Elihu Willsson, the proprietor of the town, to repress any rebellion idea for the advancement of the workers who try to get in unions. The chief of the police feels now he is trapped, he is cornered. This confirms what Chandler says in his essay that "*in these mean streets*" there is something darker than the "*darkness of the night*".

The physical violence in *Red Harvest* is on every page and it is really the blood-harvest. All the protagonists in the novel are tired of it. After Noonan saying that "*I'm sick of this butchering. I can't stand anymore of it*", it is the turn of the old Alihu Willsson in the name of whom all that "*butchering*" was done as he is the instigator of the crime in Personville that is his property, to announce that it is time "*to stop this insane killing*" [1] The horror in Personville is as contagious as plague. The Op says that he is 'going blood-simple', that the 'damned town Poisonville is right, it poisons me': "*after twenty years of messing around with crime I can look at any sort of a murder without seeing anything in it but my bread and butter, the day's work. But this getting a rear out of planning deaths is not natural to me. It's what this place has done to me.*" [5]

In *Red Harvest*, the Continental Op reveals to Dinah Brand

6 Chandler, Raymond. (1988) *The Simple Art of Murder*. 1940. New York: Vintage, pp. 13-15.

his fears that the violence and corruption of the suitably named Poisonville are beginning to infect him. *"If I don't get away soon, I'll be going blood-simple like the natives", he tells her. It's this damned town. Poisonville is right. It's poisoned me.*" [9] His fear seems to be confirmed when, the next morning, he wakes and finds his right hand around the handle of an ice-pick, with the *"six-inch needle- sharp blade (...) buried in Dinah Brand's left breast"* [1].

After the parental violence, Hammett continues through the physical violence with the private eye fighting with criminals in *The Glass Key*. Bernie Despain, one of the suspects of the son of the senator, fled to New York the night Taylor was killed. He also went with the money Ned Beaumont had won in the gambling. Beaumont took unconsidered risk in following him to New York. He asks Jack to cover him in case he would be in trouble. He tells Jack that *"if I come out with Despain, you beat it. Get another taxi and go back to watch the buckman. If I don't come out, use your own judgment"* [2]. This shows that even the detective is not saved of the violence. With Hammett's novel the readers do not know whether the private detective will end his investigation alive so deep he is engaged with the criminals and he does not care finding them in their underworld. In this sense, *"the moral ambiguity of the resolutions"* [13] to repeat Lee Horsley, is revelatory of the absence of individual culprit in Hammett crime fiction.

Eventually, we have shown that physical violence pervades all over Hammett's detective fiction. Confrontations that resulted in killings, breakings and the brutalities in almost all the scenes testify this fact of predominance of physical violence in hardboiled novels. The physical brutalities are generalized and liable to all people of all social standings. It evidences that no one is safe in Hammett's world as no one is safe in the American corners. In the following pages, we are going to analyze the detective works of Chester Himes to check.

### 3.2. HIMES: *The Police Procedural in Service of Struggle*

The police procedural is the hardboiled fiction that replaces the private eye with the policemen who work the governmental apparatus. In choosing this way to address societal facts, Himes is saying that literature as a means of expression cannot but reflects the life, thoughts, and the milieu of its people. Harrison accordingly states that *"as the history of literary studies in classics pointedly shows it, we are all necessarily children of our time and environment, and so are our interpretations."* [10] So the crime fiction writers, as part of the society and children of their time, cannot but depict the period of their living and what they know of the most.

However, it is not obvious to consider that crimes and the horror that it entails feed a literary subject, and thus, aesthetical object. Paradoxical enough as it may seem, everything can be artistically represented, crime and murder included. To talk like Marc Angenot and Regine Robin, *"the murder become an object of consummation"* [11] So, crimes become ipso facto an aesthetical object, that is, an artistic

arrangement of reality for its reproduction or of attenuation of emotion related to the representation of crime. Crime is human being companion because it exists since human beings exist and will be here so long as people will live on earth, so what is strange in its presentation on papers by writers who decided to paint this harsh reality they witnessed?

In Chester Himes Harlem series, the origin physical violence is almost absurd. Rarely is it for the valuable cause. In each of his novel it is as if the world is worthless of being lived in so much so that people commit murder, crimes, or fight for nothing. In *A Rage in Harlem*, which is the first novel of the series, brutalities reach the climax with the throwing of acid to Ed Coffin's face. In this scene, the fighting is indescribable. Everyone is fighting everyone as Chester Himes illustrates it in this passage:

*Jodie punched Jackson twice, hard, in the belly. Jackson grunted and grabbed Jodie by the throat. Jodie kneed Jackson in the groin. Jackson backed painfully into Gus. Gus grabbed Jackson by the shoulder to keep from falling, but Jackson thought was trying to hold him and twisted violently from his grip. In a blinding rage, Jodie whipped out his switchblade knife and slashed open the sleeve of Jackson's overcoat.* [4]

Taking advantage from this situation, Hank, a conman, *"Snatched up a glass of acid"* that had been there for experimentation the purity of the "gold ore" and throws it *"into Coffin Ed's eyes"* [4]. Ed is now blind and he becomes more furious and hot-raged that he emptied his pistol in the walls of the room. Enraged by the burning acid in his eyes he begins *"clubbing right and left in the dark with the butt of his pistol."* Unconsciously he knocks his partner Grave Digger who becomes unconscious:

*He didn't know it was Grave Digger who backed into him. He just felt somebody within reach and he clubbed Grave Digger over the head with such savage fury that he knocked him unconscious. Grave Digger crumpled to the floor at the instant that Coffin Ed was asking in the dark, 'Where are you, Digger? Where are you, man?' [4].*

Himes goes on with flaunting the hardships and brutalities with the horrible act of killing "sister Goldy". Goldy is a twin brother of Jackson but they are completely different. Jackson is a Baptist Christian believer, and his only mistake was his naivety to think that Imabelle loves him and is ready to marry him. Knowing that Jackson would do anything for her, she uses him to do her dirty things. As far as Goldy is concerned, he is materialistic brother of Jackson, disguised in woman of charity or what he calls himself as "Sister of Mercy" in the "service of the Lord" to be a pigeon for the police. Despite his plea from Hank not to kill him, that he will help them a hideout, that he has *"ins"* in the police station, they kill him *"throat cut"*. Jodie, who shows his contempt of Goldy's role as pigeon, was going to kill him colt-bloodily. Goldy's scream goes with the scream of *"as the train thundered past overhead, shaking the entire tenement city. Shaking the sleeping black people in their lice-ridden beds"*. [4] Goldy's plea for mercy as his name of "Sister of



Mercy”, or “Sister Gabriel” will not be heard by Jodie who:

reached down with a violent motion, clutched him over the face with the palm of his left hand, put his right knee in the Goldy’s back between the shoulder blades, jerking Goldy’s head back against the pressure of his knee, and cut Goldy’s taut black throat from ear to ear, straight down to the bone” [4].

As it is shown from above the violence between the criminals themselves in the scene of the struggle between Jackson and Jodie in the acid throwing scene, and the brutalities of the con characters toward the detectives as exemplified in the suffering of Coffin Ed with the burning acid in his eyes that he will from then bears the stigmas the whole of his life as “Harlem Detective Series” that sometimes he looks like the “*figure of Einstein*”, now let us see the violence exerted by the detective toward the criminals. Grave Digger enraged by the looking for revenge for his partner, savagely kills Hank adds additional shoots at his body for Coffin Ed’s shake “while Hank’s body was jerking from the ballet in the brain, Grave Digger said, “For you, Ed,” *took dead aim with Coffin Ed’s pistol held in his left hand, and shot the dying killer through the staring left eye*” [4].

In this situation of pervasive physical violence, all American people are susceptible to the brutalities even including the hoodlums between themselves, the detectives, and ordinary people. It is for Himes to show that in his world, you always have to be aware of latent presence of death whoever you are and wherever. Besides, Himes indicates that physical violence between blacks and blacks to show the promiscuity, lack of opportunities, and despair affect the life of the people under these conditions. This conflictual social condition embodies the real life of the American black people. This remark joins the one made by JOSÉ ÁNGEL GONZÁLEZ López that “*The story is realistic in terms of the description of violence and language used, but it also has an obvious allegorical subtext.*” [15]

In response their act, the police force suspends both Coffin Ed and Grave Digger for brutality. The rather lengthy portion of the narrative during which the detectives act as free agents is a moment of great possibility for the series: it seems to be trying to liberate its heroes permanently from the apocalyptic trajectory on which the series’ selective-statist structural logic has placed it. Fortunately, here, the logic of “*crime and punishment*” is respected:

*Mandel himself perhaps unintentionally suggests such a function of crime fiction when he observes that ‘[r]eading about violence is an (inno- cent) form of witnessing, and enjoying, violence – albeit perhaps in a shuddering, shameful and guilt-ridden way’ before he adds that It is this shuddering, shameful, guilt-ridden response to crime fiction that bears out Mandel’s point that laws are respected not out of conviction or a belief in them, but simply out of fear of punishment.*” [5]

However, with the hardboiled novel, violence seems to stand for something more valuable, more realistic than it is represented in the other previous crime literature. It is the account of American real daily life of the period of both

Dashiell Hammett and of Chester Himes. In the following part, our task will consist in analyzing the tight relationships between the communities as a dynamic organization and its representation in the crime novels as far as violence is concerned. Is the violence in these hardboiled fiction novels a faithful and objective reflection of American daily life?

## 4. Conclusion

In short, the detective novel writers follow a narrow path that is established by the writers of the prescription of the genre as if they are afraid of not being considered as not writing a serious detective novel as demonstrated in this part. For this reason or another, the early writers of crime fiction choose to represent a large range of violence in all of its forms of whatsoever it could be. In the part, we devoted to the typology of violence, we have mentioned the different short of hardships that are developed in the crime novels we analyzed. Violence in the crime fiction can be psychological or moral and thus difficult to see from the outside. For this reason, the author brings his readers into the mind of his or her characters to what is gnawing them silently. This dimension of violence is not always taken into account by the analysts of the genre for reasons known by themselves, but what they mostly care about the horror the crimes for this is obvious.

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