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“CALLED FORTH BY IMMINENT DANGERS”: THE AMERICAN GOTHIC IN
MYSTERIES OF DETECTION AND DETECTIVE FICTION (1799-1929)

by

Keli Masten

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
English
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Keli Masten

“CALLED FORTH BY IMMINENT DANGERS”: THE AMERICAN GOTHIC IN
MYSTERIES OF DETECTION AND DETECTIVE FICTION (1799-1929)

Keli Masten, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2019

The period from 1799 through 1929 marks a remarkable era of development for gothic themes in American mystery and investigative fiction. From early “mysteries of detection” through more structurally formalized detective stories, this project examines the differences in the gothic modes and devices employed by Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Anna Katharine Green, Mark Twain, and Dashiell Hammett, and their significant contributions to the progression of the popular gothic detective genre. Through the study of each author’s specific style and focus, there is much to learn about literary development and cultural influence. All of the authors mentioned here address the unique insecurities of their time period, as well as the transgressions its people both committed and feared.

This study draws upon the critical work of Teresa Goddu, John Cawelti, Dennis Porter, Karen Halttunen, and Jeffrey Weinstock, among others, to understand the tremendous impact and cultural significance of gothic detective fiction and its importance to American literary culture. The gothic detective genre provides criticism of social issues such as classism and racism, explores inseparable connections to the past, and offers an engagement with outliers of human psychology. These stories follow the development of the United States’ culture during each period, reflecting the nation’s societal concerns and aspirations of imposing order where only chaos reigns. The pervasive use of gothic themes and devices contributes to the evolution of

the detective genre by drawing attention to societal anxieties and indiscretions, and serving as a kind of living cultural record of human imperfection and aberration in the guise of an engaging mystery story.

This study adds to the understanding of gothic detective fiction as an important cultural registry of social concerns through a close examination of key texts to engage with each author's stylistic contributions and cultural concerns and illustrate a continuous arc of development over time. By isolating the individual connection between each author and their own version of the gothic detective form, this project shows why this particular mode of genre fiction represents an engagement not only with stories, but with ideologies connected back to the society which has produced it. Greater understanding of these ideas gives us a stronger connection with the literature and forges a closer relationship between readers and culture.

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INTRODUCTION

In the opening comments of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," often touted as America's first detective story, he describes the unique psychological pleasure associated with the practice of "ratiocination," the art of problem solving:

As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which disentangles. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talent into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension præternatural. His results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition. (397)

The excitement that Poe identifies lies partly in the thrill of deciphering the undecipherable and partly in the spectacle of the bizarre often found in gothic literature. His allusion to the preternatural, that which is beyond the usual scope of the norm, points to a comingling of generic elements which produces a distinct sense of unreality in tandem with logic and method. By doing so, Poe creates the image of a man of unique ability and insight, who is capable of easily ascertaining the incomprehensible in his world. While his abilities seem almost supernatural to everyone else, the method and order of his assertions create the impression that, under the right circumstances, anyone else should be able to reach a similar result. Projected against a fallen world, this inquisitive individual stands in stark contrast to the disorder which surrounds him.

In American gothic fiction, the literary devices of the past, such as dark, foreboding places and a cadre of aggressive "others," are set against post-Enlightenment Reason and recontextualized in response to the unique fears and insecurities of the New World. Ghosts and

goblins are replaced by natives and slaves, and the ominous looming abbeys and castles have become portentous cityscapes or the darkening woods. The hidden sins of the past still remain to torment the present, just as in the days of old, but their threat is rooted in the conflict between Reason and moral fallibility.

The atmosphere of gothic literature has always been related to fear; fear of violence, fear of losing money or power, and fear of troubling secrets being revealed. Much of this is tied up in the relationship between the present and the past and the persistent fear of exposure, leading to instances of violence and turmoil in characters' lives. Authors like Poe, and his predecessor, Charles Brockden Brown, were known for their gothic experimentation and their ability to evoke a sense of fantastic, otherworldly terror in their readers while ultimately revealing that the cause of the trouble lies within the uncanny real world. The authors used such gimmicks as casting wild animals as murderers, ventriloquism, psychological terror, sleepwalking, and ratiocination to foster feelings of disconnectedness and unreality among their characters, eventually offering solutions which seem rational enough in hindsight. Over time, the focus upon the logical elements became greater, to the point where authors, such as Poe, elected to focus upon them much more specifically, in an effort to explain just why exactly the process of ratiocination was so fascinating. In Poe's mind, this skill represented a process of intense observation and deduction based upon the logical analysis of many clues, facts, and accounts, compiled into one comprehensive, accurate dialogue of what has occurred. With the appearance of clairvoyance but the justification of logic behind it, Poe's ratiocination became a fast favorite among his readers, inspiring a whole series of literary transformations to occur.

In reality, the practice of blending these two generic elements, the deductive and the gothic, actually began before Poe was even born, emerging in the work of Charles Brockden

Brown shortly after the Revolutionary War. Brown's gothic novels were especially focused upon the American landscape, and the many different forms terror could take. From plagues to urban squalor to the barren frontier, Brown did his best to capitalize on what he knew about the world around him. His interest in psychological dread was a prominent feature in his books, and there is a definite sense of dogged inquiry in at least two of them, opening the door for a kind of investigative quest to uncover the truth. Like Poe's later stories, which engaged closely with ratiocinative elements, Brown presents his readers with questions which demand answers, but his focus is equally upon the gothic elements as well. The more intricate the gothic design, the greater the perplexity of the mystery, with the two elements working hand in hand to build the sense of distinct and profound hostility in the characters' worlds.

As American literature continued to develop and grow, deductive fiction became more distinct as not only an offshoot of gothic literature, but a whole new category of its own. While still retaining many elements of the gothic form, this new conception of ratiocination as the primary focus of the story became a fan favorite, with readers enjoying the vicarious thrill of following along with the investigator's logic and procedures. The investigator himself developed much from the way Poe first envisioned him, a quasi-Dupin who was equal parts odd and brilliant, with other authors adding new attributes all the time. Soon the simultaneous separation and joining of the two generic forms became distinct, with detective fiction retaining many elements of the gothic while establishing very recognizable and imitable traits of its own. The gothic spread out as a fundamentally regional form, making use of each area's particular societal concerns and insecurities. The combination of both into a dynamic category of gothic detective fiction captures both the gothic's regional concerns and its command of fear while also

stimulating the analytical faculties of detective and reader with conundrums surrounding transgressions against the social order.

While some might attribute the gothic detective genre's popularity to the exciting, fast-paced nature of the material, I assert that its success lies in its ability to identify the concerns and insecurities of each story's contemporary time period, pointing to the societal transgressions committed by and against its people. Rather than serving as a simple escape for readers, gothic detective fiction confronts them with a corrupted version of their own reality which highlights the violent and duplicitous ambitions beneath a society's placid façade. These stories reveal the darker side of American life and crime, where people are haunted by the sins of the past. They convey important messages about societal honesty, morality, and sin, especially surrounding the fact that the New World reliance upon Reason is neither effective nor useful in certain circumstances. This project aims to highlight the cultural commentary on the instability of the human mind, the dangers of hypocrisy, and the hidden violence inherent in all of humanity, placing each author's work in meaningful context within the evolution of the gothic detective genre in the United States.

Brown and Poe may have been pioneers, but they are far from the only authors who chose to write in this particular style. Prolific mystery novelist, Anna Katherine Green, also blended elements of the gothic into her detective stories, structuring her plots around the power differential which exists within families and the hidden jealousies and ambitions which can so quickly turn love to hate. She incorporates some of the same fantastic-seeming elements as Brown and Poe, but she uses her imagination to bring the genre into the domestic sphere. Green's contemporary, the renowned Mark Twain, also elected to write in the gothic detective style, choosing to blend elements of biting satire with more serious subjects to create his critique

of racial oppression. The final author to be examined is Dashiell Hammett, whose gritty gothic noir exists in an irredeemable world and teeters on a precipice of human destruction. This project follows the individual contributions and various developments which take place in each author's work, evolving and changing the shape of the genre, and details the cultural importance of the story both as a work of literature and as a record of popular culture with specific historic value and cultural significance. Gothic detective fiction exposes the dark desire to transgress social norms from gender roles to outright murder, inserting the logical detective into the scenario to try and impose order and restore peace to an otherwise unstable world.

Noteworthy Scholarship

Despite its elusive nature, many readers have some kind of images in their mind for what constitutes the European gothic genre, among them crumbling castles and abbeys, unnatural monsters and blood-sucking vampires, and the looming menace of intangible ghosts and ghouls. However, those images become blurred when we transport the generic conventions from the old world to the new. How do the story elements of the past translate to the future of a distant land, and why should we care about them? Teresa Goddu tells us in her book, *Gothic America* (1997), that "even when authors such as Edgar Allan Poe or periods such as the twentieth-century Southern Renaissance are associated with the gothic, they reveal the difficulty of defining the genre in national terms: the American gothic is most recognizable as a regional form" (3). This project correspondingly focuses on the different regional as well as historical aspects of the works covered in order to accommodate this search for understanding on a national scale.

The gothic genre is more elusive of description than the more formulaic detective genre, and thus it demands close scrutiny. Since there are so many different interpretations of what constitutes a gothic American text, it is helpful to engage with critical scholarship to pin it down.

Teresa Goddu is only one of many Americanists who have taken on this difficult task, with others making important contributions as well. Of particular significance to this project is the work of Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, both as a chronicler of the work of Charles Brockden Brown specifically in his 2011 monograph on the author, and as a scholar of the American gothic generally. In his introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to the American Gothic* (2017), Weinstock builds upon the work done by Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), and further asserts that the gothic, in its American form:

[takes] issue with the premise that America ever was a place free from history, class relations, and, one might add, other forms of social antagonism including race, gender, and religion; and... [shows] the ways in which the Gothic goes beyond elaborating and redeploying a specific set of identifiable clichés (ghosts, castles, monsters, and so forth) as it gives shape to culturally specific anxieties and tabooed desires. (2)

This practical analysis of what the American gothic *is* and what it *does* helps to contribute a sense of unity in this project's definition of the generic conventions and their overarching purpose in communicating important messages to the reader.

The detective story has a different set of conversations on the subject, but they encompass many similar social concerns. In his book, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (1976), John Cawelti says that he sees "the same ambiguous mixture of horror and fascination, of attraction and repulsion" repeating itself in mystery and crime stories, including the way that "literary crime serves as an ambiguous mirror of social values, reflecting both our overt commitments to certain principles of morality and order and our hidden resentments and animosity against these principles" (77). Cawelti's commentary on the role of crime fiction helps to establish how the genre shares certain characteristics of gothic themes as well. Dennis Porter,

in his book *The Pursuit of Crime* (1980), describes the development of the detective genre as a fiction inspired by “the American adventure tale, on the one hand, and American naturalism, on the other,” and how the effect was to “Americanize crime and detection” and invest it with “a cultural mythology wholly alien to the one found in the British model” (161-162). The way that Porter describes detective fiction echoes some of the unique American gothic themes observed by Charles Brockden Brown (i.e. “incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the Western wilderness”) but could just as easily apply to later hard-boiled authors like Hammett. Karen Halttunen’s book, *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (1982) addresses the social insecurities of society, especially the adoption of hypocritical false fronts, or social masks, to hide one’s dishonesty. Halttunen’s later book, *Murder Most Foul* (1998), discusses how American storylines of “the domestic and the sexual” each “put its own particular twist on the Gothic reconstruction of the murderer as monster” in American gothic crime stories (5). These texts contribute to the understanding of the cultural factors at play within the genre, bolstering the idea that stories often dismissed as “guilty pleasure reading” are in fact relevant to understanding the cultural discord which exists within and between American societies.

While one often finds allusions to the gothic within detective stories and investigative elements within gothic stories, this project is significant as a study of the specific overlap between the genres. Although many factors may have changed in the period from 1799-1929, the concerns of people in the United States fundamentally have not. Throughout, people have clung to their rationalist investment in logic and order while simultaneously, and even subconsciously, wishing to buck the norms and reject the control imposed by the written and unwritten laws of the land. The work of these scholars and others create a framework for exploration of the societal

significance of the genre, leading to greater understanding and appreciation of the value of its cultural critiques.

This project adds to the understanding of gothic detective fiction as an important cultural registry of social concerns through a close examination of key texts to engage with each author's stylistic contributions and cultural concerns and illustrate a continuous arc of development over time. By isolating the individual connection between each author and their own version of the gothic detective form, I show why this particular mode of genre fiction represents an engagement not only with stories, but with the ideologies of the societies that produced them. Greater understanding of each author's contemporary societal concerns gives us a stronger connection with the literature and forges a closer relationship between readers and culture.

Definition of Key Terms

In an effort toward greater clarity, it's important to understand the specific definitions and working context of language which will be used within this project. Firstly, there are distinct differences between the American gothic and the earlier European gothic of the past. The two are most distinguishable by the latter's elements rooted in the supernatural, such as monsters, mythical creatures, and ghosts as well as locations with long, dark histories like castles, abbeys, and convents, and with a distinct sense of oppression against societal "others," especially Catholics and those perceived as foreigners. The American gothic, as a response to those conventions, features elements which often seem fantastic or supernatural but which are actually uncanny and quite real. The sense of fear is often rooted in the nation's history of oppression against vulnerable populations.

There is also a marked distinction between the earlier formative American "mysteries of detection" and later detective fiction, with the former featuring stories whose primary focus is on

the mystery at hand rather than its solution, and whose primary investigator only coincidentally becomes involved in the case, without any direct, professional intention. These stories typically predate and include Poe's Dupin trilogy, although there are still some authors adopting this style of writing today. The more specialized "detective story" features a primary investigator who is consciously taking up the investigation of a problem or crime, often for a fee, and who seeks to solve their case through logic and practical deduction. The key here is that this individual represents a more professional version of the investigator.

Lastly, three of the emergent themes in this project include the threat of extreme jeopardy looming over the characters, a hostile environment so toxic that it is often as relevant to the plot as any character, and the removal of false fronts assumed by society to hide their duplicity. The element of extreme jeopardy is important because it represents the threat of imminent harm, targeting specific individuals but in vague, nonspecific ways, and evoking a sense of terror in the characters. Typically this is a threat to expose secrets or some kind of actual, physical, harm. The hostile environment reflects the corrupted image of the story's contemporary society with a danger which originates within the location or setting of the story itself, often featuring unique regional concerns such as class difference, corruption, oppression, or a combination of the three. These characteristics can be viewed as deeply-rooted flaws in the moral fabric of society. The removal of false fronts serves to provide a remedy, as the investigator seeks to recognize the artificial masks donned by the unethical, immoral, and duplicitous characters, often villains, who adopt a public persona to allow them greater freedom of movement in social settings or in committing their crimes. It is the detective's responsibility to neutralize the threat of the gothic spectre which hangs over their world.

Exploring the gothic detective genre through the frame of these three conventions allows for greater specificity and a narrower scope of inquiry. An additional point of examination is the New World reliance upon Enlightenment Reason, which infused the American gothic with a rationality which did not exist in the European version and which encouraged authors to find more striking, bizarre, and “realistic” means of evoking a sense of unease and outright terror in the minds of their readers. It is through careful scrutiny of these themes, within their various contexts, that we learn to appreciate their inherent value to the discussion of moral corruption and other important topics described in investigative gothic texts.

By understanding the intent behind the language used here, it will be easier to understand and communicate the different generic elements which combine to create a particular effect and an important commentary on sociocultural conditions and concerns over a period of remarkable generic development.

Chapter Summary

Each chapter of this project discusses an individual author who made significant contributions to the evolution of the gothic detective genre from mysteries of detection through detective fiction. While these five authors certainly do not represent the sum total of all investigative, mystery, gothic, or detective fiction published in the United States from 1799-1929, they do provide an important series of steppingstones to lead from development to development. Each individual author, and their respective texts, make a specific impact on how the American genre took shape and how they engaged with their readers. Through a careful study of the work of Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Anna Katharine Green, Mark Twain, and Dashiell Hammett, a clear picture begins to emerge of how each author sought to observe and critique their society, drawing attention to the injustices and transgressions they observed

and highlighting how the New World reliance on Reason and logic was not always practical or possible.

In Chapter 1, “‘How Imperfect are the Grounds of all our Decisions’: Gothic Mysteries of Detection and Charles Brockden Brown,” I discuss how Brown experimented with an early form of detective fiction, the “mystery of detection,” in his novels *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly*. Both novels have distinct gothic overtones, but they also present scenarios where an individual person investigates crimes in their community. The stories’ preoccupation with the investigative process helps to lay the groundwork for highly original tales of detection, transgression, and death. Brown begins the tradition of casting astute, educated individuals in the role of detective to search for the truth behind their complex problems. Brown’s gothicism influences his narratives of detection by creating scenarios which appear to be supernatural but which actually have real, psychological causes. His stories speak to the instability of the human mind, especially when preyed upon by outside forces, and the differences of ability between individual investigators to overcome adversity. Brown shows how some people have what it takes to pursue their resolution, no matter how elusive, while others live too close to the edge of instability to be effective. Through his engagement with psychology, superstition, and reason, Brown explores the possibilities within the human mind and the application of logic in a world devoid of empathy or companionship.

Chapter 2, “‘An Absolute Legion of Oddities’: The Unusual Cases of M. Dupin,” addresses the three stories most often described as the “beginning” of detective fiction, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” and “The Purloined Letter.” These stories feature Poe’s detective, the chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, performing feats of what Poe calls “ratiocination” and are important examples of the crossover

between the gothic and detective fiction in his work. He began by imposing a disrupted social order onto a hazardous environment fraught with misogynistic peril which only threatens the women of his world. The detective in Poe's stories plays an important role in each tale but also he's also important for setting the standard of the modern detective prototype. Dupin must conduct his investigations in a gothic context, forcing order on chaos by objectifying it. He uses his analytical mind to study and understand the illogical circumstances. One of the detective's responsibilities in Poe's stories is to collect the facts, but also to confront the potential for evil in the human condition. He overlooks nothing, regardless of how strange or obscure. Through this combination of elements, Poe took a primitive form of literary experimentation and intentionally improved upon specific fundamentals which were then cultivated into something far more complex and generically dynamic.

In Chapter 3, "Some Secret Object of Dread': Anna Katharine Green and the Gothic Detective Story," I discuss how Anna Katharine Green marks the next step in the formative development of American gothic detective fiction by combining classical elements of the European and American gothics with elements of deduction in new ways. Her stories feature aristocratic families who cannot escape the ghosts of the past, and instances of doubling where individuals bear striking physical resemblances but with entirely different moral dispositions. Green brings the gothic into the domestic sphere, which results in a complete disorder where nothing is ever as it seems. Through the intervention of a clever, logical detective, she shows how people can never escape the shadow cast by their ancestors, but a kind of peaceful resolution can be reached by the domestication of the gothic threat into a less harmful version of itself, if only temporarily. One of her unique contributions is death by mechanical device which results in the victim dying alone, unattended, and sometimes even behind a locked door. The fact

that Green's crimes usually occur within and between families allows for a greater possibility that the gothic "monster" will be defanged, and she shows how intimate relationships cannot be trusted in the moment, but there is some possibility of a future trust, and a future peace, if only the sins of the ancestors can be left behind. The detective's act of domesticating the gothic is what really sets Green apart from other authors.

Chapter 4, "'Natal Signatures': Devotion and Deception in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," takes on Mark Twain's important novel which experiments with satire to expose and criticize power differences in his society, especially those rooted in racial oppression and violence. Twain's historical novel sought to describe life in slaveholding territory by creating a series of comparisons and contrasts between characters to highlight the absurdity of white supremacy and warn of the dangers associated with too much power. Twain's satire inspires a kind of derision where the reader and the author are on one plane, and the actions taking place between the characters exist on another. Twain's satire is so bold-faced that it never acknowledges that what is taking place is a farce. Instead, the narrator provides their commentary in seemingly good faith, and the reader is left to make sense of the author's intentions with such a tone and such a tale. Twain's novel is rooted in a gothic of racial oppression which he used to highlight the search for order in a contaminated, portentously ominous atmosphere of guilt and dread. Add to that the elements of an investigative mystery, and the result is a distinct exploration into cultural and systemic oppression in the guise of a detective story.

The final chapter, "'A Reasonable Amount of Trouble': Dashiell Hammett's Hard-Boiled Gothic," marks the terminal point for this type of generic development, focusing upon how Hammett's detectives exist in a fundamentally flawed world where the distinctions between good and evil are hopelessly blurred. Hammett transported his readers to the gritty, realistic world of a

corrupted urban America where danger lurked around every corner. By refusing to abide by the rules of polite society and instead immersing himself in the gritty realities of organized crime, bootlegging, and murder, Hammett's new hard-boiled detective assumes the role of gothic transgressor, wild west gunslinger, and polluted urban hero all in one. Hammett incorporated a broad scheme of traditionally gothic elements into his fiction while also eliminating domestic ties from the life of the detective. Hammett's sleuths exist in a domestic vacuum where they work in isolation from romantic or familial relationships. This is a pronounced departure from earlier mystery and detective stories where the relationships between people are often a key factor of the investigation. These detectives doggedly pursue their objective and operate according to their own moral codes. Hammett's gothic worlds are full of bizarre, ominous scenes and imagery which are simply not present in other types of detective fiction. His California is a hostile place of radical uncertainty, where the detective must work to uncover the truth and unmask the perpetrators who often hide behind a false façade of upright respectability.

Although there are many different iterations of gothic and detective fiction, the combination of the two genres produced some of the most striking literature over the course of 130 years. By following the arc of development within the gothic detective genre from the mysteries of detection in Charles Brockden Brown to the hard-boiled detective fiction of Dashiell Hammett, we gain a certain understanding of cultural and societal concerns in the United States during this period. A close examination of these key authors and texts reveals how influential this type of literature has become, and how it has created a stronger relationship between reader and culture.

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CHAPTER ONE: "HOW IMPERFECT ARE THE GROUNDS FOR ALL OUR DECISIONS":
GOTHIC MYSTERIES OF DETECTION AND CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

In Charles Brockden Brown's bizarre gothic novel, *Wieland; or, the Transformation* (1798), the narrator, Clara Wieland, and her circle of cultured, well-read friends are subject to the strange interjections of disembodied voices which seem to alternately seek to protect them and then draw them into harm's way. The origin of these voices cannot be ascertained, which inspires a sense of curiosity in Clara's mind, but she is not actually alarmed until she awakens one night to the sound of voices arguing near her bed. She relays her harrowing experience, saying:

I started, but gave no audible token of alarm. I was so much mistress of my feelings, as to continue listening to what should be said...

'Stop, stop, I say; madman as you are! there are better means than that. Curse upon your rashness! There is no need to shoot...'

'Why not? I will draw a trigger in this business, but perdition be my lot if I do more...'

'Coward! stand aside, and see me do it. I will grasp her throat; I will do her business in an instant; she shall not have time so much as to groan...'

Murderers lurked in my closet... One resolved to shoot, and the other menaced suffocation... Flight instantly suggested itself as most eligible in circumstances so perilous. I deliberated not a moment; but, fear adding wings to my speed, I leaped out of bed, and scantily robed as I was, rushed out of the chamber, down stairs, and into the open air. (53-54)

Clara finally collapses at the door of her brother's house, frightened half to death. When her brother and her sister-in-law, Catherine, hear her tale, they assure her that she must have been

dreaming, and that the voices are not real. Clara, however, having actually heard them herself, does not immediately relent in her fears. Instead, she begins thinking long and hard about the possible cause of this mystery. In this one short scene, the reader is witness to an occasion of action and bravery, when Clara flies from her bedroom and out of the house to escape physical harm. Like her brother and friends, Clara has been hearing voices she cannot be sure exist, and she begins to question how and why this is so. This leads to Clara's troubling investigation into the source of their persecutions, which turns out to be the disturbed mind of an unbalanced ventriloquist. Her logical inquiry into this bizarre series of events marks the beginning of gothic detective fiction in the United States.

Clara Wieland's story is not the only instance of weird human tricks in Brown's body of work. Another novel, *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799), follows the same epistolary form and recalls the adventures of the title character as he attempts to solve the brutal murder of his friend, Waldegrave. While engaged in this task, to which he considers himself bound by honor, he also becomes preoccupied by finding the source of a neighboring laborer, Clithero's, strange behavior. As events unfold, Edgar deduces that Clithero has been sleepwalking. By the time that he realizes that he, too, is plagued by the mental aberration of somnambulism, Edgar's perception of himself and his situation has become tragically and violently skewed. He claims that he is pursuing his 'case' with noble intentions, but his actions tell a different story. Although he does find the truth behind the death of his friend Waldegrave, his pleasure in the mystery's resolution is short-lived due to the problems Edgar has created for himself in the interim, proving him not a very adept detective at all.

While Brown is generally accepted as one of the earliest gothic writers in America, he also experimented with this early form of detective fiction, the 'mystery of detection,' in his

novels *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly*. Both stories have distinct gothic overtones, but they also present scenarios where an individual person investigates crimes in their community. The stories' preoccupation with the investigative process helps to lay the groundwork for highly original tales of detection, transgression, and death. Brown begins the tradition of casting astute, educated individuals in the role of detective to work against forces of extreme jeopardy and the perils of a hostile environment to tear away the 'false fronts' of deception in their search for the truth behind their complex problems. Through a close reading of his work, it's easy to see how Charles Brockden Brown is a detective novelist whose stories are inextricably intertwined with his gothic impulses, leading to the new popular genre of American Gothic detective fiction.

Charles Brockden Brown, trained as a lawyer and later employed as an editor for *The Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (1799-1800), was also responsible for the publication of a series of gothic novels released in quick succession from 1798-1801, with *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly* particularly bearing many hallmarks of the formative gothic detective story.¹ In its earliest iterations, this took the form of 'mysteries of detection,' which predominantly featured elements of classical mystery as well as gothic spectacle. When Brown imagined his scenarios, he had a dual purpose in mind. He wished to convey a similar sense of gothic scene and tone as he found in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), but he wanted an effect which was uniquely American in shape and form. To these ends, he placed his characters in remote areas which were largely unsettled by the hand of 'civilized' humanity. His settings and characters can be found only in this harsh New World terrain where the oppression of Native peoples has

¹ Peter Kafer's book, *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of the American Gothic* (2004), gives a historical perspective on Brown's life and times, including the perception of his family and friends that the abandonment of his legal career in favor of literary work as a big waste of time. Considering the brevity of his life, dying of tuberculosis at age 39, and the larger implications of his impact on the American novel, his friends would prove to be sorely mistaken about the importance of his work.

resulted in constant conflict and bloodshed, and the distance which exists between homesteads and human relationships has left many individuals with a sense of intense privacy which inhibits their ability to speak their hearts and minds openly.

Another key feature of Brown's style is including phenomena which outwardly appear to be supernatural but which ultimately have scientific causes. This is evident in many of his novels, but the most grotesquely bizarre examples are probably found in *Edgar Huntly* and *Wieland* with their respective sleepwalking and ventriloquism, and so these works will be the focus of this discussion. Rather than simply focusing his efforts upon creating the American Godwinian novel, Brown went a step further to pose questions for which there were no simple answers and which demanded extensive investigation before the truth could be known. Brown's Gothicism influences his narratives of detection by creating scenarios which seem to defy logical explanation. By challenging his characters' ability to trust their senses, Brown further complicates their ability to effectively address their mysteries. He believes that the best way to evoke a fearful response is to use the perils present in the New World and the complexities of the human mind. In the preface to *Edgar Huntly*, Brown expressly describes his methodology of creating a unique American experience, saying:

That new springs of action and new motives to curiosity should operate, – that the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe, – may be readily conceived... One merit the writer may at least claim: – that of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the reader by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors. Puerile superstition and exploded manners, Gothic castles and chimeras, are the materials usually employed for this end.

The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the Western wilderness, are far more suitable; and for a native of America to overlook these would admit of no apology. (641)

It is against an American backdrop and with threats against the post-enlightenment American reliance upon Reason that Brown casts his stories of detection. Brown creates problems which prey upon his characters' minds until nobody is sure of what they observe with their own senses. In the end, it is the responsibility of the protagonist as investigator to make sense of the chaos into which they are thrown and to apply their own deductive logic to find a solution to their conflict. By exploring these three key elements of the gothic as they are applied to early mysteries of detection, it becomes apparent how the work of Charles Brockden Brown is a suitable place to start tracing the trajectory of gothic themes in American detective fiction.²

Hostile Environment: Districts so Romantic and Wild

The sense of place in Brown's mysteries of detection is quite powerful, to the point where the physical backdrop takes on its own role in the mystery. The hostile environment is something that Brown mentions specifically as being uniquely American and a departure from the ways of the past. In his reimagining of the gothic tale, this 'frontier gothic,' the unexplored vastness of the North American continent presents an uncultivated wilderness to intimidate and menace his characters.³ In his construction of both Mettingen, home of the Wielands, and Norwalk, home of the Huntlys, Brown illustrates places at a remote distance from the Western conception of civilization. This distance creates a physical buffer between the concentrated small groups and

² Faye Ringel discusses the larger framework of the early American gothic with respect to the influence of Puritan theology clashing with enlightenment ideology to produce new fears and insecurities in the colonists in her essay "Early American Gothic (Puritan and New Republic)" in *The Cambridge Companion to the American Gothic* (2017).

³ David Mogen, Scott P. Sanders, and Joanne B. Karpinski set out to put a name to this concept in their book, *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature* (1993), describing how the most fundamental conflicts of the American experience are the battles between civilization and nature and between old world superstition and the enlightenment of the New World.

the larger populace while also giving off a sense of psychological isolation. This leads to greater individual introspection and less communication of people's innermost thoughts. Since each person values their reputation seemingly above all else, in accordance with the social constructs of the time, the characters in these stories rely heavily upon their own counsel to preserve outward appearances despite the turmoil which might be taking place inside of them. This behavior only increases the sense of isolation and creates a greater divide between individuals. Both Clara and Edgar are attempting to conduct an investigation in less than ideal circumstances, but their solitude affects them quite differently. Clara stays true to her trust in Reason and logic to guide her, but Edgar becomes detached from his civilized self, psychologically drifting away into the wilderness.

Clara's home of Mettingen at first appears to be almost a heaven on earth, surrounded by rural splendor and beautiful natural scenery before the mysterious voice trespasses upon her serenity. Working over the facts of her investigation one afternoon, Clara walked to a favorite nook in a little shack at the far edge of her property. In this beautiful place, Clara's mind begins to peacefully wander and then to dream. In an intense moment of foreshadowing, she recalls how:

I at length imagined myself walking, in the evening twilight, to my brother's habitation. A pit, methought, had been dug in the path I had taken, of which I was not aware... I thought I saw my brother, standing at some distance before me, beckoning and calling me to make haste. He stood on the opposite edge of the gulph. I mended my pace, and one step more would have plunged me into this abyss, had not some one from behind caught suddenly my arm, and exclaimed, in a voice of eagerness and terror, "Hold! hold!" (57)

Although the dream was in her imagination, the voice was real, and Clara starts up out of her stupor in shock, realizing that hours have past and she is surrounded by impenetrable darkness. Her fear only increases when a voice is seemingly projected from the very stone, urging her to “Attend! attend! but be not terrified” (58). As she sits, shocked into inaction, upon the grassy slope, the voice continues, revealing information both frightening and contradictory. First he tells her that he is “a friend; one come, not to injure, but to save,” but then he goes on to say, “I leagued to murder you. I repent. Mark my bidding, and be safe. Avoid this spot. The snares of death encompass it... Mark me further; profit by this warning, but divulge it not. If a syllable of what has passed escape you, your doom is sealed” (59). At this point, the voice ceases to speak, leaving Clara petrified by fear and far from any human aid. When Pleyel finally comes looking for her, she is delighted to have a companion to help guide her back home. However, a schism begins to form between them due to her reticence in confiding her investigation to Pleyel, and she fears that he will either not believe her or that the voice would somehow know of her betrayal and make good on its threats against her safety.

This experience is the first of many to ensure her physical isolation from the places she loves and the psychological isolation which takes the people that she loves away from her as well. It is not enough that Clara should live in a place which allows her but few companions; Carwin desires to take it a step further. As a ‘test’ of her courage, he plots to use his special talent to terrorize her. Carwin capitalizes on the remote, isolated location to play upon her fears and whip her into a state of nervous frenzy. This unsettledness is soon reflected in all the characters’ minds, leaving Pleyel and Clara miserable, Wieland completely unhinged, and Catherine and their children dead. With nobody except Clara around to help resolve the issue, and no ‘civilized’ community to contend with, Carwin has the four friends right where he wants

them. The seemingly untouched beauty of the place becomes contaminated by fear, doubt, and violence, and the moral landscape devolves from a peaceful communion to barren depravity. Whether or not Clara is ultimately able to pin the acts on Carwin, so much damage has already been done.

Edgar's home of Norwalk, positioned at the edge of the western wilderness on the Pennsylvania border, is far rougher terrain. This "uncultivated region" was "in the highest degree rugged, picturesque, and wild," and placed in a contentious area under dispute by the local natives and the encroaching European settlers (655).⁴ After the violent death of his friend, Edgar feels compelled by honor to avenge Waldegrave's death and bring the perpetrator to some kind of justice. However, in this remote and unruly place, his aspirations soon turn into nothing short of bloodlust as he takes life after life in the guise of his noble cause. As Edgar ventures further into the wilderness, he, too, becomes wild and soon serves as an active catalyst for destruction rather than a voice of Reason. After Edgar sleepwalks into a cave and awakens to find himself trapped in a stony pit, he feels helpless and imagines himself starving to death in absolute darkness at the bottom of the ravine. His logic deserts him, and he is spurred into action. He fights his way upward despite the painful injuries from his fall, and proceeds to kill a panther with a tomahawk in self-defense. Despite the horror he feels at the death of this creature, his

⁴ Many scholars have focused upon the conflict over land ownership in *Edgar Huntly*. Chad Luck discusses the connections between *Edgar Huntly* and the Walking Purchase of 1737 which defrauded natives of their land in his article "Re-Walking the Purchase: *Edgar Huntly*, David Hume, and the Origins of Ownership" (2009). In his article "'Melancholy Wildness': The Failure of Cross-Cultural Engagement in Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and Brown's *Edgar Huntly*," Avram Alpert discusses how the aforementioned authors sought to help their readers imagine "new forms of thought, politics, and relations between cultures." Christine Yao discusses Edgar's lack of insight into the human sameness between himself and the natives in her article "Gothic Monstrosity: Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* and the Trope of the Bestial Indian" (2016). An historicist view is presented in Andrew Newman's article "'Light Might Possibly be Requisite': *Edgar Huntly*, Regional History, and Historicist Criticism," linking each character with a possible real counterpart from the 1737 Walking Purchase "land fraud" (2010).

instincts kick in, and he begins to devour the panther raw, even drinking its blood for sustenance. This scene serves as a kind of conversion point, where Edgar's constructed public façade begins to slip away, revealing the brutal survivalist within.

Where Clara had begun to doubt her sanity, Edgar only becomes more reliant upon the accuracy of his primal instincts, turning into a wild animal himself. The hostility of the environment is so great, that Edgar has an even more hostile response, reacting to the threats of man and nature with equally savage violence. All his personal connections are left behind him, and he is one man against the world, a force against the natives whom he regards as mere savages and an imminent threat. After leaving a path of bloodied brown bodies behind him, Edgar feels a sense of disgust at what he has done but also a sense of accomplishment. Resting for a moment to recover from the exertions of combat, Edgar thinks to himself that:

by a series of events impossible to be computed or foreseen, was the destruction of a band, selected from their fellows for an arduous enterprise, distinguished by prowess and skill, and equally armed against surprise and force, completed by the hand of a boy, uninured to hostility, unprovided with arms, precipitate and timorous!... Such are the subtle threads on which hang the fate of man and of the universe! (816-817)

Edgar is equal parts repulsed and impressed by what he is capable of, and since he sees the native people as somehow lesser than himself, he is rather proud of his ability to singlehandedly extinguish the lives of an entire group of men. After he has recovered somewhat from the physical exertion of killing off the last Indian, and feeling "cheered" by the appearance of the rising sun, he "left the savage where he lay, but made prize of his tomahawk... Prompted by some freak of fancy, [he] stuck his musket in the ground, and left it standing upright in the middle of the road" (817). This action is probably the most symbolic of everything Edgar does in

this story. Having removed all vestiges of civilized humanity left in him, Edgar asserts himself as the conqueror of nature and man by shooting down his enemy and violently thrusting the musket into the ground to mark his victory. What he describes as a “freak of fancy” actually reveals how far he has fallen from the studious pupil and diligent investigator. Instead, he has absorbed the hostility of his environment and morphed into a ferocious beast, little different from the so-called ‘savages’ he fights or the panther he has slain.

The physical environment in which the mystery unfolds is an integral part of detective fiction. Brown lays this groundwork as a response to his own environment, placing his “detectives” in a location with which he was himself familiar, the early American frontier. Brown’s scenes seem to demand a certain type of individual, rugged and headstrong, to survive in its harsh terrain. Although Clara is considered a lady, she is at home meandering the sprawling grounds of Mettingen, even in the dark of night. Edgar responds to his harsh surroundings with the same disregard of darkness as a threat when there are Indians and other aggressors hiding behind the unyielding terrain of desolate Norwalk. In a way, the environments are uniquely suited to the protagonists and vice versa, with Mettingen retaining a sense of abstruse beauty, similar to Clara, whom Carwin finds so alluring. For Edgar, his hidden propensity for violence seems companionable to the jutting rocks and bottomless caverns of Norwalk, matching the native ‘savages’ he fights. This begins a tradition of a story’s place playing such a significant role as to warrant their consideration as a background character, casting influence without direct interference. The setting becomes nearly as important as the person cast in the story’s starring role, and the danger of that place is all too close, and far too real.

Extreme Jeopardy: To Credit or Trust in Miraculous Agency

One of the key ways that Brown puts his characters in extreme jeopardy is by placing them in situations where they cannot trust their senses. Once a person's ability to trust their own judgement is questioned, especially when they are cast in the role of problem-solver, their investigation must necessarily suffer. In the case of Clara Wieland, this is painfully true. She, her brother Wieland, Catherine, and their friend Pleyel make up a philosophical little quartet, relying upon one another for the majority of their human interaction due to the remote location of their neighborhood. A newcomer, Carwin, tentatively joins their group, although he remains elusive about why he has come there. One night, Wieland hears a strange voice, similar to Catherine's, telling him to go home. Once there, he discovers that Catherine never left. If so, what is the cause of the voice? This awakens the curiosity of Clara and her brother, Wieland, who is unusually sensitive and religious. The next instance cannot be waved away so nonchalantly, as it was witnessed by two individuals: Wieland again, but also Pleyel.

They are walking outdoors, when the mysterious voice once again interjects its opinion into their conversation. Pleyel asks Wieland whether Catherine could be convinced to make a journey to Europe, and before Wieland can answer, "a negative was clearly and distinctly uttered from another quarter. It did not come from one side or the other, from before [them] or behind. Whence then did it come? By whose organs was it fashioned?" (41). Wieland demands of his friend, "What think you of this? This is the self-same voice which I formerly heard; you are now convinced that my ears were well informed," to which Pleyel readily asserts "yes... this, it is plain, is no fiction of the fancy" (41). They debate whether the cause of the voice might be divine, and Pleyel is struck with fear when the voice goes on to tell them that his fiancée is dead,

that “the seal of death is on her lips. Her silence is the silence of the tomb” (42). They hurry inside to see whether Catherine is there, and Clara assures them she has not budged.

With the spectre of death now hanging over the love interest of one of their own, Clara begins to ruminate seriously upon the questions surrounding the voice and whether it meant well or harm, saying “this incident was different from any that I had ever before known. Here were proofs of a sensible and intelligent existence, which could not be denied. Here was information obtained and imparted by means unquestionably super-human” (42-43). Clara is battling between believing that what her friends witnessed was some kind of hallucination or even the voice of God, although she knows this to be highly improbable.⁵ Before she has even experienced the effect of the voice firsthand, it has captivated her imagination and curiosity. She thinks to herself, “that there are conscious beings, beside ourselves, in existence, whose modes of activity and information surpass our own, can scarcely be denied. Is there a glimpse afforded us into a world of these superior beings?” (43). A battle has begun in Clara’s mind over whether the voices are divine or human in origins, and if human, what their motivation might be. Her persistent interest in the affair becomes a nuisance to its cause, Carwin, and he tries to defame Clara to eliminate her credibility and get her off his track. He uses his ventriloquism to fabricate a conversation, seemingly between Clara and himself, so that Pleyel will overhear and think Clara is a depraved harlot. Sadly, Pleyel believes the evidence of his own hearing, and berates Clara, saying “That my eyes, that my ears, should bear witness to thy fall! By no other way could detestible conviction be imparted” (96). Despite Clara’s insistence that Carwin had invaded her home in a

⁵ Jeffrey Weinstock discusses the questions *Wieland* raises about human psychology and the ability to correctly interpret the information obtained by one’s own senses in Chapter 1 of his comprehensive monograph, *Charles Brockden Brown* (2011). Bill Christophersen asserts that the Calvinist-rationalist tensions which pervade *Wieland* bring into focus the question of whether the world operated according to fixed laws decided during Creation or according to an ever-present divine agency in Chapter Three of his book *The Apparition in the Glass* (1993).

failed attempt to assault her, Pleyel believes his senses over the words of his friend. These tensions cause a significant rift to form between all members of the tight group, leaving Clara to rely upon her own intuition to prove her innocence and Carwin's guilt.

All of this turns out to be Carwin's twisted idea of entertainment. At first he used the voice to simply direct Wieland away from where he was hiding to avoid exposure. But as time went on, Carwin grew to enjoy the sense of power he experienced by interfering with these people's lives, leading to increasingly aggressive interactions which then turn into violence. Even when they are faced with the truth after Carwin's confession, it takes time for the survivors to psychologically recover from the damage which has been inflicted, and Wieland never does. While Clara and Pleyel are eventually married and do manage to get better after their terrible ordeal, they will certainly never forget their harrowing brush with Carwin.

In the case of Edgar Huntly, the extreme jeopardy plaguing him is of a very different, but equally inexplicable, type: somnambulism. Edgar is attempting to solve the recent murder of his friend Waldegrave, and as a part of his preoccupation with the crime, he makes frequent evening visits to the 'fatal elm' where his friend lost his life. During one such visit, he observes a neighboring man, Clithero, behaving strangely and digging near the tree. In his growing fascination at this man's strange actions and extreme emotional distress, Edgar suspects Clithero might be involved with his friend's death and follows him. However, the truth behind Clithero's behavior is even stranger. Edgar tells how:

My musing was rapid and incongruous. It could not fail to terminate in one conjecture, that this person was *asleep*. Such instances were not unknown to me, through the medium of conversation and books. Never, indeed, had it fallen under my own observation till

now, and now it was conspicuous, and environed with all that could give edge to suspicion and vigour to inquiry. (649)

Edgar's interest in Clithero and his troubled past soon borders on obsession, and Edgar cannot control his curiosity.⁶ He begins following Clithero and visiting the tree even more frequently in an attempt to learn all he can about his neighbor's past, with the excuse that it might be relevant to Waldegrave's death. In a move reminiscent of *Caleb Williams*, Edgar haunts his quarry relentlessly until Clithero feels the only way out is to tell Edgar his story.

This would seem to resolve the question of sleepwalking in the story, but other strange events hint toward another sufferer of the malady. One night Edgar awakens from a dream with the sudden impulse to examine Waldegrave's private papers which he had secreted in a hidden drawer in his desk before retiring for the evening. When he opens the drawer, the papers are gone, and he is at a loss for who could have taken them, as nobody even knew of their existence or location except himself. As he frantically searches his room, his uncle knocks on the door to ask what he is doing and why he has been upstairs. When Edgar assures him that he has not left his room, his uncle says "Indeed! That is strange. Nay, it is impossible! It was your feet surely that I heard pacing so solemnly and indefatigably across the long room for near an hour. I could not for my life conjecture, for a time, who it was, but finally concluded that it was you" (758). Edgar believes his uncle is mistaken and instead searches the attic for signs of an intruder, but to no avail. Nothing in the house appears to be disturbed except Edgar's peace of mind.

Edgar recounts coming home one day after searching for evidence and drifting off to sleep, but then, he gradually awakens to find himself in a living nightmare, trapped in the

⁶ Kyle Joseph Campbell posits that Brockden Brown uses the plot device of sleepwalking to illustrate how Edgar wrestles with same-sex desire in competition with homosocial desire of the men around him in his article "Walking with the Ghost: Sodomy, Sanity, and the Secular in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*" (2017).

impenetrable darkness of an underground cave. In his disordered mind, he begins to grasp the enormity of his peril, thinking to himself

What was my condition when I fell asleep? Surely it was different from the present. Then I inhabited a lightsome chamber and was stretched upon a down bed; now I was supine upon a rugged surface and immersed in palpable obscurity. Then I was in perfect health; now my frame was covered with bruises and every joint was racked with pain. What dungeon or den had received me, and by whose command was I transported hither? (780)

As his natural instinct to survive kicks in and forces him onto his feet and into action, Edgar must set aside his astonishment at finding himself in such a predicament. Torn away from his investigations of Waldegrave and Clithero, Edgar hardly gives them a second thought as he fights for survival. During the latter half of the book, Edgar appears to have abandoned both his cause and his sanity, raising doubts of whether he was ever really committed to the investigation of Waldegrave's death in the first place, or whether he merely felt bound by a duty of honor.

Edgar only begins to understand the truth about his mental aberration and sleepwalking at the end of the story. At his reunion with his tutor, Sarsefield, Edgar learns that the mystery of the disappearance of Waldegrave's papers has been solved. While Edgar, himself, did not believe that he was the one pacing about in his uncle's attic that night, Sarsefield disagreed and caused the room to be searched, asserting that "Instances similar to this have heretofore occurred. Men have employed anxious months in search of that which, in a freak of noctambulation, was hidden by their own hands" (868). Sarsefield soon found Waldegrave's papers, "carefully concealed between the rafters and shingles of the roof, in a spot where, if suspicion had not been previously excited, they would have remained till the vernal rains and the summer heats had insensibly destroyed them" (868). Despite Edgar's unwillingness to believe that he, too, suffers from

sleepwalking, Sarsefield can see right through his protests to the truth. Edgar continuously maintained that he was in danger from an unknown assailant, when in reality *he* was the one moving things around and walking in his sleep. His world is turned upside down, and his credibility as well as his sanity are under attack.

While there are many elements of extreme jeopardy present in Charles Brockden Brown's work, those of ventriloquism and somnambulism are just weird enough to be interesting.⁷ The thought of losing the capacity to accurately gauge one's senses is frankly terrifying to most people, and in the cases of Clara and Edgar, this proves true. Clara is certainly frightened at the thought of being ravished by a ne'er do well outcast, but she is equally interested in resolving the disconnect between what she has heard and what she has seen. She suspects that Carwin is to blame for what transpired in her bedroom closet, including the overheard conversation between the murderous voices and the 'saving' voice telling her to "Hold!" rather than open the closet door, not to mention his presence in her closet so many hours after she had gone to bed for the night. Clara struggles to find sanctuary in an intellect which has always served her so well. Although she is bold enough to face the fears she can see, her bravery does waver a bit when her logical gaze is turned inward to examine the unexplained.

Edgar's reaction to the strangeness of his situation is one of extreme activity. He restlessly wanders the environs of Norwalk at night, searching his mind and the countryside for the culprit behind Waldegrave's untimely death. His constant action seems always intended to bring him away from his own problems and toward a solution to the problems of others. While Edgar presents himself as a paragon of virtue in his quest to exact justice and avenge his friend's death, its easy derailment in favor of investigating Clithero hints to the reader that maybe

⁷ Brown actually published another story, entitled "Somnambulism: A Fragment," anonymously in *The Literary Magazine and American Register* in 1805, showing his preoccupation with the subject.

Edgar's heart is not really in this endeavor. His savage violence against the natives, too, seems out of place until he mentions that his parents were killed in a native conflict.⁸ As his grasp upon reality is gradually loosened to the point of becoming full-blown feral, Edgar regresses from the studious young townsman into an all-out killing machine, capable of taking on whole gangs of men singlehandedly. Where the investigator ends and the warrior begins becomes a hopelessly blurred line.

The detection present in *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly* is a fascinating spectacle to behold. Brown clearly had no qualms with casting a woman in the leading role as he does in *Wieland*, and Clara is a character in a million. Both intellectually adept and level-headed, Clara is not the type of person to let her emotions lead the way. Logic and reason are her guideposts, and even in incredibly adverse circumstances, such as the aftermath of her brother's unspeakable crimes against his family, Clara suspects a human hand in the affair; namely, Carwin's. In an interesting contrast, Edgar is also described as being educated by his tutor, Sarsefield, but his decisions are often hasty and spur of the moment. Where Clara is slow to act or judge, Edgar flies by the seat of his pants, following his impulses from place to place. The state of a detective's mind is crucial to their investigation. By placing the investigator in a position where they cannot rely upon the facts they are provided, Brown begins a long tradition of opposing the detective's actions, which sometimes seem illogical, with their innate ability to doggedly get to the bottom of complex problems through sheer dedication, endurance, and curiosity. While Brown's investigators have

⁸ Arthur G. Kimball's article, "Savages and Savagism: Brockden Brown's Dramatic Irony" (1967) states that the Native American people in *Edgar Huntly* are really foils for the "savage potential" of Edgar himself. Jared Gardner believes that the presence of the novel's native people has less to do with the question of what is civilized than what it means to be American, as he states in his article "Alien Nation: Edgar Huntly's Savage Awakening" (1994). Going in a different direction, Christopher Stampono's article "A 'Spirit of Mistaken Benevolence': Civilizing the Savage in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*" (2015), posits that the novel makes the transatlantic political claim that all "nonwhite 'savages' must be either imprisoned or killed."

mixed results, with Clara resolving her problems much more neatly than Edgar, each relies upon the little voice inside of them, their gut instinct if you will, to prompt their next move. Between them, Edgar is quick to violence while Clara is more inclined to self-harm than to harm another person. These choices are early examples of the association between detectives and violence which would become established fixtures of gothic detective fiction. Even in early mysteries of detection such as these, certain elements were emerging, such as the hazards of extreme jeopardy, to threaten the progress of the investigator, and these elements would come to be staples of the genre.

Tearing Away False Fronts: The Dignity of Virtue, and the Force of Truth

Most readers would probably agree that what makes the detective story or the mystery of detection so compelling is the person conducting the investigation. It's not necessary to actually like this person, but they must be sufficiently interesting enough to warrant the reader's attention. Charles Brockden Brown created complex individuals for this role, and the insight behind their actions are not always clear. While Clara seems like the type of person to be up front and accurate in her recounting of events to her unnamed 'friends' positioned as the readers of her narrative, Edgar's retelling of his experiences seems grandiose, exaggerated, and inclined to portray him in the most favorable light to his betrothed, Mary, to whom his missive is addressed.⁹ But even with his efforts at censorship, he still betrays the instability of his character and mind. Edgar and Clara are both positioned as the seekers of truth; they just look for it in very different ways.

⁹ Mark Edelman Boren's article "Abortgraphism and the Weapon of Sympathy in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly: Or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker*" (2009) asserts that Mary Waldegrave is pregnant and that Edgar is unconscionably negligent by leaving her and misrepresenting his adventures to gain her sympathy.

For Clara, the struggle between fear and reason is often surmounted by the latter. Until she comes under actual attack by Carwin, she relies upon her own powers of logic to guide her in times of stress. Her efforts to learn the cause of the strange occurrences near her home eventually result in a full-blown murder investigation surrounding Carwin and his potential part in her brother's terrible crimes. Even though he is soon recognized as a wanted criminal, nobody else seems to suspect Carwin of these recent transgressions because they cannot explain how he might accomplish them. Clara, however, feels strongly that Carwin is the cause of their mutual distress and determines to get to the bottom of his guilt. After being caught in her closet, he confessed his foiled plans to rape her, attributing her deliverance to the divine intervention of an otherworldly presence of mysterious means. While she does not necessarily believe his explanation at the time, she does seek out a later opportunity to question him further regarding his involvement in their local chaos and the death of her brother's family. When this is granted, Carwin admits to her: "I have deceived you: I have sported with your terrors: I have plotted to destroy your reputation. I come now to remove your errors; to set you beyond the reach of similar fears; to rebuild your fame as far as I am able" (182-183). Clara demands a complete recital of his deeds, which Carwin provides, albeit in a potentially revisionist fashion which exculpates him from having urged on Wieland's terrible crimes.

Carwin explains how he first discovered his unique ability (which Brown calls 'biloquism'), and sought to develop the skill to an expert level. He tells Clara that "for a time the possession of so potent and stupendous an endowment elated me with pride. Unfortified by principle, subjected to poverty, stimulated by headlong passions, I made this powerful engine subservient to the supply of my wants, and the gratification of my vanity" (184). His actions eventually led to his fleeing the United States for Europe and then stealing back again once he

experienced similar results in his new home. He never learned from his mistakes and settled in the region surrounding the remote Mettingen in hopes of avoiding detection by the authorities which pursued him. After Carwin developed a love affair with Clara's servant, Judith, and heard stories about her, he became fixated on the lady of the house. He tells Clara how Judith "chiefly dwelt upon your courage, because she herself was deficient in that quality. You held apparitions and goblins in contempt. You took no precautions against robbers. You were just as tranquil and secure in this lonely dwelling, as if you were in the midst of a crowd. Hence a vague project occurred to me, to put this courage to the test" (187). The result of these 'tests' was that Carwin grew only more disgusted with Clara's fortitude and persistence in the face of adversity, and out of spite resolved to ruin her altogether.

The opportunity presented itself when Pleyel was approaching her home one evening. Carwin darted behind some bushes and proceeded to begin a conversation just loudly enough to persuade Pleyel that Clara had fallen willingly, and irretrievably, from grace, at the hands of a degenerate despoiler. Carwin tells Clara how Pleyel:

stopped, turned, listened, approached, and overheard a dialogue whose purpose was to vanquish his belief in a point where his belief was most difficult to vanquish. I exerted all my powers to imitate your voice, your general sentiments, and your language. Being master, by means of your journal, of your personal history and most secret thoughts, my efforts were the more successful. When I reviewed the tenor of this dialogue, I cannot believe but that Pleyel was deluded. When I think of your character, and of the inferences which this dialogue was intended to suggest, it seems incredible that this delusion should be produced... yet the imposture amounted to proof which the most jealous scrutiny would find to be unexceptionable. (194-195)

In this shocking betrayal, Carwin uses the information he has garnered by reading Clara's diary to turn her friend against her and ruin her reputation. With the amount of value placed upon a woman's chastity in this period, Brown knew that this particular offense against Clara's honor would enflame his readers' anger. Just as Midas turned everything he touched into gold, Carwin maliciously turns everything around him to misery for his own amusement.

Although most women would have wilted under the pressure of this constant barrage of terror, horror, and humiliation, Clara is made of sterner stuff. She has faith in her own worth and her ability to unravel this mystery and bring the person responsible to light. She believes that Carwin is the cause, and she is soon vindicated in that belief. Even after her uncle tells her that Carwin has not been seen since the discovery of the Wieland family murders, and that Carwin's agency in the crime is "a mystery still unsolved," she persists, saying that his guilt must be an "unavoidable inference" (149). Only then is she told that it was her brother who actually perpetrated the terrible crimes against his family, all due to the command he received from the voice of God.

Clara is immediately suspicious about the coincidence of two otherworldly voices just happening to communicate with their isolated little group, and she makes the seemingly logical deduction that Carwin must have taken part in the voices which resulted in so much heartbreak. He denies it, but Clara cannot bring herself to fully believe him. Brown puts Clara in a place where evidence does not necessarily lead to the correct conclusion, no matter how convincing it seems. Clara believes Carwin guilty of all the instances of mysterious voices in Mettingen, but aside from the episodes Clara witnesses firsthand, the reader doesn't really know for sure if the voices her brother heard were even the same voice. Brown leaves that point, and the combustion of the elder Wieland, unaddressed, but at least there is the possibility of a happier future. At the

story's conclusion, Clara and Pleyel are married and living in Europe, and even Carwin is given a chance at a happy future despite all of the suffering he has caused. Although there is no clear resolution to the mysteries which have tormented her, Brown offers Clara a distinct sense of hope and regeneration after a long period of intense sorrow.

The story of Edgar Huntly offers no such consolation. In many respects he is the same as Clara, seeking a solution to the strange problem surrounding his friend. However, their temperaments, personalities, and moral framework are vastly different, leading to much different results in their investigations. Edgar is intelligent; his tutoring by Sarsefield has proven that much. He seems to prefer solitude to socializing and to hold his fiancée, Mary Waldegrave, the sister of his deceased friend, in high esteem. However, the more we learn from Edgar, the more his comments seem to have ulterior motives beyond what he communicates. He explicitly states that his:

thoughts reverted into some degree of bitterness. [He thought] that to ascertain the hand who killed [his] friend was not impossible, and to punish the crime was just. That to forbear inquiry or withhold punishment was to violate [his] duty to [his] God and to mankind... Lately [he] had viewed this conduct with shame and regret; but in the present state of [his] mind it assumed the appearance of conformity with prudence, and [he] felt [himself] irresistibly prompted to repeat [his] search. (645-646)

This seems like an honorable response for a man who wished to avenge his friend's honor and to afford some kind of justice to the victim's family and friends. However, although his methodology seems like sound detective work (i.e. searching the scene of the crime, interviewing witnesses, and looking for evidence), he does not stay committed to it for very long. Instead, he becomes distracted by the strange actions of his neighbor, Clithero, eventually abandoning the

entire murder investigation and switching to the pursuit of Clithero's secret. Even that quickly devolves into a tale of all-out survival and adventure as Edgar rescues a young girl held captive by local Indians, sparking a conflict which leads him across the territory, simultaneously fighting with natives and making his way back home.

Because the novel is set up in epistolary style, we are only given Edgar's point of view for the first long section of the novel. He relates his extreme hardships in lurid detail to his betrothed, as he assures her of the purity of his intentions and the gloriousness of his valor. His tale is truly astonishing when one considers that he is only a young man, and a bookish type at that. Having tracked Clithero into the wild and forced his secret from him, Edgar takes on the role of caregiver in bringing the inconsolable man provisions during his attempts at suicide by starvation. He next cleaves a panther's head in two with a tomahawk, and then valiantly fights his way through a pack of bloodthirsty adversaries to wind up back at home, really none the worse for wear. Despite the investigation of Waldegrave's murder being the stated purpose of Edgar's life at this time, he soon forgets about it, only sporadically remembering his responsibility to his friend. Even Waldegrave's fate at the hands of a vengeful native is revealed almost as an afterthought, while whole chapters are devoted to Clithero's tale and Edgar's adventures in the wilderness.

If Brown intended to make Edgar his investigative character in this story, why is Edgar so bad at it?¹⁰ Clearly this must be by design, but Brown leaves the enigmatic solution up in the air.

¹⁰ Many scholars have debated whether *Edgar Huntly* is or is not actually a detective story. William Hedges calls *Edgar Huntly* an "abortive detective story" in his article "Charles Brockden Brown and the Culture of Contradictions" (1974). Beverly R. Voloshin describes Huntly's "detective work" as projecting him into the "center of horror" in her article "'Edgar Huntly' and the Coherence of the Self" (1988). Jared Gardner refers to *Edgar Huntly* as a "detective story" in his article "Alien Nation: Edgar Huntly's Savage Awakening" (1994). Larry Landrum describes *Edgar Huntly* as the "first detective novel in America" in his chapter on the novel in *American Mystery and Detective Novels: A Reference Guide* (1999). Justine S. Murison says Edgar is "acting the detective" in digging up Clithero's papers from under the Elm in her article "The Tyranny of Sleep: Somnambulism, Moral Citizenship, and Charles Brockden Brown's Edgar Huntly" (2009). Carol Margaret

The reader is given some clue to the true state of things in the appended letters between Edgar and Sarsefield. These reveal that Edgar's actions have been perceived as imprudent and even dangerous. The trust he has invested in Clithero has been misplaced, which he does not realize until the man declares that his destiny is to kill Sarsefield's wife, saying "if she be alive, then am I reserved for the performance of a new crime" (894). Edgar unknowingly lets the violent lunatic escape, but he writes ahead to Sarsefield to let him know. The letter is intercepted by Mrs. Sarsefield, who is so frightened that she then miscarries her baby, adding yet another death to the grim total. After all the tales of bloody glory from Edgar, Sarsefield sends him a scathing response, saying "I find it hard to forbear commenting on your rashness in no very mild terms. You acted in direct opposition to my counsel and to the plainest dictates of propriety" (897). Sarsefield is frustrated beyond measure at Edgar's willful negligence which is really only a continuation of his behavior all along. Although on the surface Edgar talks a good game, his true abilities fall far short of the mark for being a successful investigator. Even the cause of Waldegrave's death is not revealed by Edgar, but by a local native woman named Old Deb, who was apprehended for her part in a raid on the village.¹¹ Without her, Edgar would have absolutely nothing to show for his efforts except a significant amount of bloodshed.

Both Clara and Edgar are independent thinkers who rely heavily upon their own intuition to guide them through bizarre gothic encounters. However, their results are far different due to

Davison lists "detective fiction" as one of the ingredients in CBB's hodgepodge of style in Chapter 9 of *A Companion to American Gothic* (2014), and Stephen Knight describes Huntly as a detective in Chapter 2 of his *Secrets of Crime Fiction Classics* (2015).

¹¹ Matthew Wynn Sivils discusses Old Deb in *Edgar Huntly* as a representative of the Native peoples displaced by European encroachment who is at least somewhat justified in her plots due to the cruelties suffered by herself and others like her in his article "Native American Sovereignty and Old Deb in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*" (2001). Janie Hinds writes about the "aesthetic configurations" of animals, Native Americans, and storytelling in *Edgar Huntly* which she believes are Brown's contribution to the race debates taking place around him in her article "Deb's Dogs: Animals, Indians, and Postcolonial Desire in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*" (2004).

their mismatched personalities. While Clara appears to be quite suited to detective work despite the nicety of her manners, Edgar, who might outwardly appear a more suitable candidate, winds up an abysmal failure. Their commonalities seem to outweigh their differences, but with quite uncommon results. Whether his characters are gothic transgressors or have been transgressed against themselves, Brown's fiction considers the implications of opposing reason and superstition (or religion) against one another to challenge individual perceptions of reality. His investigators are not outwardly exceptional individuals, but they possess an inward necessity to seek the truth behind the problems they encounter. Neither is willing to be satisfied by supernatural causes or misleading falsehoods, disregarding what others might consider to be concrete evidence of otherworldly interference. This old-world gothic mysticism is dispelled by new-world reasonability, which has become a hallmark of American gothic detective fiction.

Detective fiction in general revolves around the actions and instincts of the investigative character. In Brown's mystery of detection, he relies heavily upon the first-person narrator to guide the reader through their complex encounters. However, not every fact or deduction is fully revealed for what it really is, leaving the reader, and sometimes even the detective it seems, in a position of limited knowledge until very near the end of the story. These stylistic choices in Brown's writing are fundamental elements in the construction of many detective stories, showing a preoccupation with the search for truth in the face of many aggravating circumstances. The unique construction of this one individual, despite their imperfections, is the catalyst for all of the events which take place in the story. Without the fearless investigator, detective fiction would lose much of its appeal.

Parting Thoughts

Everything has a beginning, a starting place where someone has taken a risk and tried something bold and different. The origins of gothic detective fiction in the United States are no less auspicious. Charles Brockden Brown and his handful of unusual novels mark a particular point of origin for the mysteries of detection to begin their transformation into detective fiction. He experimented with different elements of gothic fiction, for which he has been amply recognized, but he also introduced a series of story elements which fall outside the realm of the gothic and established a new kind of experience for his readers. For Brown's investigators, the biggest mystery lies inside themselves. By designing complex problems which seem supernatural but actually occur within the confines of the natural world, Brown engaged his readers as investigators themselves, taking them along in the search for a solution. Regardless of how strange the situation might be, it *should* be possible to address it according to scientific inquiry, and Brown engages with the post-Enlightenment reliance upon logic and reason to play with his readers' beliefs that everything ought to be explainable. By adding a psychological dimension to the mix, especially prior to any formal study of the human mind, Brown is able to increase the strangeness of his tale without the crutch of the supernatural to aid him. In his conception, there is nothing stranger than the human mind. The tying together of gothic and investigative modes of writing into one neatly conjoined genre provided new psychological sensations for readers, who had never seen anything quite like it before.

Brown imagined his investigators outside of the usual scope of the role, embodying a variety of human qualities which combine, to greater or lesser success, to create character prototypes which outwardly seem ideally suited to the inquiries they investigate. Just as the investigators are uniquely matched with their environments, so, too, are they uniquely fitted to the crimes they investigate. Brown calls upon his protagonists to connect disparate elements

from within the story to create a cohesive narrative explaining events which have thus far defied explanation. In the two stories discussed here, he challenges the investigators' senses directly, assaulting their concept of reason and pushing them from a world of logical certainty to one of doubt. Within this no-man's land of moral disquietude, Brown's investigators have the opportunity to learn much about themselves and their cases. Whether they choose to take advantage of this chance at personal growth or ignore it to focus only on the problem at hand remains up to them. In some cases, as in that of Edgar Huntly, the detective proves to be frustratingly obtuse and lacking in self-awareness. These unflattering personality pitfalls can also be seen in the later detectives to come. Not everyone can be as steady and intelligent as Clara, although she has her weak points, too.

Through a close examination of Brown's writing, it is possible to find a starting place for the evolution of American gothic detective fiction. He offers two distinct examples of individuals working to solve problems in the hostile terrain of early America at a time when nobody else was writing anything similar. His influence is easily observed in the work of authors to follow, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Anna Katherine Green, Mark Twain, and Dashiell Hammett, among many others, in that they either incorporate or offer a response to the fictional elements Brown first employed in his early mysteries of detection. His stories speak to the instability of the human mind, especially when preyed upon by outside forces, and the differences of ability between individual investigators to overcome adversity. While some people, like Clara, have what it takes to pursue their resolution, no matter how elusive, others, like Edgar, live too close to the edge of instability to be effective. Tapping into his fascination with psychology, superstition, and reason, Brown explores the possibilities within the human mind and the possible applications for logic in a world devoid of empathy or companionship. Through his experimental efforts, he established

the foundations for the gothic detective genre which has inspired the creativity of future generations of writers and evolved into one of the most popular genres in the world.

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CHAPTER TWO: “AN ABSOLUTE LEGION OF ODDITIES”:
THE UNUSUAL CASES OF M. DUPIN

In the story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” by Edgar Allan Poe, featuring his special detective, the chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, he describes a pair of especially gruesome murders which have occurred right in the middle of the city of Paris. Dupin, drawn to the crimes by their oddity, takes one strategic look around their home to determine not only the motivation behind the attacks, but the culprit as well. Dupin places an ad in the local papers to lure the perpetrator, or at least the perpetrator’s “accomplice,” to him:

CAUGHT—In the Bois de Boulogne, early in the morning of the—inst... a very large, tawny Ourang-Outang of the Bornese species. The owner, (who is ascertained to be a sailor, belonging to a Maltese vessel,) may have the animal again, upon identifying it satisfactorily, and paying a few charges arising from its capture and keeping...

The narrator, responding to the ad, asks Dupin “How was it possible... that you should know the man to be a sailor, and belonging to a Maltese vessel?” To which Dupin replies:

I do not know it... I am not sure of it. Here, however, is a small piece of ribbon, which... has evidently been used in tying the hair in one of those long queues of which sailors are so fond... Now if, after all, I am wrong in my induction from this ribbon, that the Frenchman was a sailor belonging to a Maltese vessel, still I can have done no harm in saying what I did in the advertisement. If I am in error, he will merely suppose that I have been misled by some circumstance into which he will not take the trouble to inquire. But if I am right, a great point is gained. (425)

This scene is a good example of the very weirdness of Poe’s stories, conjuring images of supernatural-seeming incidents where the truth seems impossible to find. The reality of the L’Espanaye case is actually stranger than the “usual” everyday violence against women, and

Dupin, from his position as a societal outsider, is able to explain the situation for what it is without being blinded by the typical limitations of human perception.

Edgar Allan Poe's imagination is responsible for the creation of a whole new gothic in the United States. His preoccupation with horrific violence, psychological tension, unpredictable acts, and an atmosphere which is both "grotesque and arabesque" have substantially contributed to his reputation as a creative pioneer in American gothic literature. His gothic stories are known for their themes of brutality, revenge, hypocrisy, mental aberration, dead women, the surreal, and the uncanny. All of these elements contribute to the "unity of effect" in his writing, which Poe explains as a necessary attribute for any work which can be read in one sitting, essentially poetry and short stories ("Philosophy of Composition" 140). Poe was a reader of Charles Brockden Brown, and he innovated upon Brown's mysteries of detection by his development of "ratiocination," a far more exact manner of investigating problems.¹ The stories featuring Poe's special detective are important examples of the crossover between the gothic and detective fiction in his work.² In these stories, women are in constant danger, but the detective, a social outlier, is not impacted by the crimes. The chosen subjects for Poe's victims are so often women, and he has said that the death "of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" ("Philosophy of Composition" 144). Following this inclination, Poe also uses these stories to offer criticism of the societal fear of "others," particularly foreigners, within Paris and other urban areas.

¹ Stephen Knight discusses the common perception that Poe was the originator of crime fiction in Chapter 3 of his book, *Secrets of Crime Fiction Classics: Detecting the Delights of 21 Enduring Stories* (2014) and explains how that idea is contradicted by the writing of authors such as William Godwin and Charles Brockden Brown, who also created inquiries into hidden crime, human duality, and the impact of strict social rules.

² Alfred Bendixson's chapter "Romanticism and the American Gothic" in *The Cambridge Companion to the American Gothic* (2017) defines the detective story as a genre that seems to oppose gothic terror due to its faith in the power of human reason, in the form of the detective.

Poe's gothic detective stories are a deliberate crossover of the two genres, joining together elements of deduction and dark absurdity in a place which is dark, dreary, crumbling, and old. Dupin is a societal outsider in this place, preferring the darkness of evening to the light of day, and the companionship of one friend to all the genius of Paris. Dupin's roommate, the narrator, explains how:

It was a freak of fancy in my friend... to be enamored of the Night for her own sake; and into this bizarrerie, as into all his others, I quietly fell; giving myself up to his wild whims with a perfect abandon... we then busied our souls in dreams—reading, writing, or conversing, until warned by the clock of the advent of the true Darkness. Then we sallied forth into the streets arm in arm... roaming far and wide until a late hour, seeking, amid the wild lights and shadows of the populous city, that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observation can afford. (“Murders in the Rue Morgue” 401)

These cerebral night-dwellers consciously reject most concepts of societal “normalcy” and instead spend their time sequestered among their books or parading about the slumbering metropolis. Their unusual preferences make them ideally suited to investigate strange events occurring in strange places.

The detective in Poe's stories plays an important role in each tale but also an important role in setting the standard for the prototype of modern detectives. Dupin must conduct his investigations in a gothic context, forcing order on chaos by objectifying it. He uses his analytical mind to study and understand the illogical circumstances. One of the detective's responsibilities in Poe's stories is to collect the facts, but also to confront the potential for evil in the human condition. He overlooks nothing, reducing third-party accounts to only the most essential details, regardless of how strange or obscure. For example, Poe's use of an orangutan as

the perpetrator in the L’Espanaye women’s murders is both totally unprecedented yet somehow entirely indicated when all of the facts are presented and arranged in the mind of Dupin. Poe places reason in tension with *un*reason by showing how forcing an organizational structure on an unpredictable world does not make it any less dangerous. It is only an attempt at rational explanation, and then the world goes back to usual where danger prevails. Poe designs highly unusual and complex crimes which cannot always be solved in a reasonable way. In gothic fiction, people, places, and things are often the opposite of what they seem. Things that are not usually threatening become exactly that, and safety is elusive. People behave in strange ways, which contributes to the sense of extreme jeopardy and the harsh environment. Danger is always lurking in unexpected places. Poe’s select application of risk to only some characters (women), while in the precincts of a gothic urban wasteland, set the tone that so many authors have imitated. Through a close reading of his stories “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” and “The Purloined Letter,” certain details begin to emerge which contribute directly to the development of the gothic detective genre and mark a distinct shift from “mysteries of detection” toward “detective fiction.”

Extreme Jeopardy: Grotesque and Arabesque

The hazards which exist in the world of Dupin are many and often bizarre. With a commonality that cannot be coincidence, Poe illustrates three distinct crimes against women which almost defy rational explanation. Dupin unravels mysterious abuses from blackmail to rape and murder, but his stories do not have the easy resolutions that readers might expect.³ The crimes themselves are inscrutable, and the murder of Marie Rogêt is left rather clarified than

³ Robert T. Tally, Jr. describes how Poe’s writing defies interpretation, playing with the reader’s assumption that a story’s “meaning” will eventually be revealed through exploration and the application of Reason in his book *Poe and the Subversion of American Literature: Satire, Fantasy, Critique* (2014).

solved. The detective, while not in any jeopardy himself, is keenly aware of its grim presence in the lives of the people around him and uses this understanding to help guide his investigation.

“The Murders in the Rue Morgue” is probably the most incomprehensible of all Poe’s detective stories, featuring an ape as murderer, while “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” proves to be the most obscure. “The Purloined Letter” presents the least violent and clearest resolution in the form of a blackmail scenario. All these cases are focused upon the barrage of threats facing the female victims and the uncanny ability of the detective to solve the crimes.

The murders of Madame and Mademoiselle L’Espanaye, which appear in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” were unbelievably grotesque and violent crimes. The young woman’s body was found thrust, head downward, up the chimney, badly mutilated, while her mother was discovered in the courtyard “with her throat so entirely cut that, upon an attempt to raise her, the head fell off” (406). The barbarity of the crimes is so singular that the police have no clue as to the identity of the perpetrator. In a novel twist, the murders were committed inside of a locked room in the top story of a locked house, and might as well have been the work of a ghost for all the lack of clues.⁴ Poe uses the gothic fear associated with enclosure to highlight the vulnerability of these two women, despite the fact that Dupin himself lives in a quite similar way. In his analysis of the crime, Dupin isolates only those elements which indicate the intruder and comes to the logical conclusion which he later explains. The lack of evidence against any individual person does not prevent the police from arresting Adolphe Le Bon, a bank clerk, for the crimes. Despite the newspapers reporting that “nothing appeared to criminate him,” they imprison Le Bon until they can come up with a better lead (411). Dupin, owing this young man a

⁴ Michael Cook discusses how Poe’s innovation of the locked room mystery became a prototype for detective fiction’s focus on enclosure, death, and sequestered lives in his book *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery* (2011).

favor, decides to intervene and restore his good name. In so doing, Dupin deduces the surreal truth that the perpetrator of this inhuman crime is, in fact, *not human*; it's an escaped orangutan.

The death of Marie Rogêt, echoing the circumstances surrounding the death of the real Mary Cecelia Rogers in New York, does not feature anything so outré as a wild animal, but the results are no less disturbing.⁵ After she is fished out of the river Seine, the cause of Marie's death is up for public debate. Dupin begins his investigation based upon the facts reported in the local Paris newspapers, and he debates the accuracy of their suppositions. He tells his friend that "This is an ordinary, although an atrocious instance of crime. There is nothing peculiarly outré about it. You will observe that, for this reason, the mystery has been considered easy, when, for this reason, it should have been considered difficult, of solution" (519).⁶ This debate over the strangeness or routine nature of the murder of an attractive young woman means more than a simple classification. Crimes committed against women are a common transgression in gothic fiction where female characters are frequently imprisoned, violated, and/or murdered. These offenses against the vulnerable are particularly objectionable, evoking a stronger emotional response in the reader. This offers an opportunity for criticism of the patriarchal domination of women which Poe does not always take up.

The story ends with the following enigmatic statement: "For reasons which we shall not specify, but which to many readers will appear obvious, we have taken the liberty of here omitting, from the MSS. placed in our hands, such portion as details the following up of the

⁵ Police historian Thomas Reppetto's book, *American Police: The Blue Parade 1845-1945* (2011), recounts how the murder of Mary Rogers became a politically charged topic due to the perceived dangers of urban life, and how Governor William Seward cited it specifically in his demands for an organized police force in New York City which was eventually established in 1845.

⁶ In Chapter 3 of his book, *Secrets of Crime Fiction Classics: Detecting the Delights of 21 Enduring Stories* (2014), Stephen Knight calls this a "subtle-simple paradox," or the notion that what might seem simple at first is actually more complex than something which seems more elaborate at first glance (35).

apparently slight clue obtained by Dupin. We feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was brought to pass” (553). Why should the solution be omitted? The ending, then, is left ambiguous, in that Dupin seems to have neatly wrapped up the case, but no perpetrator is named. It is strange that Poe would have included only this partial resolution rather than a clear-cut answer to the question of the murderer’s identity unless he wished to retain the sense of mystery associated with the unsolved death of Mary Rogers in New York. Dupin’s other two cases are more neatly resolved, which raises the question of whether Poe considered the death of Mary Rogers (and Marie Rogêt by extension) to be only one specific instance of the much larger issue of violence against women in urban areas. In that case, the specific solution to the crime really didn’t matter. This would answer to the role extreme jeopardy plays in his Dupin stories, where men walk around in complete security while women rightly fear for their lives.

The threat which looms over the queen in “The Purloined Letter” is of a much different kind. In this case, Dupin works to return a private letter which has been stolen by Minister D—, “who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man” (682). The queen seeks out the Prefect’s help, but his men search to no avail. After a rather rudimentary survey of the Minister’s rooms, Dupin is able to isolate the one “oddity” in the place to identify the location where the letter has been “hiding” all along, right in plain sight. The conflict between Dupin and the Minister D— is the first opportunity of seeing the detective address an antagonist directly. Dupin restores the power the Minister D— has taken from the queen and stealthily reverses the situation so that she gains the advantage. Removing the letter so carefully that the Minister will not even notice its absence, Dupin replaces it with a message of his own. This final passage of the story, “Un dessein si funeste, S’il n’est digne d’Atrée, est digne de Thyeste,” gives

evidence of Dupin's resentment and victory (698).⁷ The ending alludes to a larger backstory between the two intellectuals which might be just as interesting as the one shown the reader. The resurfacing of old grudges and the realizing of old vendettas are common themes in gothic literature, and it's interesting that Poe should position Dupin as the one to relieve the stress his old nemesis has forced upon the queen. Although he has no use for women in his own life, Dupin apparently respects them enough to liberate the queen. Or, perhaps his true motivation was simply revenge all along, and relieving the queen of her thralldom only a pleasant addition.

Poe's Dupin stories contribute to the development of American gothic literature due to their sense of constant danger, where the women who live in the Paris of Poe's imagination are in constant danger of transgressions against them. In the case of the "Rue Morgue," Dupin exonerates the sailor in charge of the beast of any wrongdoing, and the world seems to continue as usual despite the atrocities which have been committed. In a similar way, the death of Marie Rogêt is treated casually and bandied about by the papers, as though terrible violence is just one more part of city life that women must live with. Poe leaves the story unsolved where he could have invented a specific solution, which is an interesting point to consider. Was Marie just one of many girls in Paris, and other urban areas, where women are subjected to routine brutality? Was Poe capitalizing on the public insecurities surrounding the exponential growth of big cities and the ineffective means of policing them?⁸ In true gothic form, this story leaves almost as many questions as answers, emphasizing the uncertainty of the jeopardy the characters face. In the case of the "Purloined Letter," the entire police force is incapable of finding the letter Dupin so easily

⁷ This translates loosely from "Such a mean plan is unworthy of Atreus, but totally worthy of Thyestes," a line from the tragedy *Atrée et Thyeste* by Prosper Jolyot (1707), which tells the story of two brothers from Greek mythology who are embroiled in an extremely violent feud.

⁸ In D. A. Miller's invaluable work, *The Novel and the Police* (1988), he explains that since the novel is viewed as an act of "truancy," there is no other role for the police except to stand by ineptly while the detective does his thing.

discovers, leaving the queen vulnerable until his intervention. These events are distinctly threatening to women, and they highlight the extreme jeopardy in which women live their daily lives. Poe has cast a gothic pall over the existence of the women in his worlds, using this peril to maximize the outrage when the innocent are violated or betrayed.

One of Poe's major contributions to detective fiction is the way his detective is as disconnected from his surreal investigation as he is from society, a man who is not affected by the danger which presents such a threat to others. Poe's Dupin sees the cases he investigates as a kind of twisted sport and a vehicle for flexing his deductive abilities. Extreme jeopardy, in the form of predators who target the "weaker sex," is not felt by Dupin. He merely observes and analyzes it like so much evidence, another "fact" to be acknowledged, categorized, and dismissed. The women in Poe's stories, however, are in a very precarious position. They seem to exist as mere objects to be analyzed much more than fully-conceived victims with lives and dreams as individual and precious as any belonging to a man. Poe's choice to stack the power so favorably on the part of the male characters is one which is repeated by countless emulators until the femme fatales of the hard-boiled era flip the script. Poe's women are soft, vulnerable, and easy prey for man or beast, and women in the city seem to be at the highest risk of all.

Hostile Environment: A Peculiarly Parisian Air

There is a very definite sense of place in Poe's fiction, and he chose the confines of the winding streets of urban Paris deliberately to set the tone for his gothic detective fiction.⁹ The city provides almost limitless suspects in the murders, and its volatile political history enhances the political leverage Minister D— has upon the Queen for as long as he has her incriminating

⁹ Leonard Cassuto describes how traditional gothic architecture influenced the development of urban gothic fiction, and how it is marked by the same secularized version of the fear and foreboding gothic architecture creates in his chapter "Urban American Gothic" in *The Cambridge Companion to the American Gothic* (2017).

letter in hand. The transportation of Poe's mysteries from New York to Paris gave his stories a sense of unfamiliarity to his American audience, especially due to the longer history of the country and the potential for many hidden secrets. Poe's Paris is a place far away from American Reason, and its intimidating old corridors are the perfect setting for mischief to occur. The female victims suffer at the hands of men who are both known and unknown to them, but the hostile nature of the environment may be the linchpin that allows these crimes to occur. It's interesting to consider whether the city has a bad reputation because it causes crime, or whether crime is what gives the city its bad reputation. In a place like the one where Poe situates his tales, the question is akin to the conundrum of the chicken and the egg. Are women unsafe because the city is unsafe, or is the city unsafe because men go there to prey on women? This is an interesting question to ask, and it's unlikely the answer could ever be definitive. Poe experimented with this kind of unstable environment to complete his "unity of effect" by recreating the perfect mood, setting, characters, and tone of his gothic stories. The main difference is that the detective is attempting to impress some kind of order on an unpredictable place which defies all other attempts to explain it.

In European gothic stories, the setting is often a looming castle, sequestered abbey, or an aged manor house. While Charles Brockden Brown first set a standard for gothic fiction in the United States by setting his stories in the American wilderness, Poe took the genre in another direction by imagining new scenes in old places. The instability of a location like Paris is a perfect reason to introduce otherworldly elements and then explain them later in a perfectly logical way. As demonstrated by this essay's opening scene, even the inclusion of a wild creature into the equation does not faze Dupin. Despite many aggravating circumstances, including contradictory evidence and witnesses who are so blinded by their own prejudices that they are

incapable of giving an accurate statement, Dupin connects all of the dots. Many assumed that the mother and daughter were slain by one of the many immigrants living in the area, exposing their various prejudices for the various “others” residing in their community. It almost seems like Poe is laughing at their ignorance when Dupin reveals that the perpetrator is, in fact, a large ape.

While the gothic nature of the story provides the necessary thematic elements in the forms of darkness, fear, and disgust amidst the towering edifices of downtrodden Paris, the investigative aspects of the story add an engaging intensity of intellectual pursuit. Poe shows how some kind of order can be imposed, even in the unstable conditions of a hostile environment.

The neighborhood of Marie Roget, though it showers her with attention, proves to be a perilous place for the young grisette. She lives with her mother, holds a steady job, and is even engaged to be married, but this is not enough to protect her from the dangers lurking just around the next corner. Since Marie is young and pretty, it seems like the community would take great pains to protect her, but in this gothic world of opposites, there is actually an increased danger in the form of sexual predators. The way that Marie’s death is treated in the papers shows a distinct lack of respect paid to the girl’s memory, where everyone is focused on the scandal and ignoring the tragedy of an innocent life lost to violence. As is so often the case, there is a sense of victim-blaming rather than compassion. The way that Poe constructs this story, Marie is little more than a dead body to be fussed over, perhaps to draw criticism to the way that Mary Rogers was treated by the papers of New York. Gothic stories often open the door for critiques of contemporary society, and Poe appears to be targeting the media as much as the violence of urban areas in this story. While this confrontation gives Dupin a chance to show off his deductive abilities, taking the newspapers of *L’Etoile*, *Le Commercial*, and *Le Soleil* to task for their various suppositions with regard to the murder and the murderers, it also gives evidence of the societal prejudices of

Paris. Based on the way that the newspapers read, all of Paris considers Marie's death an interesting puzzle to be solved more than a shocking tragedy. It's not so much the shock that a woman has been killed, it's the mysterious circumstances surrounding her death that catch the public's attention. The people of Paris seem to accept that the women around them will die such deaths as a matter of course in city life, while the survivors are left behind to make sense of it.

The gothic themes of violence and dead women, so prevalent in Poe's other tales, serve a different purpose than the usual fodder for heartbreak and revenge in the Dupin stories. Instead, they speak to the tenuousness of life and the illusion of safety felt by women in urban areas. Poe joins together the atmospheric conditions of an unstable, hostile environment by including so many people living in such close proximity as to render most individuals invisible (even if they had just committed murder), as well as a sense of isolation from one's fellow man. The streets Marie walks are in the full light of day, but the shadows cast by the surrounding buildings leave her vulnerable to the human monsters lurking in the shadows. Whether she was killed due to the violence of a gang or one dark-complexioned naval-looking fellow, Marie's innocent life was snuffed out by the hostility of Paris in one cruel way or another.

Approaching that same theme of environmental hazard from a totally different angle, Poe illustrates how the queen of France is vulnerable to the political whims of her people as well as the violence of men. This toxic combination is played out on a much larger scale, where the fate of a woman's reputation, marriage, and position are all at risk. It's important to note that the nature of the letter in question is never fully disclosed. Poe does not inform the reader of the contents of the letter or who it is from, but the implication seems to be that it is amorous in nature and would cause a public scandal if exposed. The queen's nation expects her to be a paragon of virtue, and she may fear that her people will not hesitate to overthrow the regime if

sufficiently incensed. Nobody could forget the executions of the French Revolution which had made the streets run with blood, and Poe uses this knowledge to up the ante on the tumultuous situation in which the queen finds herself.

The intrusion of the Minister D— into the boudoir of the queen also echoes the violation perpetrated earlier by the ape into the bedroom of the L’Espanaye women. The Minister’s transgression into this woman’s private space, occupied by herself and her husband, is also a violation of her personal privacy. The Minister D—, clearly an opportunist, seeks out an opportunity to steal her private letter and read it, later using its contents to wield power over her husband and herself. Poe allows the queen no sanctuary, no safe place where she can exist without the power of men to intrude and degrade her. The environment in which the queen exists is incredibly threatening, despite its opulent splendor. The richness of her physical surroundings stands in stark contrast with the anxiety she must feel at all times, rendering her incapable of enjoying any of the benefits her position might bring. Poe’s solution is for Dupin to intercede on the queen’s behalf to restore order to the chaos that has been unleashed on her life. The force of reason in an environment of unreason does not fully restore order and prevent the Minister from perpetuating his little trick in the future, but it does deliver the queen from his grasp in the present. This small victory is all one might expect, even amongst the rich and powerful, in the harsh conditions of Poe’s gothic Paris.

While gothic fiction often relies upon the treacherous nature of the physical setting to create the right kind of ambiance or mood for the story, the work of Edgar Allan Poe is totally unusual.¹⁰ When compared with the writing of European heavyweights such as Ann Radcliffe or

¹⁰ Dennis Porter describes in his book, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (1981), how the effects achieved in the “Rue Morgue” are both innovative and peculiar, how the detective is the first in a long line of “artist/thinkers,” how Poe invented the locked room puzzle, and how his choice of an orangutan as murderer “has rarely been more outrageous” (27).

Matthew Lewis, there is no denying that Poe's conception of scene incorporates so many sensory elements that the reader almost feels transported to a place which defies all social norms and logical expectations. The sense of environmental danger within Poe's worlds leaves individuals subject to fear and violence, and the darkness of the visual spectacle which he illustrates in the mind's eye is incomparable. Rather than evoking fear from the wildness of an unsettled terrain, Poe presents a place which is undeniably settled but still very wild and chaotic. Danger remains incredibly close, and Dupin's voluntary exclusion from this world speaks to his understanding of its hostility and his wish to avoid it.

The way Poe approaches the stories discussed here is provocative, in that the Paris he adopts is not so different from the New York he leaves behind, complete with a plentiful supply of suspicious foreigners, darkened alleyways, sexual predators, and corrupt politicians. Poe selects this environment to play upon society's fears surrounding crime in urban areas and to exploit these fears to their full potential by designing scenarios that touch on the very nerve of societal insecurities by victimizing powerless women. This is saying nothing of the extraordinarily outré explanation for the murders of the L'Esplanade women, where no matter what the local people think, they would never expect that the perpetrator would be, not a swarthy immigrant, but a wild animal. The commodification of the orangutan, not to mention the honor of Marie or the queen, is evidence of the perversion of morality so common in gothic fiction and detective fiction as well. The blending of these two genres allows Poe to pit logic against the disorder so frequently found in his other gothic worlds. By combatting the forces of human evil with cerebral logic, Poe uses the art of ratiocination to impose at least temporary order on the detective's hostile environment.

Poe's innovations add to the development of detective fiction by setting the scene for the detective's urban environment playing a significant part in the mysteries he unravels. While the character of Dupin often takes center stage, the spirit of Paris is all around him: dreary, crumbling, and looming over the heads of all its denizens. The home Dupin and his friend share suits "the rather fantastic gloom of [their] common temper" and is described as "a time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted... and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain" (400-401).¹¹ This melancholy visual of a city gone to seed is one which has been carried forward in the detective genre and taken up by many other authors due to its stark gothic imagery and the great hidden potential for harm.

Where earlier American gothic mysteries of detection were focused upon the insecurities inherent to life in the wilderness, Poe redirects the focus to another scene of great insecurity, the city center, home to countless walks of life and limited means of sustaining them. The many different forms of danger which exist in this gritty urban environment frustrate any possible sense of safety and reduce the significance of the victims' blameless lives to mere puzzles. Poe leaves it up to the detective character, in this case Dupin, to restore order to this unreasonable

¹¹ Many scholars have speculated that Dupin and his roommate mean more to one another than just being simple friends. While Bonita Rhoads's article "Poe's Genre Crossing: From Domesticity to Detection" (2009) classifies it as merely "homosocial domesticity," while Courtney Novostat's "Outside Dupin's Closet of Reason: (Homo)sexual Repression and Racialized Terror in Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'" (2012) suggests that the joining and cohabitation of the two bachelors is more than just coincidence. Joseph Church suggests that Poe's own misogyny spills over into Dupin's disdain of women and preference for the company of men in his article "'To Make Venus Vanish': Misogyny as Motive in Poe's 'Murders in the Rue Morgue'" (2006). In Edward Kozaczka's article "Death as Truth in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'" (2011), Dupin is described as the 'inviolable male' of ambiguous sexuality of the antebellum period. Peter Goodwin's chapter "The Man in the Text: Desire, Masculinity, and the Development of Poe's Detective Fiction" in *Edgar Allan Poe: Beyond Gothicism* (2011) also places a gendered lens on the understanding of Dupin and his relationship with his close friend.

place, or, if that isn't possible, to at least manage the chaos long enough to reveal the truth behind his investigation and walk away unharmed.

Tearing Away False Fronts: The Whole Air of Intuition

Poe created the chevalier, C. Auguste Dupin, with a specific goal in mind. He wished to experiment further with the art of ratiocination and puzzle-solving which proved so cleverly useful in other stories, such as “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), “The Gold-Bug” (1843), and “The Balloon-Hoax” (1844). In his construction of Dupin, he removes almost all human limitations and leaves behind a man whose sole purpose seems to be observation and deduction. Dupin has the unique ability to see through the gothic mirage of surface appearances that cloud the judgement of other people, creating an aura of mystery surrounding his abilities. He seems almost psychic, but when he explains his methods of deduction, the connections are all readily available for anyone to ascertain.

Dupin is an intriguing character because he maintains the outward appearance of total disinterestedness, when he is actually somewhat of a stockholder in the cases he investigates. He views his inquiries as challenges to his deductive powers where he can also pursue personal interests, like exonerating his acquaintance, Le Bon, of the L'Españaye murders, beating the newspapers to identify the killer of Marie Rogêt, or getting revenge on his old rival, the Minister D—, all while making some easy money off the Prefect. While Dupin is technically doing good deeds by exposing the truth behind the façade of his gothic world, he is also morally ambiguous due to his many conflicts of interest.¹² Like in *Edgar Huntly*, Poe directs the attention of the

¹² In Karen Halttunen's *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (1982), she discusses the Victorian generation's preoccupation with surface appearances, duality, and hypocrisy and how this obsession effected the trust between individuals and society and demanded the tearing away of “false fronts” assumed by dishonest people. Dupin is both exposing other people's secrets and suppressing facts about his own life at the same time.

reader away from the investigation taking place to focus on the movements of the detective himself. The main difference with what Poe is doing is that he works to evolve the role of the detective from coincidental to deliberate, developing his methods and logical judgement in place of the mere activity of Edgar Huntly. Dupin is more uniquely fitted for the job than any previous investigator, and Poe shows this through the careful progress of the detective's intelligent methodology despite the harsh conditions imposed by his environment.

In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin makes a particular spectacle of himself by interjecting his presence into the police investigation of the L'Espanaye murders. Having followed the case in the local papers, Dupin says to his friend, "let us enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make up an opinion respecting them. An inquiry will afford us amusement... We will go and see the premises with our own eyes. I know G——, the Prefect of Police, and shall have no difficulty in obtaining the necessary permission" (412). Much of Dupin's back story is missing due to the point of view being the narrator, a rather recent acquaintance. However, Dupin's preexisting relationship with the Prefect G— does raise some questions about whether he has ever intervened in a criminal case before. Has Dupin worked with the Prefect to solve mysteries of the past, or are they mere acquaintances by chance and the Rue Morgue represents his first real case? In any event, Dupin has what the police lack, and that is a certain sort of insight.

When Poe set about designing his Dupin mysteries, he had the difficult task before him of blending the complex generic elements of gothic suspense, horror, fear, and dread with deductive logic, reason, and sound judgement. While this might seem impossible, Poe proves himself worthy of the task in his conception of the highly effective Dupin and the way he functions within a highly unstable environment. While the dismal city of Paris seems to effect all who

come within its precincts, Dupin is just weird enough to fit in. He is a societal outlier, an “other” of a different kind who does not follow society’s rules. Dupin is a night-dweller who rarely leaves home, and even then, only in the company of his sole companion. He is impervious to the influence of his toxic environs and exempt from their potential for harm as well. Secure in his safety due to his male status, Poe’s Dupin does not really care about the victims of the crimes he investigates in a personal or emotional way. Rather, he retains his position as morally ambiguous in his dealings with police, citizens, and criminals alike. Just because he is engaged in the task of isolating the truth among so many incomprehensible events does not mean that Dupin is not himself deceptive at times when it serves his best interests.

One of Dupin’s most prominent features is his incredible power of observation. Even with his body sitting quite still, the activity inside of Poe’s detective is staggering. This early prototype of the armchair detective sees, hears, and understands everything, quickly analyzing and categorizing his data into neat interpretations in the blink of an eye. Dupin is critical of organized law enforcement and tells his friend that “the Parisian police, so much extolled for acumen, are cunning, but no more. There is no method in their proceedings... The results attained by them are not unfrequently surprising, but, for the most part, are brought about by simple diligence and activity” (411-412). Dupin laughs at the police because they only solve their cases by basically tripping over the solution. His approach is far more cerebral and focused upon method rather than activity.¹³ Poe designs his Dupin stories so that his detective will always be at the center of them, regardless of the unbelievably outré features of the crime he investigates.

¹³ Charles E. May explains in his book, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1991), how Dupin’s success lies in the fact that he is not limited in his vision of what is possible but rather accepts the extraordinary nature of what has taken place and suits his methods to the unique requirements of the case.

“The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” presents a different kind of problem because Poe modeled the story after an actual disappearance and murder. In reality, it is not a story which shows Dupin at his keenest. Although its premise is ingeniously transported from New York to Paris and the names of the persons, places, and newspapers associated with the case have been translated into more cosmopolitan variations, the resulting conclusion remains elusive at best. The whole purpose of the story seems to be showing off Poe’s transatlantic gothic sensibilities and Dupin’s egotistical assertion that there is no case he cannot solve. Paris, which takes the place of New York, is suitably ominous to the welfare of an unaccompanied young woman, and supposedly only Dupin is astute enough to correctly interpret the copious amounts of contradictory evidence to reveal the truth behind the false realities constructed by the newspapers. While the reader might find the ending eminently unsatisfying, Poe is ultimately only echoing the conclusions (or lack of conclusions) reached by the New York authorities in the murder of Mary Rogers.

After reading about Marie Rogêt in the papers, the narrator reports that “the atrocity of this murder, . . . the youth and beauty of the victim, and, above all, her previous notoriety, conspired to produce intense excitement in the minds of the sensitive Parisians” (509). Soon a reward was offered which “stood at no less than thirty thousand francs, which will be regarded as an extraordinary sum when we consider the humble condition of the girl, and the great frequency, in large cities, of such atrocities as the one described” (510). This statement is factually informative but also offers some subtle commentary upon the mindset of the people of Paris versus the social outlier, Dupin. While the city is “intensely excited” by the crime, the narrator also says that it is one which happens with “great frequency” in large cities. Why, then, should it create so much excitement? Haven’t the Parisians been desensitized to such violence by now?

Since he is not concerned with satisfying a morbidly curious public, the incentive for Dupin's involvement in this awful affair is likely a financial one. While the deal is not quite so clearly spelled out as it is later in "The Purloined Letter," a definite agreement is reached between the Prefect and Dupin, the terms of which remain ambiguous but promising to the economically disadvantaged amateur sleuth. The narrator tells how the Prefect "made [Dupin] a direct, and certainly a liberal proposition, the precise nature of which I do not feel myself at liberty to disclose... The compliment my friend rebutted as best he could, but the proposition he accepted at once, although its advantages were altogether provisional" (511). This seems to indicate that the Prefect believes only Dupin is capable of seeing through the murky circumstances surrounding the girl's violent death well enough to find some sort of solution. Between the personal satisfaction of outwitting the police and the newspaper editors and getting whatever reward the Prefect has in store, Dupin is only too willing to lend his astonishing brain to the investigation. With this move, Poe reveals that Dupin is not only interested in finding the truth for the truth's sake, but he is also in it to win it, competitively speaking. The lack of clarity at the end leaves Dupin's success in question despite his proven ability to work through the aggravating circumstances to weed out the facts. The reader is only left with the parting comments that the "result desired was brought to pass" and "the Prefect fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance, the terms of his compact with the Chevalier," so win, lose, or draw, Dupin has managed to get something out of this case beyond simple notoriety (553).

The "Purloined Letter" is probably the most satisfying instance of watching Dupin at work, although the setting is the least outwardly gothic. The design of Poe's puzzle is so completely baffling but also so frustratingly simple that this story has become a staple for any Poe or detective fiction aficionado. Before even hearing about it in detail, Dupin jokingly

describes the Prefect's problem as both "simple and odd," "too plain," and "too self-evident" for the police to resolve (681). In this case, the Prefect does not ask so much as beg Dupin to assist him, offering up fifty thousand francs for the solution. After hearing all about the Minister D—'s theft, the Prefect's rigorous searches, and the potential for great political harm, Dupin elects to get involved and resolve the matter once and for all. In a simple visit to the Minister's apartment, Dupin's keen eyes light upon the one item in the room which seemed out of keeping with the Minister's usual habits: the letter. Dupin elects to make his own little switch and return the Minister's favor to the queen in kind, but he takes things a step further.

Rather than simply replacing the letter with a blank sheet of paper or some other innocuous substitute, the truly gothic spin in this story is when Dupin reveals the ominous message he left for the Minister to find. He informs the narrator that this is not the first adversarial exchange the two men have been caught up in, and that "D—, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember" (698). As a testament to his vindictively effective memory, Dupin leaves D— a written passage from a revenge tragedy as a little souvenir of their previous conflict. While appearing on the surface to bear no grudge against the Minister, and making no mention of it to the Prefect, Dupin has managed to exact his revenge and simultaneously attain the financial security which has eluded him thus far. While Dupin is still cast in the role of hero, or deliverer of the queen from danger, there is a hidden darkness inside of him which is briefly exposed, raising the detective's altruistic intentions even further into question. The conflict between the detective's monetary concerns and his dedication to the tearing away of false fronts has become a familiar feature in detective fiction, but Dupin's dual designs were the first example. Poe's complication of ethical priorities

pollutes the morality of the investigator, leaving behind a conflicted, flawed, but still highly remarkable individual in its wake.

In gothic fiction, nobody is ever exactly who they are purported to be. The inner self is rife with inconsistency and mixed emotions which motivate the individual but also inhibit him. The character of Dupin is one of duality where the man who is presented to the public and the man who exists in private are not always the same.¹⁴ The narrator tells how Dupin:

boasted to me, with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms... His manner at these moments was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation. Observing him in these moods, I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin—the creative and the resolute. (401-402)

This perception of Dupin as having a double within himself has been hazarded by the man who knows him most intimately and who shares with him every moment of every day: his roommate. Dupin's duality follows the gothic tradition of physical and psychological doubling, which plays

¹⁴ There are many elements of the gothic doubling in the Dupin stories. Nathanael Thomas Booth discusses duality in terms of the enigmatic "double helix" in his article "'Seeking Truth in Detail': 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' and its Structure of Revision" (2016). In John Gruesser's article "Never Bet the Detective (or His Creator) Your Head: Character Rivalry, Authorial Sleight of Hand, and Gender Fluidity in Detective Fiction" (2008), he perceives doubling in the contests between Dupin and the Prefect, Dupin and the newspapermen, and Dupin and Minister D_. In his book, *Secrets of Crime Fiction Classics: Detecting the Delights of 21 Enduring Stories* (2014), Stephen Knight says that features of Poe's detective mysteries remind him of the doubles present in the writing of Charles Brockden Brown. Richard Kopley observes what he calls "doubleness of creation and resolution" in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Dupin Mysteries* (2008). Bran Nicol's article, "Detective Fiction and 'The Original Crime': Baudrillard, Calle, Poe" (2011), attributes Dupin's success in "The Purloined Letter" to his doubling psychologically with the Prefect and Minister D_. Courtney Novosat's version of doubling in "Outside Dupin's Closet of Reason: (Homo)sexual Repression and Racialized Terror in Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'" (2012) lies in the repressed sexuality of the narrator and Dupin in a society intolerant of their possibly transgressive friendship.

upon the multifaceted dimensions of existence inherent in all of humanity. While previous investigators, like Edgar Huntly, experienced a sort of psychological doubling or detachment, the doubling in the Dupin stories is much different due to the role of violence. Edgar eventually becomes quite violent, but Dupin does not; he studies violence from the outside. Instead of “letting go” of his outer persona to behave aggressively during his investigation as Edgar does, when Dupin elects to “let go” of his outer persona, it is to take a step back and engage his mind to solve the mystery. By maintaining a certain amount of distance between himself and the gothic conditions of his case, Dupin gains the necessary perspective to see past the impossible and find the truth. Dupin is at once simple and complex, logical and impulsive, analytical and vengeful. Poe crafts Dupin’s dual existence to highlight both his superhuman abilities and his all-too-human shortcomings, deploying him into scenes both suggestive of danger and resistant to explanation.

In detective fiction, there is a definite preoccupation with seeing the detective as a sort of do-good hero, but just as often he is conflicted by opposing ambitions. While he has to have money to survive, the detective is not usually trying to get rich by his trade. The detective views things accurately for what they are because he is detached, analytical, and, living as a social outcast, he does not appear to be invested in anything except the gathering and application of logically assembled, seemingly disconnected facts. In addition, while he is typically perceived as a loner, the detective is also frequently bound to a friend or confidante who takes on the role of storyteller to report his tales of ratiocinative genius (think about Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson or Christie’s Hercule Poirot and Captain Hastings). Other than the fact that he lives in world where women are in constant danger and that he maintains a conscious distance from its peril, there is nothing really clear about Dupin except his interest in solving crimes. In essence,

he occupies a liminal moral space where he investigates only those crimes which interest him and which might prove to be of some benefit. Poe imagined his detective as capable of feats of remarkable deduction and exempt from environmental peril but also someone vulnerable to the financial demands of life. The detectives of the future would retain these personality traits, often occupying a station in the working class while investigating crimes affecting the corrupted world of the rich and powerful. This commentary on class distinctions, moral conflict, and the detective's duality of self are all crucial elements of gothic detective fiction which originated in the mind of Edgar Allan Poe and propelled the social misfit of an investigator from mysteries of detection to a more fully-developed form of gothic detective fiction.

Parting Thoughts

Edgar Allan Poe is commonly accepted as the father of detective fiction in the United States, and maybe even the world, but he is really only one stop on a journey of genre development which spans much further than his lifetime.¹⁵ Poe experimented with generic elements which challenged and appealed to his readers almost as much as they interested him.¹⁶

¹⁵ Many different scholars credit Poe with one variation or another of the invention of detective fiction. W. T. Bandy's article "Who Was Monsieur Dupin?" (1964) positions the 'Rue Morgue' as the most widely read and imitated work in a genre Poe invented. In Michael Cook's *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery* (2011), he describes the Dupin stories as a blueprint for all subsequent detective stories. John Gruesser's article "Never Bet the Detective (or His Creator) Your Head: Character Rivalry, Authorial Sleight of Hand, and Gender Fluidity in Detective Fiction" (2008), says that Poe concocts the first detective story and then competes with himself to outdo what he has already done. Stephen Knight calls Poe the originator of all crime fiction in his book, *Secrets of Crime Fiction Classics: Detecting the Delights of 21 Enduring Stories* (2014). Richard Kopley says that Poe's composition of the "Rue Morgue" engendered a genre in his book *Edgar Allan Poe and the Dupin Mysteries* (2008). Charles E. May's book, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1991), says that 'Rue Morgue' takes the credit for being the first detective story. Dennis Porter's book *The Pursuit of Crime* (1981) describes how Poe brought fictional crime into the realm of the philosophic and aesthetic. Tim Towslee's "The Armchair *Flâneur*." (2013) claims that Poe invents the archetype of the armchair detective specifically. In his article, "Detecting Truth: The World of the Dupin Tales" (1993), David Van Leer credits Poe with the first stories to achieve popularity for their ingenious puzzles and the popular motifs of the locked room, the unjustly accused suspect, and psychological analysis and deduction.

¹⁶ In *Poe's Children: Connections Between Tales of Terror and Detection* (1999), Tony Magistrale and Sidney Poger discuss the popular enjoyment of the gothic detective genre and how readers are drawn to the way both gothic and detective genres reflect the fears and concerns of the society which has created them.

There are so many “firsts” in Poe’s fiction, such as the locked room mystery, the armchair detective, the hidden-in-plain-sight theft recovery, the orangutan murderer, and the deductive, analytic investigator who sees past the intimidating menagerie of gothic peril to reveal the truth. Poe used his fascination with ratiocination to add a new dynamic to the gothic detective story by introducing problems that were less fantastic and more complex, demanding close scrutiny, attention to detail, and a completely open mind. The overwhelming power of Reason is embodied in Poe’s Dupin, who seeks to impose some kind of reasonable order on gothic circumstances which are distinctly unreasonable. Dupin proves time and again that even the most outrageous solution must be true if all others are methodically ruled out. Some might say that Dupin’s deductions are almost supernatural, just like the mystical severity of his environment, but he insists that the facts are all right there for anyone to observe.

Since Poe is well-known as a master of gothic fiction, he likely imagined his investigator as someone who was set apart from society in the same way as many of his misfit protagonists, although in this case his outsider status proves to be to Dupin’s benefit. He is perfectly at home in the dismal, predatory city, and he possesses an ideal, unbiased eye to take in every detail of the crime and assemble all of the separate pieces and parts into one cohesive mass, revealing the truth just as putting together a jumbled puzzle reveals its completed image. Everything is very carefully connected, piece by piece. Poe has said that “it is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention” (“Philosophy of Composition” 139).¹⁷ This is particularly true of both gothic and detective

¹⁷ Burton Pollin discusses how Poe mimicked many of Charles Brockden Brown’s and William Godwin’s writing strategies, including approaching mysteries from end to beginning, in his article “Poe and Godwin” in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1965).

stories, where the solution to the problem at hand must be properly foreshadowed with at least the illusion of order being restored. The resolution must be simultaneously surprising and yet just possible enough to satisfy even the most ardent skeptic. Poe's denouements, for the most part, offer up satisfactory solutions to the crimes being investigated. Even if the explanation takes a turn for the bizarre, as in the case of the orangutan, Poe has diligently laid out all of the indicators as so many clues for Dupin to discover. Since one key feature of the gothic detective story's ending is to recount the truth and impose some sort of resolution, Dupin is the perfect archetype to lead this tradition. His matter-of-fact, didactic manner of speaking is what most people today would likely picture when they imagine the nineteenth century detective recounting the solution to any bizarre, gothic conundrum as though it were mere child's play. The detective's habit of tutoring the narrator as his protégé would also become immortalized in the form of Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle's later version of the Dupinesque detective.

The detective elements are not the only examples of unique imagination in Poe's writing. His reimagining of many traditional gothic elements infuse his Dupin stories with a sense of the grotesque in keeping with the atmosphere of his many gothic tales. Much of Poe's writing is preoccupied by violence, and there are many memorable characters who meet very memorable ends according to his fictional whims. Poe's belief that the death "of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world," especially led the way in his construction of gothic crime and detection in the Dupin tales ("Philosophy of Composition" 144). The deaths he arranges for the L'Esplanade women are both horrific and shocking, and they evoke all of the worst instincts in the humanity which surrounds them. Poe truly understood the "value" in "shock value," choosing to design death scenarios which were evocative of suspicion and disgust, like the deaths in the Rue Morgue. The tragic demise of Marie Rogêt is no less

disturbing and perhaps even more so when one considers that it is factually based on real life events. The casual bandying about of Marie's name and reputation is uncomfortable as well, although the practice is far too familiar to anyone reading the scandal sheets. The cherry on top is the theft of the letter from the queen, offering proof that women at all levels of society and wealth are vulnerable to male predators.

Poe's real-life position on the question of women is inconsequential when compared with the position women hold in his gothic detective stories. Poe's victims are all helpless ladies, relying upon a man, Dupin, to grant them the justice they deserve. This highly masculine lens viewing the transgressions or murders of women as pleasurable puzzles to solve is one of Poe's greatest examples of extreme jeopardy. Neither rich nor poor women are exempt from the threat of violence, while men of all classes appear to exist far more freely. He reimagines the force of jeopardy into something which does not touch the detective, but rather, looms over the lives of everyone else, threatening to engulf them at any moment. Nothing and nobody can be trusted, as the powers of fate are swift and cruel in Poe's imagined world.

The selection of Paris as the setting for Poe's Dupin mysteries also lends a sort of foreign mysticism inherent in his descriptions of the city which makes it seem as though the mouldering edifices could come crumbling down at any moment. Even private places inside the domestic sphere are not exempt from the threat of encroachment or transgression, such as the invasions into the L'Españaye home and the queen's boudoir. By making even commonplace locations seem mysterious and obscure, Poe creates a sense of gothic anxiety which extends to every character's mind except Dupin's. He alone seems to blissfully exist, nay, *thrive*, in this city of putrescence, and feels no palling influence from its ominous atmosphere. In this way, Poe's detective resists becoming one of the countless victims of his environment and instead asserts

himself as the seeker of truth in the face of violence. The fact that its threat is never wielded against Dupin, despite the perilous circumstances facing women, only makes him more confident in his ability to identify its source. In so doing, the detective proves time and time again that he is the only person capable of identifying the cause of social disorder and offering up a viable solution.

While Poe did not invent the detective story, he did significantly develop and improve it from the early 'mysteries of detection' into a form we would immediately recognize today. He imposed a disrupted social order onto a hazardous environment fraught with misogynistic peril which only threatens the women of his world. From his position as a social outlier and voluntary recluse, Poe's detective is focused upon separating the aggravating, surreal gothic elements from the rational, concrete facts which stand in constant tension in his fiction. Poe took a primitive form of literary experimentation and improved upon specific elements which could be cultivated into something far more complex and generically dynamic. Without this period of intentional development, who is to say where American gothic detective fiction might be today? Poe's contributions to the evolution of the genre are many and significant, and this is why he is remembered as playing a pivotal part in its thematic and structural development.

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CHAPTER THREE: "SOME SECRET OBJECT OF DREAD": ANNA KATHARINE GREEN AND THE GOTHIC DETECTIVE STORY

In her novel *Lost Man's Lane* (1898), Anna Katharine Green sets the story in an aged and crumbling old manor house whose mistress had apparently died abroad years ago, leaving behind her three adult children, Loreen, William, and Lucetta. The lane in which the house is situated has been the scene of a series of extraordinary disappearances where individuals have vanished so completely that all of the locals avoid the area out of superstitious fear. Green's popular detective figure, Mr. Gryce, has reason to believe that a body has been recently buried in the old house's cellar, possibly one of the missing victims, and he arrives on the scene with his officers for a complete and thorough search. In a scene very like Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," the group, including the two sisters, make their way through the darkened basement by lamplight with a heightening sense of dread building among them until they suddenly stop.

Mr. Gryce... was pointing with an imperious forefinger to the ground under his feet.

"You will dig here," said he...

"Dig?" repeated Loreen...

"My duty demands it," said he. "Some one else has been digging here within a very few days, Miss Knollys..."

Loreen made no further attempt to stay him...

Lifting the spade, [the policeman] thrust it smartly into the ground toward which Mr. Gryce's inexorable finger still pointed. At the sight and the sound it made, a thrill passed through Lucetta which made her another creature. Dashing forward, she flung herself down upon the spot with lifted head and outstretched arms.

"Stop your desecrating hand!" she cried. "This is a grave – the grave, sirs, of our mother!" (271-272)

The totally unexpected revelation of a fresh corpse that is unrelated to their current investigation stuns the men into silence. The girls tell their painful story of how their mother came to lie in the cellar floor, and Mr. Gryce agrees to let the woman rest in peace rather than cause a scandal for the grieving orphans. Despite the mysterious disappearances which some in the community attribute to a “Phantom Coach,” the detective recognizes that the truth of this case lies in the realm of reality, or the uncanny, not the unreal or fantastic.¹

Anna Katharine Green marks the next step in the formative development of American gothic detective fiction by combining classical elements of the European and American gothics with elements of deduction in new, exciting ways.² Her stories feature aristocratic families who appear outwardly respectable but cannot escape the ghosts of the past, like Falkland in William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, and instances of doubling where individuals bear striking physical resemblances but with entirely different moral dispositions, like in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* by James Hogg, with the bizarre contrast between Robert Wringhim and the shape-shifting Gil-Martin. Green shares the same sense of psychological tension as earlier authors, but she evolves that tension into something new and further refined. Green brings the gothic into the domestic sphere, which results in a complete disorder where nothing is ever as it seems. Through the intervention of a clever, logical detective, Green shows

¹ In his book, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973), Tzvetan Todorov explains the tension between the fantastic (imaginary or magical worlds) versus the uncanny (bizarre in the real world), which helps to place Green’s stylistic choices regarding these thematic elements into better context.

² There are three indispensable resources for any Green scholar: Patricia Maida’s monograph, *Mother of Detective Fiction: The Life and Works of Anna Katharine Green* (1989), the section on Green in Catherine Nickerson’s *The Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women* (1998), and the discussion of Green in Lucy Basingstoke Sussex’s *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction: The Mothers of the Mystery Genre* (2010).

how people can never escape the shadow cast by their ancestors, but a kind of peaceful resolution can be reached by the domestication of the gothic threat into a less harmful version of itself, if only temporarily.

One way Green's engagement with the supernatural is different from that of earlier gothic writers because she orchestrates very complex death scenarios committed by mechanical devices which result in the victim dying alone, unattended, and sometimes even behind a locked door. While Poe's locked-room mystery of the "Murders in the Rue Morgue" had the offending orangutan enter through an open window, Green's devices take the conundrum of impossibility to another level by removing any possibility of an intruder. This phenomenon of death from a distance increases the sense of strangeness and indecision over what has actually occurred versus what *appears* to have occurred. These devices take the classical gothic theme of mysterious unattended deaths in new directions, and only the detective has the ability to assemble all of the disparate facts into a clear interpretation of the crime and the individual(s) responsible. Green was not afraid to blend gothic elements of classic European design with American innovations of her modern present to experiment with the themes of fear, violence, social stratification, and betrayal and shed light on the hidden insecurities of elite family dynasties.³

Green also transports the scene of action from earlier American writers' settings of wilderness or teeming city to the comfortable lives of the upper classes, highlighting the gothic nature of the psychological duality which emerges under the pressures of resentment, greed, and jealousy within families.⁴ The deaths which occur in Green's stories are often within the

³ In Richard Slotkin's book, *Regeneration Through Violence* (1973) he discusses the roles of violence and aggression in the lives of Americans, and how their justifications of themselves and their violence is the foundation of the American myth.

⁴ Charles Brownson explains in his book, *The Figure of the Detective: A Literary History and Analysis* (2014), how the gothic motifs of earlier authors are redeployed in later texts like Green's, where the writers restructure their

domestic circle and seem utterly incomprehensible, occurring under circumstances which defy explanation. These include murders committed at a distance by a series of intricate mechanical devices which make the deaths appear to have supernatural causes. Green's diverse detectives introduce their methods of deduction and activity to this disordered world in an attempt to solve mysteries which outwardly appear to be rooted in the paranormal. By imposing reason on a highly irrational world, Green seeks to domesticate the gothic threat and demonstrate how a detective might restore at least a brief sense of order in their world.

And just how does somebody go about domesticating the gothic? From one perspective, Anna Katharine Green's approach to gothic plots is distinctly feminine in that she has tapped into the psychological consciousness of home life and other concerns of the domestic sphere. In her books, it's not outside forces which pose a threat. Instead, the most dangerous individuals are often those who were once closest to the victims: spouses, siblings, parents, children, and friends. Hypocrisy is the name of the game, and the plots Green constructs are precipitated on the idea that, in movie parlance, the killer is inside the house. Security in the form of the family circle has been corrupted and the knowledge that nobody can be trusted results in the total evaporation of the characters' peace of mind. So often, Green's detectives must prove themselves equal to the task of misdirection by also donning disguises and adopting personas, basically passing as a member of the upper class or being so inconspicuous as to escape notice altogether.⁵ Gone are the vicious assaults between Natives and colonists, and the dreary precincts

stories to include more modern perspectives on what is disturbingly real in their present day and time, reinventing the gothic myth.

⁵ In his important book on the subject of detective genre fiction, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, John Cawelti discusses the sophistication necessary for successful detective fiction and how the cruder forms of suspense might offer a quick fix of terror but lack the staying power of more complex scenario-driven conflict.

of Paris seem worlds away from the swanky homes of Green's respectable families. The danger is still very real and incredibly close; it is merely disguised in a more palatable form.

Another way that Green domesticates the gothic is by taming it, or defanging it, into something that is not *harmless*, but also not as harmful as it could be. While some gothic authors introduce threats of otherworldly designs, such as *Frankenstein's* monster, *Dracula's* vampires, or a series of angry gods from mythology looking to smite pesky mortals if given the chance, Green goes in another direction. The dangers that her characters face are entirely human and therefore capable of being neutralized to a degree by the detective's intervention. By interrupting the scene of chaos with the introduction of Reason and logic, the threat becomes less intimidating and more manageable. Green effectively domesticates the gothic spectre of danger like a feral cat fed cream, where the wild and unruly nature is still present but made somewhat docile in the presence of the investigator. The addition of female investigators to the equation gives Green's writing an even greater domestic appeal by employing a female stereotype to engage with and neutralize the gothic threat which exists within the domestic sphere. While her stories often close with happy endings, the chaos of her worlds lies in the unbreakable connections to the past which remain a constant source of peril. While certain individuals do experience a sense of closure, true peace can never be achieved.

Hostile Environment: A Position of Positive Peril

Following the lead of many European gothic writers who used greed, jealousy, and revenge as motivation for their characters to lash out, Green imagines some particularly violent variations on the theme. In her stories, people can never escape from what happened in the past, and while reason might intercede, it has no permanent place in Green's corruption-ridden gothic worlds. In *The Circular Study* (1900), she arranges a murder/suicide plot in retribution for crimes

committed by and against the fathers of the victims, and in “The House in the Mist” (1913), a corrupt family is wiped out by a deceased relative as revenge for poisoning him to gain access to their inheritance. The families in Green’s stories are constantly revisited by the ghosts of the past and cannot move forward until or unless their dirty secrets are exposed. Within these scenarios, Green reworks the complexity of family relationships into something ominous and threatening where even those ties which seem incorruptible, such as those between immediate family members, pose the greatest threat. The sins of the parents are revisited upon their children into perpetuity, and the past can never be left in the past, so the characters in Green’s worlds are without confidence or comfort in a family bond. It is only through the intercession of a third party, usually the detective, that the mysteries of the past can be revealed and their threat minimized.

In *The Circular Study*, Mr. Poindexter ravishes Mr. Cadwalader’s teenaged daughter, Evelyn, while her father is away at war, and the young woman dies from the shame of it. Years later, the brother of the dead girl, Felix Adams, reveals his revenge plot by having their younger brother, David Adams, court Poindexter’s adult daughter, Eva, and then jilt her, thrusting her back into her father’s home in shame. When David and Eva actually fall in love and marry, and David refuses to go along with the plan, Felix threatens to mechanically seal them all up in a room to die together and complete the revenge Cadwalader swore against Poindexter so very long ago. To escape this grim fate, Eva, now Mrs. Adams, springs into action to protect them. Only later is it revealed that Felix had also fallen in love with the ill-fated Eva, and his death had set him free from the torment of being torn between his devotion to his father’s vengeance and the passions of his heart.

Green builds upon the classical gothic theme of revenge for the sins of the past with a blow back against the aggressor, but she also incorporates a modern influence in the form of mechanical engineering to accomplish the villain's end goal. The toxic relationship which exists between David and Felix is based almost entirely upon the latter grooming the former to be the ideal beau to weaponize against Eva Poindexter. Felix is intelligent enough to not only plot the scheme of seduction, but he also develops an involved contingency plan on the off-chance his brother buckles under the pressure of their scheme. When the newlyweds come for their first visit, Felix ominously tells David "I can so hermetically seal [this room] that no man, save he be armed with crowbar and pickaxe, could enter here" (267). As the weight of this statement begins to settle in, and David realizes that his brother is serious, Felix continues by pointing out "the edge of a huge steel plate hanging flush with the casing" of the door, and tells his brother:

This plate can be made to slide across that opening in an instant just by the touch of my hand on this button. This done, no power save such as I have mentioned can move it back again, not even my own... Do you doubt my mechanical skill or the perfection of the electrical apparatus I have caused to be placed here? You need not... Shall I press the button, brother? (268)

This device promises a long, cruel death for the lovers which Felix himself plans to share with the intention that his actions will release them from demons of their families' past. The shadow of Mr. Poindexter's crime hangs heavy over the fates of these three young people, and once threatened with such a horrific demise, Mrs. Adams takes up a paper knife from the table and plunges it through her brother-in-law's heart in self-defense. So influenced is Felix Adams by the ghosts of his family's past, that he never realizes that he is destroying their present and future.

In “The House in the Mist,” a young traveler, Hugh Austin, wanders into an open house looking for a place to get out of the weather and find a bite to eat. He has fatefully stumbled upon the home of the late Anthony Westonhaugh, and the extended Westonhaugh family has gathered at their deceased relative’s home for the reading of the will. Once it is established that he is not a member of the family, Austin is ejected from the room, but he watches what transpires through a gap in the door. Just before the terms of the will are revealed, the family attorney, Mr. Smead, asks if anyone feels they should recuse themselves of their inheritance due to any dishonor which might disqualify them as a worthy an honorable heir. To the observer’s surprise, Eunice Westonhaugh, a young unwed mother, feels shame enough to step forward, withdraw from the house, and go out into the dark, eerie night. After consuming a lavish dinner, Smead reads a letter from Anthony Westonhaugh to his family revealing that he knew those present had conspired to poison him to get his money, and that the wine they had so gluttonously enjoyed was laced with the same poison given to him.

Westonhaugh’s letter to his family recounts the many cruel ways they had wronged him, ending with how he was one night given some wine and tried to share, but, “one by one you refused it, and when I rose to quaff my final glass alone, every eye before me fell and did not lift again until the glass was drained. I did not notice this then, but I see it all now... Because one and all of you knew what was in that cup, and would not risk an inheritance so nearly within your grasp” (418). The family members recoil in horror, claiming that these supposed revelations are all lies, but Smead continues reading through to the end of the letter, where Westonhaugh proclaims ominously from the grave, “you have already drunk the toast destined to end your lives. The bottle which you must have missed from that board of yours has been offered you again... [and] that bottle has been greedily emptied by you; and while I, who sipped sparingly,

lived three weeks, you, who have drunk deep, *have not three hours before you, possibly not three minutes*” (419). As Austin, the visitor, watches helplessly, everyone present dies, one by one, except the attorney, Smead, and Miss Eunice Westonhaugh, who is huddled in a shed outside. The young man, fleeing from the house of death, offers to help Eunice and her baby get away from this terrible scene, but the attorney stops them. He tells Eunice that due to her honorable withdrawal earlier, she has inherited all of her uncle’s wealth by proving herself worthy of it.

In this story, the part of the investigator is played by Hugh Austin, but his role in the mystery is really only that of observer. He is powerless to intervene in the vengeance which is being wrought from the past, and he can only watch as Anthony Westonhaugh actually avenges his own death using Mr. Smead as his emissary. There is no way to resolve the conflict between the members of this tainted family tree, and Green emphasizes the karmic justice which is being dealt out as repayment for the “kindness” they had shown their kinsman. As is so frequently shown in Green’s work, the sins of the past, whether the current generation’s or their ancestors’, resurface periodically to wield great hostility over their fates. The ending of this story is framed as a happy one, except for the literal pile of bodies strewn about the tainted home of the Westonhaugh clan. In this way, Green subtly confirms what the reader already suspects: that there can never be any real sense of peace or closure in this world due to the perpetual interference from the phantoms of yesterday.

Much of the environmental hostility experienced by characters in Green’s gothic detective stories is rooted in the cursed remnants of the past. These timeworn offenses often take the shape of theft, murder, or other, equally objectional, transgressions, and they cannot be left behind. Green shows how the intense pressure put upon the upper classes to maintain their reputations at any cost can be a powerful motive when threatened with exposure and how people

have a tendency to lash out violently if it means avoiding a mark against one's character. Even more importantly, Green portrays these haunting offenses of the past as though they are poisonously near and not merely remnants of another time. The contemporary characters feel an imminence in the danger stalking them, and with good reason. Due to their inability or unwillingness to make peace with the past and domesticate its gothic threat, probably rooted in a fear of exposure, the sins of an earlier time continue to haunt the people of today and will continue to do so indefinitely if left without intercession. It is the role of Green's investigator to act as the revealer of secrets and the neutralizer of threats when no one else is willing or able to. Only then can the turbulence of the past settle into a kind of calm and the characters escape the certainty of harm.

The way that Green ties the art of deduction, what Poe called "ratiocination," into her stories invites the reader along for the process of discovery with tales often told in the first person by the investigator. As the many different observations are noted and assembled internally within the detective's mind, things quickly begin to seem less supernatural and more and more possible when one considers the feats capable by the human mind. Add to that the eventual revelation of crimes, often family crimes like those of the Westonhaughs, committed earlier yet so immediately relevant to the events of today, and Green describes the perfect formula for a gothic detective story. Her stories' past, present, and future are always inextricably intertwined in revealing and troubling ways. The construction of Green's characters also allows ample opportunity for criticizing the corrupt, avaricious, and violent types who scheme their way through life, using her detectives to expose these people as the real-life monsters who haunt their worlds in the place of more fantastic goblins. The hostility of Green's environment is terribly real, and it is rooted in the residual threat of the past within the realm of the uncanny. Without

the detective's logical intervention to bring the solution of the mystery to light, the present can never escape the sins of bygone days and the intensity of their ripple effect.

Extreme Jeopardy: The Facsimile of His Form

In order to exist in a world with such a fragile sense of security, the people in Green's stories often go to great lengths to assimilate and even imitate when necessary.⁶ Like the gothic doubling of the past, Green's characters routinely adopt alternate personalities for personal gain or experience instances of strange but real physical doubling like the striking resemblance between the Secret Service agent and the estranged Benson heir in *XYZ: A Detective Story* (1883). The tension which exists within families also often leads to a two-faced duality of self and eventually to violence as well, which is especially evident in *Initials Only* (1911) with the twin suitors, Orlando and Oswald, courting the same woman. In Green's stories, the pressure to maintain one's spotless public façade and a sense of self-importance is incredible, leading people to take shocking actions in order to acquire wealth or exact revenge for perceived slights, not to mention the oldest motive in the world: love.⁷ For these reasons, Green's characters can never trust the people within their domestic circle the way they ought to. Nobody is who they seem, either in a literal or figurative sense, and so the sensation of extreme jeopardy infiltrates deeply into the private realm where betrayals often have fatal consequences.

⁶ In her book *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (1982), Karen Halttunen studies the problems associated with the assuming of "false fronts" by people in society through the many conduct publications, including how they impressed the idea that individuals who focused too much upon being outwardly polished and not enough on their inner self-worth were guilty of cultivating "the mere surface of character" and that one's behavior was also an outward sign of inner moral qualities.

⁷ In her book *The Detective Novel of Manners: Hedonism, Morality, and the Life of Reason* (1981), Hannah Charney discusses many of the niceties of polite society and their resulting negative impact upon the moral mutability of individuals in detective fiction.

In *XYZ*, the primary doubling which takes place is between an unnamed Secret Service agent and Joe Benson, the estranged son of an eccentric wealthy recluse, who wishes to come make peace with his father over a misunderstanding long in the past. Their physical resemblance is first brought to the reader's attention when the detective hears "a sudden, quick cry, half joyful, half fearful" from Miss Carrie Benson, as she briefly mistakes the detective for her brother and looks upon him "with an expression of mingled terror and longing that would have astonished [him] greatly, if it had not instantly disappeared at the first sight of [his] face" (23). Miss Carrie begs the detective to allow someone to pass unmolested into the party on their estate that night, and gives the description of this person (actually Joe) by saying: "look in the glass when you get home and you will see the *fac-simile* of his form, though not of his face. He is fair, whereas you are dark" (34). In an effort to piece together the sinister plot he believes is about to take place, the detective decides to assume the costumed identity of Joe Benson and go to the masquerade party himself.

Dressed in a costume, the agent enters the Benson mansion and one of Green's most voluptuous scenes, resplendent in gothic imagery and harkening strongly back to the spectacle of the masquerade in Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842). The fantastic qualities of this sumptuous affair are not lost upon the senses of the detective, as he tries to gather information where he can, in spite of the strangeness of the scene. Looking around him, he sees "visions of a motley crowd decked in grotesque costumes [which] passed constantly before [his] eyes" (41). Trying to maintain his objective stance, he resists the way "sight and sound combined to allure" him and remains aware of, but impervious to, the essence of danger which makes the rooms almost stifling with elements of the macabre and arabesque (41). The detective passes a mirror and sees that his domino, or cape, is of "a brilliant yellow hue, covered here and there with black

figures representing all sorts of fantastic creatures, from hobgoblins of a terrible type, to merry Kate Greenaway silhouettes” which contrasts sharply with the Black Domino, Joe and Carrie’s brother, Hartley (42). The agent follows the caped ebony figure through a series of hallways where he “threaded more laughing groups and sauntered down more mysterious passage-ways than [he] would care to count. Still the mysterious Black Domino glided on before [him], leading [him] from door to door” (58).

These events strongly echo Poe’s “Red Death,” creating an engaging sense of doubling even between the two stories. Like the agent, Prince Prospero and his fellow revelers pass from room to kaleidoscopic room in their pursuit of pleasure. In like ways, the masked figures pass through a series of multi-colored chambers, with Prospero reaching his terminal point in a room of black illuminated by a crimson radiance of “deep blood colour” (486). Mr. Benson eventually crumples lifeless to the floor, just as Prince Prospero does, except instead of falling prey to his own hubris, Mr. Benson dies of poison, the victim of his eldest son’s duplicitous, greedy ambitions. Whether meant as an overt move of imitative flattery or a coincidental replication of a classical motif, the sheer amount of doubling which takes place in *XYZ*, within and between texts, could easily be attributed to Green’s fascination with the same European gothic themes which influenced Poe. However, her story features deductive innovations beyond the limited ratiocinative scope of Poe’s investigators. This is how Green pushes gothic doubling into a new realm, modernizing its threat into something both domestic and dangerous. Green’s eminently logical Secret Service agent struggles to retain his footing in this place of uncanny reality as he attempts to reduce the gothic threat and parse together the fragments of facts in his case to reveal the truth about the death of Mr. Benson and exonerate his son, Joe, of any involvement in the crime. If the agent had not elected to impersonate the young man in an effort to find the solution

to his family's mystery, who knows the damage that Hartley might have inflicted not only on Mr. Benson, but on his siblings as well. Here Green reimagines the usually unsettling device of gothic doubling as something the detective might employ to his advantage in the pursuit of justice and when under conditions of extreme jeopardy.

In *Initials Only*, the doubling of characters leads to much more deadly results in the form of a revenge plot. A wealthy debutante, Miss Edith Challoner, collapses at a hotel in front of numerous witnesses and dies from an injury to her chest. No weapon or bullet is found on or near her person, and there is no evidence except the slight wetness of her dress near the wound. The police are at a loss for the utter lack of motive or evidence until the perpetrator, an obscure inventor named Orlando Brotherson, finally confesses that Miss Challoner had spurned his romantic advances, causing him to lash out:

I determined to kill her, and I did. How? Oh, that was easy, though it has proved a great stumbling-block to the detectives, as I knew it would! I shot her—but not with an ordinary bullet. My charge was a small icicle made deliberately for the purpose. It had strength enough to penetrate, but it left no trace behind it. “A bullet of ice for a heart of ice,” I had said in the torment of my rage. (342)

After Miss Challoner's death, Orlando comes to realize that she actually rejected his romantic advances because she was already engaged to his twin brother, Oswald. Assuming that Orlando knew of this attachment, Miss Challoner had honorably refused to entertain his suit out of allegiance to the man whom she thought they both owed their loyalty. The knowledge of the terrible wrong he has committed begins to tear Orlando apart, eventually leading to a rather grandiose suicide by shooting himself into space in a flying machine during a lightning storm. Throughout the entire affair, Orlando Brotherson is being tailed by Detective Sweetwater, the

protégé of Green's recurring detective, Mr. Gryce, who is attempting to isolate the threat to society posed by the mysterious assassin of Miss Challoner. Had the detective not been so diligent in his perpetual attendance on Brotherson, driving him to confess, there might never have been a resolution of the crimes or the revelation of the terrible secret of the cause of Miss Challoner's death.

Both of these stories feature gothic doubling as a very prominent element of their investigation. In one case, the detective plays the double of a persecuted young man and prevents him from being framed for his father's murder. The other has a pair of literal twins who are as different in temperament as they are similar in appearance. Each situation presents its own unique challenges and opportunities, which Green uses to create as much confusion, disorientation, and outrage as possible. The Secret Service agent reveals the horrifying truth about Hartley's duplicitous nature by unknowingly taking the role of the second victim, Joe Benson, who would surely be convicted of his father's death if not for the agent's intervention. Sweetwater, in his investigation of the Challoner murder, discovers not one lover but two, and identical twins at that, one of whom bore so much animosity so quietly in his heart that he even murdered a second person, a washer woman, by the same means as Miss Challoner, without any regard for her life and simply because he wished to test out his icicle gun before "the main event." Green shows how the act of doubling can have many consequences, and how the detective character must always be aware that collateral damage is not something their predatory villains fear. They are far too focused on the acquisition of wealth or wreaking vengeance upon their enemies for any perceived slight. These crimes take place in domestic, intimate places, and it is the responsibility of the detective character to work toward restoring peace, as difficult as that may seem. Although Green's detectives are almost always at least partially successful, the

efficacy of their use of logic to defuse the volatility of Green's chaotic gothic worlds can only go so far.

Tearing Away False Fronts: In the Cause of Truth and Justice

The purpose of the investigators in Green's stories is to interject their Reasonable minds into the affair, isolate the threat, neutralize it, and then continue on with their lives or to the next case. Her societies need this type of intervention to cast away their many dangers and restore some kind of order because without it, there is no possibility of a reprieve. When the detective enters the scene, it is usually an entrance into chaos or soon-to-be chaos which is only thinly veiled at the moment. Her investigators appreciate the nuance of the gothic threat they face, and they are not likely to fall into the traps of superstition or a fear of the supernatural. Instead, they always look for the logical, real, if uncanny, solution to fantastic-seeming problems within the domestic sphere. Even when deaths occur in locked rooms inaccessible from the outside, they *must* have a solution which is grounded in reality, and the detective intends to find it. This is how the detective works to domesticate the gothic, like taming a black cat, removing from it the more harmful threats against society, leaving behind a reduced potential for injury. Her introduction of female detectives adds another element altogether, utilizing a feminine intuition and perspicacity to identify and engage with Green's gothic threats, proving just as effective as the male detectives and comfortably treading in places they simply cannot go, especially the "woman's realm" of the domestic sphere.

Green's diverse cast of detectives prove quite effective throughout her many stories, solving cases which seem indecipherable. One example of this is in her book *The Filigree Ball* (1903), which features an extremely complex series of multigenerational and interconnected events, all surrounding the infamous Moore house. This imposing old house has been the site of

many unexplained deaths and is considered haunted by those in the community. After a very recent death on the wedding day of Miss Veronica Moore and the bride's subsequent suicide in the house, it is revealed that the Moore family has preyed upon their enemies for generations through the use of a very simple, yet effective apparatus. A set of encrypted instructions handed down from parent to child relays how to manipulate a certain lever in the closet of a bedroom in the ancestral home which dislodges a large stone from the ceiling in the room beneath, killing whoever is sitting on the settle below instantly. These deaths have given the house a reputation in the community for being haunted or cursed, and it had remained empty for many years after the last event of that kind.

Miss Veronica Moore decides to hold her wedding there, and decodes the family secret just in time to use it on a man she mistakenly thinks is her first husband, long believed dead, who has returned on this fateful day to reclaim her. She later laments in her written confession, "It was so easy! Had it been a hard thing to do; had it been necessary to lay hand on knife or lift a pistol, I might have realized the act and paused. But just a little spring which a child's hand could manage—Who, feeling for it, could help pressing it, if only to see—" (378). On the verge of suicide, Veronica rages against her family's fatal flaw, expressing her disgust that "Murder was taught; but murder from a distance, and by an act too simple to awake revulsion" (392). One of Green's many nameless detectives tirelessly pursues both the mysteries of the fatal Moore house and the events surrounding Veronica's suicide, eventually discovering the device and the note left behind by the repentant woman revealing her awful mistake and the fact that the victim was not her late husband at all, but his brother, arrived to wish her well in her future with her new husband. The guilt and shame of the past could no longer be suppressed, and the detective helps to expose the truth about the Moore family and their tragic history, dispelling the mysterious

legends surrounding the house in the process. As is so often the case, Reason prevails, at least for the moment.

The detective in this story has several talents. Firstly, he immediately sees past the local superstitions which plague the house with the reputation of being evil. He also begins to realize that the fate of the dead man was somehow connected with that of the young bride. Once these two factors are brought into play, the detective then locates the suicide letter of the dead woman and pieces together the events which have transpired in the house over time as well as the nature and design of the mechanism used by the Moore family to wipe out their opposition. Once the secrets of the past are exposed, the survivors, Mr. Francis Jeffrey, Veronica's husband, and Miss Cora Tuttle, her half-sister, are left behind to try to carry on with their lives. The death that separated Mr. Jeffrey from his wife was the same that liberated the Moore family from their thralldom to the past, and the story ends with Francis and Cora finding love and solace in one another. However, they had to flee the country, and indeed the continent, to find their peace. The odious cousin, "Uncle David" Moore, remains behind to take possession of the house, and although he is somewhat of a pariah and consequently a recluse, he still retains all of the nefarious possibilities of the little lever in the upper bedroom that had caused so much trouble over time. While the detective has managed to both solve the case and abate the gothic threat looming over the Moore family, there is still one member left behind with just the right temperament and potential for violence, thus reinforcing the idea that the domestication of the gothic can only be a temporary condition.

An interesting contrast to the scenario of *The Filigree Ball* are the adventures of the vibrant young debutante, Miss Violet Strange. She is tiny, almost childlike, although in her twenties, and her petite form and sparkling personality are well-known and charmingly

disarming. In reality, she is a secret detective, solving the mysteries of high society to preserve or redeem reputations and solve a murder here and there. Although she is but a sprite of a woman, Violet is capable of admirable feats of bravery, boldness, and deduction which earn her the respect of others in the field. Green frames her adventures as a series of short stories, each focusing on a specific case, and the most eerily gothic is probably “The Grotto Spectre” (1915), in which Violet is hired by Roger Upjohn to discover the truth about his estranged wife’s mysterious death. It is apparent from the start that the family is suffering, and Upjohn’s father has been acting very peculiarly as well. After digging into the past, Violet believes that both Upjohn and his father suspect one another in the woman’s death, and that their mutual suspicions are destroying them.

In a move both ingenious and bold, Violet disguises herself as the ghost of Mrs. Upjohn and appears dramatically along the cliff where the dead woman so often walked. Green maximizes the supernatural elements of the story with a gothic flair for the dramatic, exaggerating the superstitious fears of the characters. Violet instructs the younger Mr. Upjohn and his father to be in separate locations but both looking out on the cliff at the same moment, where the men spied “a spectre floating in the air above the promontory! The spectre of a woman—of [Roger’s] wife, clad, as she had been clad that fatal night! Outlined in supernatural light, it [faced] them... A sight awful to any eye, but to the man of guilty heart—” (136). Violet judged correctly that the shock of this vision would cause the perpetrator to betray his guilt, but nobody except she ever suspected the truth. When Roger Upjohn looks up at his father’s window:

he beholds, not the distorted form of his father sinking back in shame and terror before this visible image of his secret sin, but that of another weak, old man falling to the floor

behind his back! Abram! the attentive, seemingly harmless, guardian of the household! Abram! who had never spoken a word or given a look in any way suggestive of his having played any other part in the hideous drama of their lives than that of the humble and sympathetic servant! (136)

Violet has removed the shadow of suspicion from both father and son, and once the truth is revealed, they are able to begin rebuilding their lives together. She has restored order where there was only chaos and neutralized the dark pall looming over the Upjohn home with the reassurance that it was neither a ghost nor a member of the family who perpetrated the crime.

The diminutive Violet is frequently employed by individuals who are suffering as collateral damage to the crime which has been committed. Some problems are more superficial, such as those relating to a person's reputation, while others include such macabre subjects as a man and his baby being found dead in a locked room. The juxtaposition of the young woman frequently described as "spritely" and "vivacious" and the dark cruelty of the world she voluntarily enters time after time in her efforts to restore order, creates a strange sort of unreality where both problems and solutions are found in unexpected places. Green establishes scenarios which seem terrifyingly impossible, where ghosts of the past are looming over the characters, the villains, and sometimes even the detective. Green uses the sins of the past as "almost-ghosts" which haunt the present day and create a sense of terror and fear, as a supernatural apparition might do, except in human or mechanical form. No matter how uncanny the scenario, Green's detectives bring order and method to the situation. The many contrasts in her work give the reader ample food for thought in discerning what she is doing by casting diverse characters, especially women, within the gothic detective realm, and by bringing that fictional realm into the domestic sphere as well.

The female detectives in Green's fiction present a more "gentle" detective prototype than men like Poe's Dupin or even Green's fatherly recurring detective Mr. Gryce, intensifying the domestication of the wild gothic fears and supernatural incidents. Green's female investigators are not subject to the powerful emotions or prejudices associated with other gothic characters that interfere so much with a practical investigation. In *That Affair Next Door*, Miss Amelia Butterworth initially proves her value to Mr. Gryce by failing to display any squeamish discomfort in the presence of a dead body in the Van Burnum's study, instead carefully looking around for any clues the police might have missed. As they are examining the victim's personal effects, Miss Butterworth makes various feminine observations which prove to be uncannily accurate. Mr. Gryce, perplexed by his failure to notice these things on his own, questions her on it: "You came to a conclusion this afternoon, Miss Butterworth, for which I should like some explanation. In investigating the hat which had been drawn from under the murdered girl's remains, you made the remark that it had been worn but once... Will you tell me what it was that gave point to your assertion?" (58). When Miss Butterworth answers quite simply that there had been only one hole in the hat where the hat-pin passed through, Mr. Gryce exclaims, "Women's eyes for women's matters! I am greatly indebted to you, ma'am. You have solved a very important problem for us. A hat-pin!... The woman who was killed in that room owed her death to the stab of a thin, long pin. We had not thought of a hat-pin, but upon your mentioning it, I am ready to accept it as the instrument of death" (59).

Miss Butterworth, as an amateur agent of Reason in this case, has revealed not only the simple information regarding the accessories of the woman killed in an effort to establish her identity, she has also successfully identified the murder weapon, which she soon finds lodged in a floor vent. Although she is not formally trained as an investigator, Miss Butterworth is

staunchly no-nonsense, and has keen powers of observation which she may or may not put to use in privately surveilling her neighbors and community. Her habit of looking out the window is what brought the murder next door to her attention in the first place, leading to her involvement as a witness in the case. Although she is introduced into the investigation innocuously, Miss Butterworth proves herself an invaluable addition, and Mr. Gryce cannot help but admire her abilities. In fact, they go on to appear in two more novels together, where Miss Butterworth's intervention proves to be the linchpin in the solution of both mysterious cases. Her slow, careful perseverance has the effect of cowing those around her, and the humor of her narration often reveals that the severity of her disposition is, like many of Green's characters, the adoption of a mask or public persona. An important precursor to Agatha Christie's character, Miss Marple, her nonthreatening appearance and dignified carriage allow Miss Butterworth the freedom to go into places where the police can't, especially the domestic sphere where the real root of the trouble most often lies.

In Anna Katharine Green's gothic worlds, everything about the present is tainted by history, and people cannot move forward until or unless their secrets are revealed. But by then, it may be too late. This sense of perpetual pursuit by the demons of the past is a classic theme in gothic fiction, especially when connected with a particular location. Like the looming Van Bernum mansion in *That Affair Next Door*, the infamous Moore house, and many of Green's other gothic settings, certain places seem haunted by the sins of the past, leaving the present generation doomed to continue suffering under their oppression. The only way to free the innocent from their thrall is for the investigator to expose their secrets publicly and for the guilty to take responsibility for what has occurred. Often this happens naturally, but sometimes no reasonable resolution is possible. Green's efforts to find balance between the chaos of a

gothic which exists in domestic, and supposedly safe, spaces and the strength of the investigator's logic and detection result in a blending of surprise and horror which can only end in uncertain conclusions.

In detective stories, privileged people often do strange things for reasons which seem irrational. The detective's methodical sifting through innumerable facts, even going well back into history, will almost always lead to a logical conclusion, no matter how improbable. The detective's cynical nature dismisses anything which seems insupportable by facts, and they focus only upon the most authentic facts which can be supported by evidence. The introduction of a female investigator like Miss Butterworth or Violet Strange shows a new perspective, and having a confident woman asserting a domestic stereotype in the investigation contributes to the neutralizing or defanging of the gothic. In the world of Green's detectives, the use of Reason prevails when faced with supernatural-seeming events. Green's blending of characteristics both gothic (irrational) and deductive (rational), creates a tension where there is no clear solution for the reader to rely on. While there is often a happy ending to her stories, the circumstances which surround the mystery under investigation allude to the fact that nothing can ever be fully resolved. The detective's confidence in the application of method and reason is not shaken, but they recognize that there cannot always be a rational solution when so many elements of the crime seem to defy explanation.

Parting Thoughts

The gothic detective fiction of Anna Katharine Green is different from that of any other author discussed in this project because she is a woman and because she recognized both the unique anxieties connected with the domestic sphere and how to domesticate them. This shift in scene and concerns brings a new perspective to light which was heretofore unexplored by Brown

or Poe. Green taps into a whole different realm of existence beyond the masculine boundaries which limited the scope of either male predecessor's work and extended them into the home, the family, and the roots from which they spring. The devices that she employs draw from the classical gothic of the European past but she translates them into new shapes, taking a classic element like doubling and evolving it in novel ways. In this same way, she explores the idea of ghosts of the past coming to haunt the present and doom their future unless some kind of intervention takes place. Adding all of these elements together, constrained within the family home or the domestic unit, stresses the characters to the brink of lashing out. Green embraces the sense of disorder which infiltrates flawed relationships and uses the situations which arise as a means for providing commentary on duplicity, artifice, and barely restrained violence.

In some ways, Green's stories are a response to earlier themes and motifs, where she often places her scene of action in secluded places, set apart from the hustle and bustle of human life, and reminiscent of Mettingen in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*. There are also scenes of urban conflict where the publicity of many eyes watching at any given moment create their own kind of peril, as in the Dupin mysteries by Edgar Allan Poe. The main difference that sets Green's work apart is her ability to imagine a conflict which is happening behind closed doors, away from the pesky judgement of the public eye. The families in Green's stories are nothing like the devoted L'Esplanade mother and daughter who lived together in seclusion, and her villains cannot claim madness as mitigation for their crimes as with Theodore Wieland. The crimes which take place in Green's gothic detective fiction are usually calculated and, even when committed on the spur of the moment, to some definite personal gain.

Green made more extravagant gothic moves than predecessors such as Brown or Poe, and made more elaborate conceits which suggest that the world is potentially deeply deadly and

dangerous, populated by mean rich people instead of vengeful gods or mysterious creatures. While Green creates worlds which appear to be supernatural at first glance, they are, in fact, filled with much more realistic dangers. It is incredibly difficult to summarize even one of her short stories, not to mention full-length novels, without going into elaborate detail about the characters, their history, their environment, and the unique hazards which threaten them from all sides. Events which could easily be interpreted as supernatural or otherworldly force Green's readers to question what is real, and what kind of a place it is where things like these crimes can happen. With everything so elaborately constructed, from the families and their dark histories, to the hostile environment fraught with danger and extreme jeopardy for one's personal safety, Green does not fail to engage her audience with her gothic worlds.

Green's work represents an elaborate evolution of the genre, pushing it in new directions, complete with diverse investigators, complex criminal plots, and bizarre deaths. She overtly addresses many gothic elements that Poe does not due to his efforts to focus more upon the ratiocinative points of Dupin's cases than any others. The extreme exaggeration of the elements of propriety and greed create a hard tension which backs the characters into corners where they are forced to react. In some instances, individuals come out fighting, ready to strike down their own mother rather than lose an ounce of esteem in the public eye or a penny from their own purse. This environment of betrayal and hypocrisy in the midst of polite manners and intimate relationships creates the perfect gothic contrast for the investigator to infiltrate and disarm such a place of its ability to cause damage.

When faced with perpetrators who are incredibly dedicated to achieving their cause, whether that be revenge, wealth, or love, Green's detectives, equally dedicated to their task of unravelling the truth, prove to be the only adversaries capable of surmounting the murderers'

overwhelming pressure to succeed. Each investigator has their own well-developed persona with at least allusions, if not outright references, to an individual backstory of their own and each approaches their problem with their own distinct sense of method. Recurring characters, such as Mr. Gryce, Sweetwater, Miss Butterworth, and Violet Strange, are rendered even more clearly, complete with catch phrases and specific identifying characteristics, like Mr. Gryce's unwillingness to look anyone in the eye, and Miss Butterworth's old-fashioned insistence on wearing puffs. Green also created a whole series of unnamed investigators who anonymously infiltrate scenes of chaos, often using false identities, and work to restore order to a world in which it is absent. The depth and breadth of Green's detective characters proved to be an inspiration to later authors, like Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie.⁸

While there are many elements of Green's gothic detective fiction which directly contributed to the further development of the genre, probably the most important was bringing it into the domestic sphere to create a conversation about dysfunctional relationships in the home. Where earlier authors pictured their investigators' environments as a "no-man's land" of ominous oppression, Green transported her setting to one which was far more familiar to her readers: the parlor. Her interest in domesticating the American gothic, both by bringing it home and by using her investigators to neutralize it, has had a profound impact on the way authors and readers approach gothic detective fiction, whether they are specifically aware of Green or not. Many of the conventions that we recognize in the later "cozy mysteries" are present in her work, and her use of technology to commit murder is a theme that certainly hasn't been abandoned. All of these elements spring from the same source of material: Anna Katharine Green.

⁸ Paul Woolf explains that Arthur Conan Doyle saw Green as a peer and sought her out during a trip to Buffalo in 1894, acknowledging via a personal note that her writing was "of course well-known" to him, in his article "When Arthur Met Anna: Arthur Conan Doyle and Anna Katharine Green" (2004).

While the mention of her name does not bring the same nod of recognition it once did, largely due to the melodramatic style which was soon to be replaced by the hard-boileds, Green's influence cannot be overstated.⁹ It's interesting how she explores the relationships between people in families and how the power dynamics impact their quality of life or even their right to live, while Mark Twain was simultaneously examining many of the same ideas, except with regard to racial dynamics in domestic and community relations. The main difference between them is that Twain's environment is fatally toxic while Green's still retains a semblance of order and some hope for peace. There is always the threat of duplicitous scheming in gothic detective fiction, but perhaps the fact that Green's crimes usually occur within and between families allows a greater potential for the gothic "monster" to be defanged. Intimate relationships are not to be trusted in the moment, but Green leaves the door open for some possibility of a future trust, and a future peace, if only the sins of the ancestors can be left behind. This act of domesticating the gothic alone is something which makes her stand apart from other authors.

⁹ After her 1929 interview with the author, Kathleen Woodward wrote, somewhat idealistically, that she wondered if forty years from that date, any mystery author would have the intense interest that Green had in her article "Anna Katharine Green."

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CHAPTER FOUR: “NATAL SIGNATURES”: DEVOTION AND DECEPTION IN
PUDD’NHEAD WILSON

In Mark Twain’s book, *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1893), plantation owner, Mr. Percy Driscoll, has discovered some money missing, and not for the first time. He calls before him his four house slaves, among them a woman named Roxy who is in charge of caring for his infant son alongside her own. Driscoll demands that the slaves tell him who is responsible for the theft, but they are too frightened and remain silent. As his frustration grows, Driscoll tells them:

“I give you one minute”—he took out his watch. “If at the end of that time you have not confessed, I will not only sell all four of you, but—I will sell you down the river!”

It was equivalent to condemning them to hell!... Roxy reeled in her tracks and the color vanished out of her face... and three answers came in the one instant...

“I done it!—have mercy, marster—Lord have mercy on us po’ niggers!”

“Very good,” said the master... “I will sell you *here* though you don’t deserve it. You ought to be sold down the river.”

The culprits flung themselves prone, in an ecstasy of gratitude, and kissed his feet, declaring that they would never forget his goodness and never cease to pray for him as long as they lived. They were sincere, for like a god he had stretched forth his mighty hand and closed the gates of hell against them. He knew, himself, that he had done a noble and gracious thing, and was privately well pleased with his magnanimity; and that night he set the incident down in his diary, so that his son might read it in after years, and be thereby moved to deeds of gentleness and humanity himself. (312)

This scene is a perfect example of the satirical tone Twain often adopts when addressing something as barbaric as racial oppression, which is why his book, *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, warrants

closer examination as a part of the American gothic detective genre. At first glance, Twain appears to be a topical outlier when compared with other gothic detective authors, but to dismiss his significance would be a mistake.¹ Always the keen observer of literary trends, Twain enjoyed experimenting with different generic styles as vehicles for his satirical farces and biting social commentary, and the detective genre proved to be a perfect fit for this story. After all, the detective story, its readers, and the people of Dawson's Landing all wish to impose order on a disordered world, and Twain used this desire to provide commentary on the harm of imposing artificial societal constructs for the purpose of segregating and degrading people of color.

Twain used satire to expose and criticize what he saw as people's stupidity and vices, often drawing attention to power differences, especially those rooted in racial oppression and violence. In the late nineteenth-century, after the Civil War and the establishment of segregation, crimes against people of color increased dramatically, including the lynching deaths of hundreds if not thousands of black Americans. Twain's historical novel sought to describe life in slaveholding territory by creating a series of comparisons to highlight the absurdity of white supremacy and warn of the dangers associated with too much power. Twain's satire is often humorous but evokes a deeper response than simple laughter, satirizing humanity's innate desire to force order on their environment. The novel inspires a kind of derision where the reader and the author are on one plane, and the actions taking place between the characters exist on another. This is particularly evident in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, where Twain's satire is so bold-faced that it never "winks" or stage-whispers to acknowledge that what is taking place is a farce. Instead, the

¹ Peter Messent's chapter "Crime and Detection in Mark Twain" in *The Centrality of Crime Fiction in American Literary Culture* (2017) points to how, despite his habit of satirizing its conventions, Mark Twain is one of the unsung fathers of detective fiction.

narrator provides their commentary in seemingly good faith, and the reader is left to make sense of the author's intentions with such a tone and such a tale.

It is important to address how Twain meets the unique generic parameters of the gothic detective story while also addressing issues of oppression, slavery, and segregation in this book. The American gothic is rooted in slavery and the sins of the past continue to plague later descendants in profound ways. Teresa Goddu says that "the benighted South is able to support the irrational impulses of the gothic that the nation as a whole, born of Enlightenment ideas, cannot. America's self-mythologization as a nation of hope and harmony directly contradicts the gothic's most basic impulses" (4). The lives of both blacks and whites are tainted by the evil of slavery, and even after it was officially abolished, it continued to cast a pall over the lives of American society for decades in the form of racial segregation. Writers like Twain tapped into this sense of the gothic and used it to create a contaminated, portentously ominous atmosphere of guilt and dread. Add to that the elements of an investigative mystery, and the result is a distinct exploration into cultural and systemic oppression in the guise of a detective story.

As if the combination of gothic and investigative themes was not enough, Twain infused his story with a dense layer of satire and sarcasm as well. Not only are the characters' thoughts and words meant to convey a message to the reader, the construction of the individual characters is also a very deliberate communication. The slaveowners are all white gentlemen descended from the F.F.V., or the Founding Fathers of Virginia, a group supposed to be revered for their aristocratic ancestral roots and despite their cruel and inhumane practices in ruling over their plantations. They are popularly viewed as the most intelligent, educated men in the area, and their position as highly-visible community members grants them a substantial influence upon the people around them, which they, of course, do not use to improve the lives of anyone else.

Instead, they use their power to control and demean people, for no other purpose than the satisfaction of forcing their order upon them. In comparison, the slaves in the story are often not even dark-skinned, possessing miniscule fractions of “black” blood down to 1/32 as an exaggeration of the “one drop rule” which declared that anyone with any black ancestry at all was considered black for all intents and purposes. Twain is pushing forward his idea that in their desire to wield control over their community, the FFVs of Dawson’s Landing and other segregationists use the imposition of forced order to elevate the preferred individuals and to degrade the “undesirables” at every opportunity.

Twain sets up his cast in order to tell a tale, but more to make a point than anything else. The satirical elements of the story “tell” the reader many things, like Percy Driscoll’s feelings of moral superiority in “sparing” his slaves, leaving the reader to ponder the incongruity of it all.² The use of satire in the story gives an additional layer of unmooring which requires the reader to think more deeply and more critically about what they’re being shown versus what the author is really telling them. Framing *Pudd’nhead Wilson* as a satirical gothic detective story offers limitless opportunities to experiment with mood, tone, setting, and theme to create a commentary on the undercurrent of human violence and oppression which permeates the lives of the characters. This capitalizes on the common desire for order which is present in segregation, detective fiction, and readers’ minds, echoing many gothic elements of the past but reimagining them in a decidedly American context and in the midst of decidedly American conflict. The catch is that Twain leaves out any Enlightenment optimism for a resolution to the problems his detective encounters.

² Stanley Brodwin’s essay “Blackness and the Adamic Myth in Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*” (1973) discusses Percy Driscoll’s god complex and other destructive effects on the human soul.

Hostile Environment: The Unwritten Law of this Region

One of the main points that Twain seems to be making is that his society is shot through with moral evil. Simply put, Twain believes that enslavement, oppression, or violence against any group, especially based upon the superficial standard of outward appearance, is wrong. Period. The moral evil of slavery, and by extension, general racism, hurts everyone involved regardless of race. Twain satirically designs the scenarios of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* to especially point toward the different ways that racism corrupts absolutely.³ One interesting approach to this is the use of a murder mystery plot as a part of the story. By working through how such a society responds to violence against one of their own versus violence against their slaves, Twain creates a powerful opposition of right and wrong and a commentary on the futility of a forced social order.⁴

The way that the community handles Judge Driscoll's murder and the subsequent investigation tells a lot about their values and their twisted sense of prideful obligation to their deceased benefactor. He is early on described as "very proud of his old Virginian ancestry, and in his hospitalities and his rather formal and stately manners he kept up its traditions. He was fine

³ Many scholars have devoted considerable effort in discussing the different ways that Twain interacts with race in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, including Richard Hardack in his article "The Tragic Immigrant: Duality, Hybridity and the Discovery of Blackness in Mark Twain and James Weldon Johnson" (2015), Kara A. Johnson in "Two Stories at the Same Time: Silent Narratives of Enslavement in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (2016), Linda A. Morris in "Beneath the Veil: Clothing, Race, and Gender in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (1999), Heather Nelson in "'You Could be Judas': *Pudd'nhead Wilson*'s Black Slaveowner" (2015), Garrett Nichols in "'Clo'es Could Do de Like o' Dat': Race, Place, and Power in Mark Twain's *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (2013), Ellen Samuels in "Reading Race through Disability: Slavery and Agency in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and 'Those Extraordinary Twins'" (2012), Brook Thomas in "Tragedies of Race, Training, Birth, and Communities of Competent Pudd'nheads" (1989), and Henry B. Wonham in "The Minstrel and the Detective: 'The Functions of Ethnic Caricature in Mark Twain's Writings of the 1890s'" (2001).

⁴ Robert H. Wiebe's book, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (1967) discusses how the process of segregation is accomplished though basically drawing a line around the good society and dismissing the remainder, making life for anyone inside the preferred circle easier and anyone outside it exceptionally difficult. This was the social practice during Twain's lifetime, after slavery had been abolished.

and just and generous. To be a gentleman—a gentleman without stain or blemish—was his only religion, and to it he was always faithful. He was respected, esteemed and beloved by all the community” (303). There is a definite sense of irony in Judge Driscoll being seen as a beloved agent of the court which enforces racial oppression, and then being murdered in part due to the conditions he serves to maintain. Before the Judge’s death, his nephew, Tom Driscoll, learns of his precarious position in the community as a black man “in disguise” due to his mother, Roxy, having switched him with their master’s son as a baby, and he fears he will be excised from the community and become vulnerable to all of the violent oppression he has heaped on others for so long. This becomes a huge motivator for Tom to pay off his debts and get right with the Judge to maintain his position of privilege. If the truth ever came out, the unequal laws of Dawson’s Landing would become applicable to Tom as well, and he was in a position of nervous desperation to prevent that from happening. He knew all too well how his fellow townspeople would react, ousting him from white society. This drives him to extreme measures and eventually murder.

Tom soon becomes frantically desperate to lay his hands on some ready cash and pay off his debts. Rather than ask his uncle for a loan, it occurs to him that Judge Driscoll keeps a certain amount in his study, and Tom plots how to steal it that evening. Slipping the bejeweled dagger he stole from the Italian twins into his pocket, he:

began to make his way toward the pile of notes, stooping low as he went. When he was passing his uncle, the old man stirred in his sleep, and Tom stopped instantly—stopped, and softly drew the knife from its sheath, with his heart thumping, and his eyes fastened upon his benefactor’s face. After a moment or two he ventured forward again—one step—reached for his prize and seized it, dropping the knife-sheath. Then he felt the old

man's strong grip upon him, and a wild cry of "Help! help!" rang in his ear. Without hesitation he drove the knife home—and was free. (415)

Tom's first instinct is self-preservation, and even though his uncle posed no physical threat to him, Tom is more inclined to simply murder him than suffer the indignity of being exposed as a liar and a thief, let alone a black man.⁵ Tom fears that the social order enforceable in Dawson's Landing might be used against him, forcing from the inner circle of the town's esteemed citizens and into the outer circle of black people, slaves, and other marginalized groups. These insecurities initially turn Tom into a nervous wreck, anticipating an authoritative knock at the door at any moment.

But soon, Tom falls into complacency. He becomes cocky, too sure of himself, and goes out of his way to taunt the constable and David Wilson about the case.⁶ He tells Wilson facetiously, "Don't take it so hard; a body can't win every time; you'll hang somebody yet," but the joke is on Tom (426). Wilson may be the town's laughingstock, but he possesses a keener insight into the interpretation of evidence than anyone else in Dawson's Landing. He catches a glimpse of Tom's fingerprint on a piece of glass, and he begins to realize that Tom is actually the murderer. But first, he must sort out the differences in the fingerprint records he has of Tom, finally comparing all four of the baby's impressions before realizing the truth about the switch.

⁵ Karen Halttunen's book, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (1998) discusses the novel in context with Twain's Gothic narrative of murder and the depiction of the criminal transgressor, positioning Tom as a moral monster to be shunned by society. Emahunn Campbell's essay, "*Pudd'nhead Wilson* and the Discourse of Black Criminality." (2013) also discusses Twain's complicated treatment of race and criminality in this novel.

⁶ Beverly Hume's article, "Mark Twain's Mysterious Duplicate in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (2013) positions Tom as a reflection of Dawson's Landing as a whole, the opposite of morality and human kindness, and utterly ruthless.

Once he is sure, Wilson feels compelled to exonerate the falsely accused Italian, Luigi Capello, and he dramatically reveals to the courtroom that: “The murderer of your friend and mine—York Driscoll of the generous hand and the kindly spirit—sits in among you. Valet de Chambre, negro and slave,—falsely called Thomas à Becket Driscoll,—make upon the window the finger-prints that will hang you!” (437). In one deft movement, Wilson has deprived him of his liberty, and soon, he fears, his very life. The social order that Tom was so willing to exploit has been turned against him. All that he dreaded has come to pass, and in a twisted parody of justice, he is sold down the river as he sold his mother before him. In Twain’s gothic world, this is “justice,” and justice has been served.

The progression toward Tom’s doom is a perfect example of how Twain’s satire comes into play. Typically the detective intervenes in the matter at hand, and they are traditionally responsible for neutralizing or eliminating the threat against the community. In Twain’s conception, however, almost the opposite occurs. Rather than a traditional resolution such as the murderer being remanded for trial or sent to prison, he is stripped of his human rights and automatically becomes a piece of property to be sold to resolve an old debt. Twain’s depiction of this entire situation is completely insane in terms of human morality, but it in many ways highlights the real-life absurdity of segregation and abuse against black citizens. In Twain’s world, people and possessions are interchangeable, justice has no meaning, and there can never be any peace for whites or blacks due to the toxic social order which has been imposed to elevate white people and subjugate their black brothers and sisters.

As a part of the blithe closing passage, the narrator relays how the creditors of the Percy Driscoll estate believed that if Tom had been delivered up to them in the first place as a possession of the estate:

they would have sold him and he could not have murdered Judge Driscoll; therefore it was not he that had really committed the murder, the guilt lay with the erroneous inventory... Everybody granted that if 'Tom' were white and free it would be unquestionably right to punish him... but to shut up a valuable slave for life – that was quite another matter. (440)

Spoken as bold-faced as authentic seriousness, the narrator's parting shot to the readers is essentially the fact that this crime and the conditions which surround it cannot be solved in isolation; there are too many environmental factors to be considered. In the same way, the violence and lynchings of Twain's time could also not be considered in isolation. They represented a part of a larger, systemic problem which could not be resolved without head-on confrontation, acknowledgement, and the complete abandonment of racial prejudice and hostility. The order which has been imposed upon Dawson's Landing has served to segregate and harm its people rather than fostering a sense of community. Twain points toward a problem within the existing social order that is outside the detective's ability to address. He simultaneously pushes his readers toward the discovery that systemic problems also cannot be easily fixed. In Twain's gothic world, there can be no harmony or justice or change without first addressing the corruption of the social order.

The environment Twain creates in Dawson's Landing is falsely beautiful, falsely noble, falsely aristocratic, and falsely affluent. People seem rich but don't have money; people seem benevolent but wear their generosity as a mask to hide their inner cruelty. Tom Driscoll might be a ne'er-do-well, but his prodigality is at least authentic when compared to the artifice the other gentlemen in town hide behind. Their investment in chivalric ideals and other aspirational

constructs only accents their willful ignorance concerning the treatment of their slaves.⁷ Twain creates comparisons between lives and lifestyles to ask the reader to consider what would happen if the roles were reversed and the white oppressors of Dawson's Landing were forced to face the same hardship and harsh treatment as they had been doling out for years. When Judge Driscoll is eventually murdered, the townspeople are finally forced to confront an act of violence against one of their own which is outside their understanding of terrible things only happening to black people. This conflict draws attention to the way that the townspeople's search for order, within the context of segregation, can never be fully realized due to its inherent racist fallibility.

Extreme Jeopardy: Blood of My Race

Part of the hazard within Dawson's Landing lies not in the present, but in the past. The white people of today are constantly revisiting and perpetuating the sins of their fathers, furthering the oppression and violence against black people and digging themselves deeper and deeper into a moral quagmire. Just as the American criminal justice system has a long history of oppression against nonwhites and other marginalized populations, the law and order in Twain's historic setting supports the subjugation and total domination of black slaves. The gothic darkness of this great moral wrong creates a place of turmoil where vast concepts such as freedom and agency are dependent upon a very narrow interpretation of what constitutes a person. Twain employs an out-of-work lawyer, New York native David Wilson, as his de facto investigator, which feels both natural, due to the links between the two professions, but also strange, because his concerns lie so far outside the scope of everyone else's. His quest for order leads him in problematic directions. Twain presents Wilson to his reader as astute enough to

⁷ Benedict Anderson's book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006), discusses the "curious authentic popularity" of the poor treatment of black slaves and natives by white American societies, calling the United States and places like Dawson's Landing a social "paradox."

study the very modern practice of legal identification via fingerprinting, but he never seems able to fully appreciate the scope or the consequences of what is happening right in front of him. It's as though he sees only the small-scale events which transpire and makes no connection to, or takes no special interest in, the larger systemic problems.

Twain used his novel about the clever but oblivious Pudd'nhead to reflect on the historical conditions which contributed to the increasing discontent and violence present after the fact, in his own present-day. Like a looming cloud suspended over all of Dawson's Landing, Twain's gothic threat exists to provoke a response, frequently a violent one, from its residents. Most often this is against the slaves, sometimes against one another in the form of chivalric duels, and only infrequently victimizing the people in power. Twain inserts his satirical narrative into this perilous moral darkness, drawing attention to the horrors of what is taking place without ever saying so at all. It doesn't take long for the reader to realize that the narrator is an unreliable one, and they are on their own in piecing together the awful truth behind the town's affluent façade. The "monsters" in Twain's gothic world are the fanciest people in town, the ones who should be setting a good example rather than basking in their own hypocrisy. Instead, men like Percy Driscoll practically break their arm patting themselves on the back in congratulations for their great humanitarianism. Twain lays it on rather thick to make sure the reader notices that what they're being told can be interpreted in more than one way and that even the most benign-appearing individuals actually present a real threat.

One of Twain's little satirical jokes is in his construction of the character Roxy, the woman who essentially sets the series of events in motion which interest David Wilson and indirectly result in the murder of Judge Driscoll.⁸ While Roxy lives as a slave woman and is

⁸ Leslie Fiedler's book, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1966) describes *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and its depiction of Roxy problematic, especially with regard to her impregnation by a white man to produce Chambers. He

subject to all of the injustices associated with that social position, her outward appearance might lead an unbiased observer to think otherwise, at least until she opens her mouth.⁹ The reader is told that:

From Roxy's manner of speech, a stranger would have expected her to be black, but she was not. Only one sixteenth of her was black, and that sixteenth did not show... Her complexion was very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in the cheeks... her eyes were brown and liquid, and she had a heavy suit of fine soft hair which was also brown... She had... a high and "sassy" way, withal; but of course she was meek and humble enough where white people were. (308)

Twain's comparison here between the seemingly Caucasian Roxy and "white people" is really a primary focus of the whole novel, and aside from the theft and murder investigations which take place, it is one of the most generically important as well. Twain plays with some of the same social insecurities as Anna Katherine Green when it comes to authenticity, but in Twain's satirically gothic world the white people are just as likely to be "black" as they are "white." The distinctions being drawn are so superficial as to be anthropologically worthless, but they are legally and culturally binding and have significant individual consequences.

Consider, too, the fate of Roxy's child. The family unit in this gothic place has been so viciously deconstructed that the only remaining point of significance is the race of the child's mother. Twain's narrator explains this barbaric practice, telling how "Roxy was as white as anybody, but the one sixteenth of her which was black outvoted the other fifteen parts and made

also compares Twain's work to Poe's with its treatment of black people, but he ultimately attributes the hopelessness of finding a resolution at the end of the novel to the corruptive influence of gothic forces.

⁹ Frank C. Cronin discusses the irony of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and the distinct contrast which exists between the mystery at hand and the overarching problem of systemic oppression in his article "The Ultimate Perspective in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (1971-72).

her a negro. She was a slave, and salable as such. Her child was thirty-one parts white, and he, too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a negro. He had blue eyes and flaxen curls” (308-309). Roxy bestows upon her baby the name of “Valet de Chambre,” French for “valet,” unknowingly naming her son something akin to “servant,” but she liked “the fine sound of it” and thought it a fitting name for her child (309). Again, the absurdity of the situation is only outweighed by its tragic consequences, and Twain satirically uses Roxy as his primary example in his commentary on the arbitrary oppression faced by black Americans.

Everything is the opposite of what it should be, especially morally, where a mother’s love for her child is typically revered, not coldly dismissed in favor of fiscal profitability. The fates of Roxy, her son Chambers, and little Tom Driscoll become tragically intertwined when she decides to rebel against this oppressive system. Twain shows us that Roxy’s crazy plan to force order on her world by switching the boys is no crazier than the social premise she is rebelling against which says that her son’s destiny is determined at birth due to his race. Despite this intervention, “Tom’s” morality becomes irreparably corrupted by growing up in a slaveholding home and treating his own mother as a master treats his slave.

Soon Roxy’s “mock reverence became real reverence... the little counterfeit rift of separation between imitation-slave and imitation-master widened and widened, and became an abyss” (320). It was not long before Tom taught Roxy “her place” and she would cry to herself, saying “He struck me, en I warn’t no way to blame—struck me in de face, right before folks. En he’s al’ays callin’ me nigger-wench, en hussy, en all dem mean names, when I’s doin’ de very bes’ I kin. Oh, Lord, I done so much for him—I lift’ him away up to what he is—en dis is what I git for it” (323). All of this is satirically presented to the reader as the natural progression of a powerful young man’s behavior toward his subordinates, casting no overt judgement of the

narrator's own, and merely relaying the events as they occurred with the accompanying thoughts and dialogue of the characters. The narrator never says that what happens to Roxy is tragic, cruel, or undeserved, they only tell the reader what *she* thinks about it all. The reader alone, in their role of investigator, begins to see how Roxy's desperate response is both understandable and the catalyst for substantial harm. The order established by the laws of Dawson's Landing excludes her from its protective arc. Her son grows cold and cruel in his role as a slaveowner, and having Roxy and Chambers cover for him all his life turns Tom into a man lacking substance, morals, or the capacity to feel human compassion. At least the slaves, while in a subjugated position, retain their essential dignity and the integrity of their souls, while their so-called "masters" devolve into rapists, murders, and thieves upon the slightest provocation.

Once Wilson reveals the truth about the switched children in court, legal justice appears to run its due course, with "Tom" arrested for his crimes and "Chambers" set free and declared a white man. It outwardly appears that the town's order has been restored. This is another satirical turn on Twain's part, plucking "Chambers" out of the only environment he has ever known and thrusting him into the realm of his oppressors in the guise of kind-heartedness. Twain's narrator presents the situation as though race is fluid and easily interchangeable, but the reader is all-too aware of the dire ramifications of being officially identified as one race or another.

Unfortunately, "Chambers," the true Tom Driscoll, does not personally or psychologically fare too well in his transition from "black" to "white":

The real heir suddenly found himself rich and free, but in a most embarrassing situation. He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the negro quarter. His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh—all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave. Money and fine clothes could not

mend these defects or cover them up; they only made them the more glaring and the more pathetic. The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen. The family pew was a misery to him, yet he could nevermore enter into the solacing refuge of the "nigger gallery"—that was closed to him for good and all. (439-440)

With all "Chambers" is given as recompense for his time spent as a slave, so much more has been taken away from him. Twain describes how "Chambers" has theoretically escaped from legal tyranny, but the impact of the cultural and systemic oppression he'd suffered all his life still remains. How can he be expected to simply change places with his oppressors and adopt their conception of social order which turns men into monsters? Everyone, including Wilson, takes great pride in the kindness of setting "Chambers" free from his enslaved condition, but the looming question in the reader's mind is, if the townspeople believe a person can be "converted" from black to white (and therefore from subordinate to equal) so easily, why couldn't they extend that belief to make *all* people free and equal?

Twain frames this tale as a gothic detective story to embellish the jeopardy experienced by the characters by having them investigate a series of robberies and a murder through a satirical lens. In typical stories of this genre, the detective character's responsibility is to assemble all of the clues to identify the culprit and then restore order to a disordered place. In Twain's gothic detective fiction, the ambiguous morality of the characters and the uncertainty of how the clues should be interpreted leave the investigator in chaos with no possible reprieve. Since none of the usual detective rules seem to apply here, the reader is asked to lend their own expertise in deciphering the truth from the illusions. Like other American gothic detective stories, there is no supernatural element casting its gothic spectre over people's lives, but the

ghosts of history are still just as present, and the ancestral belief in racial inequality remains to corrupt future generations. In classical gothic detective fiction, an outsider, like David Wilson, would usually find his outsider status to be a benefit, but Twain's world is different.¹⁰ There, all of the oppressive harm is still present, but Wilson, being exempt from it as a white man, simply ignores that it exists. The longer the story goes on, the more the reader realizes that their understanding surpasses that of any of the characters', even Wilson's.

Tearing Away False Fronts: His Manifold Cleverness

When David Wilson arrives into town fresh from law school in New York, it is immediately apparent that he does not fit in, and not simply because he is from the North. The refusal of the townspeople to take him seriously results in the floundering of his law practice and ample free time to read and make scientific studies, such as his project with the fingerprints. He is not a stakeholder in the cases he investigates, and the only potential profit he has to gain is the improvement of his reputation in town. Other than that, his primary concern is to study the facts and piece them together into a coherent order to produce an explanation of the murder of Judge Driscoll. When it finally hits him that he has held the most crucial piece of evidence in his collection all along, Wilson's scholarly eccentricities are vindicated and the correct perpetrator is identified. Unfortunately, while he genuinely believes he is serving as an altruistic agent for justice, Wilson also serves to uphold the *injustice* of the standing social order enforcing racial oppression and slavery which results in the murderer being sold down the river into conditions of

¹⁰ Discussions of Twain's incorporation of earlier authors' fictional elements include John C. Guesser's "The Purloined Critter: Twain's Parodic Homage to the Originator of Modern Detective Fiction in 'The Stolen White Elephant'" (2013) and "History Repeating Itself: Passing, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and *The President's Daughter* (2009) by Sinéad Moynihan which compares Twain's work with that of Barbara Chase-Riboud, while Ann M. Ryan partners Twain with Hawthorne's popular preface to *The Scarlet Letter* in "Standing in Some True Relation: Mark Twain Visits 'The Custom House'" (2017).

horrifying servitude rather than simply being placed in jail. Wilson is intellectual and astute, but he still has many limitations.

When Wilson first arrived in town and gained his neighbors' attention in a most unfortunate way, with an ill-timed joke, this leads to them mocking him for being a "pudd'nhead" or idiot. Although this reputation does dissipate somewhat, the townspeople still don't trust him with their legal work or anything other than a bit of accounting. Roxy, however, sees past the local stigma which affects the northern transplant, and recognizes the potential for danger in Wilson's keen sense of observation. After Tom and Chambers are switched, Roxy reflects on her fears that Wilson may notice:

Dey ain't but one man dat I's afeard of, en dat's dat Pudd'nhead Wilson. Dey calls him a pudd'nhead, en says he's a fool. My lan', dat man ain't no mo' fool den I is! He's de smartes' man in dis town... Blame dat man, he worries me wid dem ornery glasses o' hisn... I reckon he wants to print de chillen's fingers ag'in; en if he don't notice dey's changed, I bound dey ain't nobody gwine to notice it, en den I's safe, sho'. (317)

Once the fingerprinting is repeated and her deception is not noticed, Roxy feels secure that both she and her child are now safe. After all, if Wilson does not see past her charade, it's likely nobody else will, either. This is another great instance of satire, in that Wilson is supposed to be the most observant man in town, but he does not recognize the difference in the children's appearances. This is because, as Wilson tells Roxy earlier, there *is* no visible difference in the boys aside from their manner of dress. "They're handsome little chaps. One's just as handsome as the other, too," Wilson says, and Roxy replies "Bless yo' soul, Misto Wilson, it 's pow'ful

nice o' you to say dat, 'ca'se one of 'em ain't on'y a nigger" (309).¹¹ It's only later that Wilson is able to recognize the partial truth behind the strange events that have been happening in Dawson's Landing. He just simply fails to grasp the full significance of the situation.

After catching a glimpse of Tom Driscoll's fingerprint on the edge of another person's slide during Tom's visit to his home, David Wilson's mind is thrown into chaos. He tries to organize all of the facts into some kind of order, but it doesn't quite add up. This is where we see the detective in him actually spring into action in pursuit of a solution, but instead of returning to the scene of the crime or some other kind of investigative activity, Wilson takes a nap. As he awakens, the truth emerges from within his subconscious:

"Now what was that dream?" he said, trying to recall it; "what was that dream?—it seemed to unravel that puz—"

He landed in the middle of the floor at a bound, without finishing the sentence, and ran and turned up his light and seized his "records." He took a single swift glance at them and cried out—

"It's so! Heavens, what a revelation! And for twenty-three years no man has ever suspected it!" (427)

When Wilson sorts out the truth of Tom's identity, he considers it only in the context of the murder trial at hand. Never once does it appear to enter his mind that he might be condemning Tom to a fate worse than death by his revelation. It's like his powerful skills of observation are open to everything except that which is related to the systemic oppression of black people.

¹¹ Henry Nash Smith's essay, "*Pudd'nhead Wilson as Criticism of the Dominant Culture*" (2005), discusses how Dawson's Landing imposes its own fictional reality upon the people, which corrupts both master and slave through the belief in white supremacy over human dignity.

It's interesting that Twain chose to use the practice of fingerprinting in his novel, especially relating to the identification of black and white individuals. While fingerprinting was first widely popularized by Francis Galton in 1892 with his book *Finger Prints*, Twain had held an interest in the subject for quite some time before that.¹² Twain was well aware of how, in an effort to aid in segregation, certain American men, such as Harris Hawthorne Wilder, "proposed the use of fingerprinting for the surveillance of racially marginalized populations rather than the identification of criminals" (Cole 247). Galton, the acknowledged world expert in the field, had then expressed his scientific skepticism as to whether there was any merit in Wilder's ambitions at all, saying:

It requires considerable patience and caution to arrive at trustworthy conclusions, but it may emphatically be said that there is no *peculiar* pattern which characterises persons of any of the [English, Welsh, Hebrew, and Negro] races. There is no particular pattern that is special to any one of them, which when met with enables us to assert, or even to suspect, the nationality of the person on whom it appeared. (192-193)

Despite this assurance from Galton, white supremacists such as Wilder pushed forward with their efforts to rationalize racial hierarchy through science. Some Americans even responded with the theory of "polygeny," which claimed that different races were actually different biological species, which Europeans referred to derisively as the "American school" of anthropology (R. Thomas 50). Of course, other scientists sought to debunk the entire 'polygeny' myth, and today it is regarded simply as antiquated junk science.

¹² Anne P. Wigger's article, "The Source of Fingerprint Material in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and Those Extraordinary Twins" (1957) discusses Twain's fascination with the practice as emerging science.

Twain, with his interest in the subject of fingerprinting, was aware of the international debate taking place regarding the racial hierarchy of man and how certain individuals sought to reinforce their claims of white supremacy by claiming that the fingerprints of certain races would classify them conclusively and betray their heritage so they could be easier identified and segregated from the white population. Twain's use of fingerprinting in his story speaks to his belief in the commonality of all human beings, especially the way he employs it to show that while the two boys are physically indistinguishable up to a certain age, their fingerprints, and not their racial designations, are what ultimately determine who they really are. This all too serious, real-life means of identification plays an important part in Twain's satirical plot, making many of his most important points for him with their simple, indisputable existence.

In his construction of this novel, Twain asks much of his readers, pushing them into the role of the "real" detective and tapping into the more valuable insight that Wilson does not share. While he can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell as well as any other man, he does not possess the sixth sense necessary to fully appreciate the atrocities which are being committed against the black community. Because Wilson does not understand his part in the racist social order, nor does he make any attempt to disrupt it, the chaos of his world can have no reprieve. Twain uses Wilson's limitations as one of his satirical elements, molding him to fit the role of the detective in many ways but also severely limiting his ability to identify and neutralize the gothic threat of his world. Wilson misidentifies the cause of the problem as Tom, when in reality it is the corrupting influences of systemic racism and oppression which are at fault. This is apparent to the reader, but Wilson cannot see it. He thinks he has finished the case by turning Tom in to the police, but he does not realize that the real trouble is far more complex. Wilson learns some things, but he cannot fix his neighbors' desire for racial segregation. Only the reader, in the guise

of the vicarious detective, can see through the satire to appreciate this situation for what it really is.

Twain gives his readers a rush of false hope when Wilson insists upon inspecting Tom Driscoll's room after the murder, sensing that he might have something to do with the crime. Being a little more level-headed than everyone else in Dawson's Landing, Wilson dismisses the assumption that the Capello twins were responsible for Judge Driscoll's murder and sets out to investigate. The narrator tells how:

The town was bitter against the unfortunates, and for the first few days after the murder they were in constant danger of being lynched. The grand jury presently indicted Luigi for murder in the first degree, and Angelo as accessory before the fact... Wilson examined the finger-marks on the knife-handle and said to himself, "Neither of the twins made those marks." Then manifestly there was another person concerned, either in his own interest or as hired assassin. (418)

With his sole knowledge that someone else besides the twins must be responsible for the murder, Wilson sets out to find the real killer. While this is what the detective is usually expected to do, Wilson's search is revealed as treating only the symptom of dysfunction, not the actual cause. No matter how well he follows logical procedures to reach his solution, the fact that his world is entirely illogical causes his investigation to fail even when it succeeds.

The gothic detective story is the perfect medium for dishing out cultural criticism, and by distorting the investigator's reliance upon method and reason by severely limiting his perceptions, Twain took advantage of the opportunity to highlight the extreme volatility of a world dominated by racial oppression. While Twain overtly tells one story, he covertly relays another, using his satirical events from times past to convey his disdain for contemporary acts of

violence and cruelty.¹³ When this novel was published, lynching was terrifyingly common, and many people of color feared the worst from their white neighbors, with good reason. Twain could not abide by these atrocities, and he used the popular generic conventions of the gothic detective story to have greater reach in telling a tale both engaging and impactful which would make his readers think hard about many difficult things. Each new reading reveals new insight, particularly in following the commentary provided by the narrator's voice which proves to be so sarcastically critical of the people and practices of Dawson's Landing.

Parting Thoughts

Gothic detective fiction, through the eyes of Mark Twain, is a little different from what is seen in the work of other authors. It can do things, big things, that other genres cannot. Twain saw the possibilities of what he could accomplish with *Pudd'nhead Wilson* quite clearly, and he used this text to get to the heart of the matter of what concerned his society the most at that time: race. In 1893, the United States was still making an effort to return to normalcy, but what constituted that normalcy varied greatly by region. In Twain's novel, he sought to highlight the injustices taking place around him, the marginalization, segregation, and lynching deaths of countless black Americans. In order to best capture the severity of the situation, Twain chose to use his knack for satire to exaggerate the absurdity of making mass generalizations based off of perceived, non-existent biological difference. The desire of white segregationists to foist an unreasonable series of rules, regulations, and restrictions upon their free black neighbors represents the greatest possible corruption of the social order, and Twain used his novel to

¹³ John Carlos Rowe discusses how Twain uses historical distance to impress upon his contemporary audience how little their society has progressed since the Antebellum period in his article "Fatal Speculations: Murder, Money, and Manners in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (1990).

express his disgust. Once the reader becomes aware that whatever Twain tells them should be questioned and often reversed, the novel can easily be read as a scathing criticism of the normalization of such atrocious behavior. Countering the assertion that black people are somehow lesser than white, Twain offers us white slaves who are literally indistinguishable from their white owners. To point out the ways that racism harms whites as well as blacks, he shows us how slavery has corrupted and ruined Tom Driscoll. And to help his white readers understand their passive complicity in this disgusting practice, Twain gives us David Wilson, supposedly the smartest man in town, who unwittingly aids in the enforcement and perpetuation of the persecution of black Americans in the guise of ethical benevolence.

For Twain, the novel is not simply about satire, although his wit and creativity certainly shine bright in this example. The difference is that the lightness of satire is used to thrust the moral darkness of human oppression into the spotlight. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain satirizes the disturbing commonality in the desire for order felt by readers, detectives, and segregationists. While the former two are certainly common and benign enough to be generally understood and appreciated, the incongruity of the latter casts an uncomfortable pall over the group. Just as the reader appreciates a novel for its ability to disentangle complex conundrums, the detective feels a similar pleasure in this task. The segregationist, Twain shows, shares this desire to regulate society, but in a much more objectionable fashion. Joining the three together in forced interaction brings a new complexity to the gothic detective story, raising issues and questions that all three must address. The main difference is that each has their own method of answering back, creating an unresolvable sense of chaos in Twain's world. This chaos, Twain shows, can never be resolved unless the oblivious public restores a sense of true order, in the form of true equality, to its disenfranchised people.

The use of satire in a detective story was not something commonly seen in Twain's time, especially so densely packed as it is in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Twain's choice to write in a detective style using gothic themes but delivering the brunt of his message via the satirical commentary of his narrator forged a new perspective in the possibilities inherent in the genre. While many authors had already tapped into the possibilities of offering social criticism, Twain took that ability one step further by not only identifying social incongruity, but pointing and laughing at its absurdity. Responding to the violence in this tumultuous time period, Twain sought to disparage racism, to infantilize it like society had sought to diminish the quality of life for black people for so long. Twain positioned the aggressors as lesser, the oppressed as redemptive, and the people hanging out somewhere in the middle as complicit coconspirators in these societal transgressions. By satirically mocking the social order of Dawson's Landing, Twain implies that the same scorn should be felt toward all segregated places.

This new perspective contributes greatly to the development of the gothic detective story by incorporating new ideas about race into the genre. When Charles Brockden Brown was writing *Edgar Huntly*, he certainly had the conflicts between natives and Europeans in mind, but his representations of native people amount to almost slander, with their nameless, faceless aggression and bloodthirsty ways. Poe has also drawn some criticism for his use of an orangutan in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," with some asserting that his descriptions could also apply to black people.¹⁴ Green's story "Midnight on Beauchamp Row" touches ever so subtly upon the exploitation of the myth of the black, male intruder, but she didn't write that until 1895, two years after Twain's novel. Twain is the innovator who sought to make meaningful connections

¹⁴ Elise Lemire's chapter "'The Murders in the Rue Morgue': Amalgamation Discourses and the Race Riots of 1838 in Poe's Philadelphia" in *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race* (2001), describes how some critics interpret Poe's use of an orangutan in his story as a placeholder for a nonwhite other of African or Asian descent.

between the significance of being white or black in the United States and one's potential for achieving the American Dream so faithfully aspired to in this country. Twain uses Roxy to illustrate how her plan of switching her baby with her master's is not any more implausible than the assertion that the children's fates were predetermined at birth. By rejecting the order imposed upon her by Dawson's Landing, Roxy refuses to cede to the pressure to be a good little slave and just roll with the punches. Instead, Roxy fights back against tyranny in the only way she knows how, by subverting it. In destabilizing her master's power over her, Roxy retains a sense of agency in her own fate; win, lose, or draw. This fatalistic abandon in the face of unwarranted oppression is something that has been carried forward with the gothic detective genre and explored through future perspectives, as in the books of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, focusing on similar subjects related to racial discord.

While the topic of race is one that Twain focused upon closely, his use of satire has also had a profound impact on the way that we view the genre. Prior to Twain, there was no "wisecracking" in detective fiction, and his introduction of humor, even in dark, satirical fashion, changed the way that authors approached their work. Twain's satirical handling of the detective's quest for order, in particular, begins the process of asking whether it is even possible for such order to be imposed in a world so out of control. The detective can either laugh or cry about the problems he faces, and, due to his toughness, he elects the former. Rather than relying upon a disembodied narrator to provide their commentary, later authors put the words right in the detective's mouth, with Hammett's Continental Op spouting such niceties as "Be still while I get up or I'll make an opening in your head for brains to leak in" (*Red Harvest* 86). The snarky voice, while initially belonging to the narrator of Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, is eventually transferred to the detective, becoming a hallmark of the man. Dennis Porter says of the hard-

boiled detective who comes after Twain that “he who makes wisecracks is a wise guy. That is to say, someone who is no respecter of authority, wealth, power, social standing, or institutions... And his wit is the weapon that enables him to expose people, situations, and institutions for what they are” (166). Twain’s satirical narrator begins this tradition of the detective using “wit as weapon,” and its later popularity is directly attributable to Twain’s introduction of it in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.

When considering what this novel has to say about gothic detective fiction, it’s important to remember that Twain stepped outside his usual modes of expression to adopt it. His selection was deliberate and so was the goal he sought to accomplish. The Dawson’s Landing that Twain imagines is a world bereft of comfort, where only certain individuals make the cut for preferred status, such as the FFVs, and the rest of society, including the entire black population, is left outside that preferential circle to languish. The hostile environment alone is enough to make Dawson’s Landing a gothic place, but Twain goes even further into the realm of the bizarre by using the popular form of a murder mystery to frame his tale. The history of the genre had shown Twain the effectiveness of this mode of writing to criticize societal shortcomings, and he adopted to use it for the same purposes. All this shows what the gothic detective genre brought to Twain, but what did Twain add in return?

As previously mentioned, Twain brought the new dynamic of race into the struggle for power and order so frequently addressed by other authors. This alone is not a new idea, particularly in the context of rich vs. poor, but Twain’s positioning of his characters as either absolutely powerful or abjectly powerless was something new. He adjusted the parameters of gothic detective fiction to fit the shape of what he sought to accomplish with his satirical gestures and criticism. This authorial throwing down of the creative gauntlet challenged the perceptions

of black people in the United States, particularly within the gothic genre, which is known for its “othering” of individuals outside the preferred circle of society typically inhabited by elite, Protestant whites. Even aside from race, the conflict between the “haves” and the “have nots” was exacerbated dramatically on Twain’s watch, with individual offenses evolving into a more organized, systemic kind of crime, first in the form of elite slaveholders in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, and later echoed in the form of gangsters, bootleggers, and other lowlife hoods in the fiction of Dashiell Hammett and other hard-boileds. When the detective tries to impose order on the environment of Twain or many of the authors who follow, he finds his efforts sorely challenged by an imperfect world which rejects any such attempts. The ability of the detective to neutralize or even lessen the gothic threat of these corrupted worlds becomes doubtful at best, and Twain’s conception of this idea helped to create that standard.

In taking some of these last steps through the development of the gothic detective genre, certain elements emerge as being the most important or impactful. In *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, those contributions take on an uncommon form. It is not just about the struggle against oppression, although that is an important part of it. It’s more about the struggle for order, the natural desire to wield one’s influence over their world and create a sense of peace where before there was only chaos. In Twain’s novel, David Wilson is an imperfect detective who simply cannot overcome the darkness of his world, however hard he tries to do the right thing. He abides by his own moral code, which he thinks is on the right side of the law, and he acts accordingly. While espousing some of the attributes of the classical detective, Twain uses Wilson to show how even the best of intentions can have unintended consequences in a place as corrupt as Dawson’s Landing. The fallibility of this morally bankrupt place has become a standard of gothic detective fiction, where neither the forced order of Poe’s Dupin nor the domesticated peace imposed by

Green's detectives exists. Instead, Twain's satire shows his readers from the very beginning that this divided world can never be tamed due to its white inhabitants' complete unwillingness to even recognize that what is happening is wrong. This futility is a powerful statement of Twain's derision for racial oppression and the impossibility of separating a toxic place from its past. For these reasons and many more, Mark Twain should be recognized as a powerful force in the generic evolution of gothic detective fiction.

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CHAPTER FIVE: "A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TROUBLE": DASHIELL HAMMETT'S
HARD-BOILED GOTHIC

In Dashiell Hammett's novel, *Red Harvest*, the Continental Op of the Continental Detective Agency arrives with Police Chief Noonan to the Personville hideout of Whisper Thaler in an attempt to arrest him and his gang. Corrupt policemen level guns on the building while more guns are trained on the police from inside. Noonan asks the Op to go in and convince Thaler to speak with them, which he agrees to do. In Hammett's clipped prose, the Op tells how, once the gang agreed to open the door for him:

Across the street a dozen guns emptied themselves. Glass shot from door and windows tinkled around us.

Somebody tripped me. Fear gave me three brains and half a dozen eyes. I was in a tough spot. Noonan had slipped me a pretty dose. These birds couldn't help thinking I was playing his game.

I tumbled down, twisting around to face the door. My gun was in my hand by the time I hit the floor.

Across the street, burly Nick had stepped out of a doorway to pump slugs at us with both hands.

I steadied my gun-arm on the floor. Nick's body showed over the front sight. I squeezed the gun. Nick stopped shooting. He crossed his guns on his chest and went down in a pile on the sidewalk. (46)

The detective, caught in the crossfire between crooked cops and criminals, makes the ultimate choice to look out for number one, and to hell with everyone else. He's the kind of guy who shoots back, but this is nothing unusual for Hammett's gumshoes. They exist in a fundamentally flawed world where the distinctions between good and evil are hopelessly blurred. Hammett had

the unique power to transport his readers to the gritty, realistic world of a corrupted urban America where danger lurked around every corner, like Hogg's Gil-Martin in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Although he stopped writing in 1934, after a period of furious activity which produced countless short stories and his five major novels, Dashiell Hammett distinguished himself as a powerful force in the composition of hard-boiled gothic detective fiction. In his construction of scenes, antagonists, and, above all, his iconic detective characters, fellow detective novelist Raymond Chandler applauds how Hammett created "scenes that seemed never to have been written before" (58). Into these original scenes the investigator is introduced and must conduct his inquiry as effectively as he knows how. By refusing to abide by the rules of polite society and instead immersing himself in the gritty realities of organized crime, bootlegging, and murder, Hammett's new hard-boiled detective assumes the role of gothic transgressor, wild west gunslinger, and polluted urban hero all in one.

Dashiell Hammett was not the first story writer published in the pulp detective magazine *Black Mask* after its launch in 1920, but he quickly caught the attention of editors and readers alike. Before long he was also serving as a reader and editor, and he had the unique privilege of observing what other authors were doing with their fiction. This gave him the advantage of knowing which moves were becoming commonplace, or even passé, and he was better equipped to avoid them and keep his writing fresh. One of the things that Hammett did differently from his contemporaries was incorporate a broad scheme of traditionally gothic elements into his fiction to create a certain mood and to evoke a certain response on the part of the reader. Interestingly, part of this tension lies in the almost complete absence of domestic ties in the life of the detective. Hammett's two main sleuths, the Continental Op and Sam Spade, each exist in a domestic vacuum where they work in isolation from romantic or familial relationships. This is a

pronounced departure from earlier mystery and detective stories where the relationships between people are often a key factor in the perpetration or covering up of crime. In Hammett's fiction, Spade's not worried about his wife or his dear old mother finding out what he's been up to, and the Op doesn't even have a proper home most of the time, instead bouncing from place to place, and hotel room to hotel room. These detectives are not trying to preserve the reputation of a young woman or cover up the scandal of a wealthy old man's suicide. Instead, they relentlessly attempt to find the truth within all of their cases, doggedly pursuing their objective regardless of the consequences and operating each according to his own moral code. But in addition to this lone-gunner philosophy, Hammett interjects something more. The world his readers are thrown into is a gothic world of bizarre, ominous scenes and imagery which evoke a particular emotional response that is simply not present with other types of detective fiction. Jeffrey Weinstock asserts that "while the Gothic is always about inequalities in distributions of power and contests for control, the specific permutations it takes depend on the configuration of the society that births it and which it reflects" (3). Hammett's gothic is one of mixed anticipation and dread, of peculiar characters and perplexing alliances which join people together and then pit them against each another as soon as the time is right. His California is a hostile place of radical uncertainty, where the detective must work to uncover the truth and unmask the perpetrators who often hide behind a false façade of upright respectability. In order to better understand what makes Dashiell Hammett such a prominent figure in the gothic detective genre, it is important to first understand the construction of his stories with regard to these three elements: extreme jeopardy, a hostile environment, and the casting of the detective as 'everyman' to, as Karen Halttunen describes, tear away the "false fronts" assumed by society and expose the reality beneath (43). These three

key gothic themes help us to better understand Hammett in a new context, as the author of stories of gothic transgression.

Extreme Jeopardy: Men Died at Haphazard Like That

There is no safety, no security, either of body or of mind in Dashiell Hammett's fiction. Each detective's thoughts are fixed on certain ideas, consciously or unconsciously, and Hammett uses the indirect methods of a "story-within-a-story" or dream sequences to explore them. The knowledge that they could die at any moment drives the detectives to proceed according to the best way to stay alive as well as get to the bottom of the problem they're looking into. This constant vigilance and reliance on oneself twists the usually desirable domestic connections of home and family into things which are distinctly undesirable and which open the detectives up for future vulnerability. The gothic thrives in environments of extreme jeopardy, where the inexplicable risks present in everyday life loom over it with a chilling pall of menace, and Hammett's construction of his stories capitalizes on this dark sense of foreboding. The characters are forced to question their reality due to the infiltration of uncanny elements. In particular, Hammett's depictions of the Op's dream the night of Dinah Brand's death in *Red Harvest*, and Spade's infamous "Flitcraft Parable" from *The Maltese Falcon* help to illustrate some of the specific approaches he liked to take in making his formulaic fiction into art.

Consider the conversation between the Op and sometime ally, Dinah Brand, as they drink gin in her apartment. When she asks him what's wrong, the Op launches into a tirade against the insanely violent conditions in Personville:

This damned burg's getting me. If I don't get away soon I'll be going blood-simple like the natives. There's been what? A dozen and a half murders since I've been here. Donald Willsson; Ike Bush; the four wops and the dick at Cedar Hill; Jerry; Lew Yard; Dutch

Jake, Blackie Whalen and Put Collings at the Silver Arrow; Big Nick, the copper I potted; the blond kid Whisper dropped here; Yakima Shorty, old Elihu's prowler; and now Noonan. That's sixteen of them in less than a week, and more coming up. (135)

The threat of the Op's becoming "blood-simple" appears more and more evident as he seeks to drown himself in gin and laudanum and forget for a moment the troubles he has seen. He begins to suspect that he, too, may fall prey to the bloodlust which plagues the toxic "Poisonville," telling Dinah, "Play with murder enough and it gets you one of two ways. It makes you sick, or you get to like it" (135). The Op comes to recognize that, in many ways, he is not any better than the hoodlums he is running against and admits having arranged "a killing or two... when they were necessary" (135). Before blacking out entirely, he acknowledges that he could probably have negotiated a more peaceful resolution to the corruption in Personville, "but it's easier to have them killed off, easier and surer, and... more satisfying... It's this damned town. Poisonville is right. It's poisoned me" (137). Dinah Brand listens patiently to all of this rigamarole, inserting the appropriate response here and there, but ultimately, she views the Op as her means of protection against competing gangs. When he passes out on her couch, she tries to find protection elsewhere as he dreams his bizarre, incoherent dreams. For a time, the story transitions from Dinah Brand's apartment to a netherworld of strange sensations that were "rosy, cheerful, and full of fellowship and peace on earth" (140).

In his drug-addled state, the Op begins dreaming about a park in Baltimore, and next to him on a bench is a darkly veiled woman whom he knows but cannot remember. This elusive woman becomes the subject of a prolonged nationwide search which he finally abandons, stopping to rest on a bench in a train station. She suddenly arrives, kissing him passionately in front of everyone who was there and bringing his search to a successful close. This seemingly

idyllic scene then abruptly ends, shifting from the long search for a woman he loves to an equally arduous pursuit of a man he hates and wants to kill. He hunts the man from place to place with his open pocket-knife in his hand, just waiting for the perfect moment to plunge it in. When at last he comes close enough to attack, he realizes that they have both tumbled off the side of a building, and they “dropped giddily down toward the millions of upturned faces in the plaza, miles down” (142). These dreams are suggestive of something in the Op’s subconscious that was aware of and sensitive to the all-seeing eye of public scrutiny which was focused upon his actions, evaluating his every move. Whether it was the observation of the keenly-anticipated romantic pleasure associated with the veiled woman’s kiss or that of the sick pleasure of consummated revenge, the Op feels intimately observed in everything he undertakes in his dreams. The people at the train station and the upturned faces in the plaza are watching him closely, and he cannot escape their stare. This is one of the most obviously gothic moments in the novel, with the insubstantial quality of the characters, the mood of eager expectancy and ominous premonition that something bad is going to happen, and the eventual denuding of the detective himself before the eyes of society. Nobody moves to help him; they simply stand stationary, watching and judging, and in the case of the train station, laughing at his helpless discomfort. Although he is a skilled investigator in real life, both dream sequences prove him to be less successful in his dream quests. This is a very important scene, since after the Op awakens, he finds his right hand wrapped around an ice pick driven six inches into Dinah Brand’s left breast. Just when it seems that the ‘truth’ cannot become stranger than the ‘fiction’ of his dream, the Op must inspect Brand’s apartment to try and convince himself that he is not the one who killed her. Interestingly, this point is never consciously addressed by the Op through

our first-person view into his head. Instead, he methodically inspects the place room by room for signs of what happened:

The spring lock on the back door was fastened, and had no marks to show it had been monkeyed with. I went to the front door and failed to find any marks on it. I went through the house from top to bottom, and learned nothing. The windows were all right. The girl's jewelry, on her dressing table (except the two diamond rings on her hands), and four hundred odd dollars in her handbag, on a bedroom chair, were undisturbed. (143)

Once he is satisfied with that task, he then proceeds to eliminate any evidence which might link him to the crime. Whether he killed Brand or not, he's not going down for it, and he lists the precautions he takes:

I knelt beside the dead girl and used my handkerchief to wipe the ice pick handle clean of any prints my fingers had left on it. I did the same to glasses, bottles, doors, light buttons, and the pieces of furniture I had touched, or was likely to have touched... I washed my hands, examined my clothes for blood, made sure I was leaving none of my property behind, and went to the front door. I opened it, wiped the inner knob, closed it behind me, wiped the outer knob, and went away. (143)

And thus marks the meticulous ending of any relationship the Op might be said to have with Dinah Brand, once again proving the futility of attempting to forge any friendships at all. Even if Brand had not caused any deliberate trouble for the Op, his mere association with her had resulted in his being potentially accused of her murder. This becomes even more problematic due to his extreme intoxication from drinking gin and laudanum that night, with little insight into his own actions to defend himself. Only at the very end of the novel and with his dying breath is it finally revealed by local gambler, Reno Starkey, that he was the one who actually committed the

Dinah Brand stabbing. The Op had only stumbled into the melee that evening trying to protect her. Bleeding to death from four bullet wounds, Reno confesses the true circumstances, saying that it was Brand who first came at him with the ice pick. He tells the Op:

I twist the pick out of her hand and stick it in her. You gallop out, coked to the edges, charging at the whole world with both eyes shut. She tumbles into you. You go down, roll around till your hand hits the butt of the pick. Holding on to that, you go to sleep, peaceful as she is. I see it then, what I've done. But hell! She's croaked. There's nothing to do about it. I turn off the lights and go home. (186)

Ironically, both men react the same way to Dinah Brand's death. Their first priority is avoiding blame, so they both abandon her there, leaving her body to be discovered by somebody else. This is another moment where the detective's likeness to the criminal is most obvious, but just when the Op should see it, he doesn't. Instead he feels "glad" for the whole thing to be over since he had acquired "all the information" he wanted (186). In the end, the randomness and radical uncertainty of life is what remains, and he must focus his energy on combatting the forces still working against him to keep on moving.

In *The Maltese Falcon*, detective Sam Spade does not drift off into a dream state. Instead, he launches into a spontaneous story that is told to Brigid O'Shaughnessy; the associate of Casper Gutman's falcon-seeking gang, Spade's paying client, and a potential love interest. In a deviation from the fast-paced storyline that is just as abrupt as appears in *Red Harvest*, Spade sits O'Shaughnessy down and begins telling her his story "in a steady matter-of-fact voice that was devoid of emphasis or pauses, though now and then he repeated a sentence slightly rearranged, as if it were important that each detail be related exactly as it had happened" (442). In what has since been dubbed the "Flitcraft Parable," Spade tells her about a man named Charles Flitcraft

who lived a comfortable, ordinary sort of life in Tacoma, Washington until one day he was almost hit by a falling beam as he walked down the street.¹ It was close enough that a small piece of sidewalk shot up and made a small cut in his cheek. He was so shocked by what happened, realizing the tenuousness of life, that he decided to abandon his family and go off to see the world. Flitcraft had had the epiphany that “men died at haphazard like that, and lived only while blind chance spared them” (444). In a world of extreme jeopardy where he could literally die at any moment, Flitcraft figures he is better off seeking whatever thrills he can muster. However, by the time Spade finds him, he is remarried and living a life in Spokane which is almost identical to the one he had abandoned five years previous. Flitcraft attempts to explain himself to Spade, saying that he’d been shocked, that “he felt like somebody had taken the lid off life and let him look at the works” (444). Spade says that the part of the story that he likes best is how Flitcraft eventually “settled back naturally into the same groove he had jumped out of in Tacoma... He adjusted himself to beams falling, and then no more of them fell, and he adjusted himself to them not falling” (445). Leonard Cassuto believes that “the story intrigues because people almost never act the way that Flitcraft does. They may feel threatened or disordered in the world, but they don’t suddenly leave the people who matter to them” (*Hard-Boiled Sentimentality* 48). This is part of what makes this scene such a perfect example of Hammett’s

¹ There are numerous critical references to Flitcraft. Among them are Peter Wolfe’s use of an image from Flitcraft in the title of his book *Beams Falling: The Art of Dashiell Hammett* (1980), as a possible metaphor for the author’s oeuvre. Sinda Gregory attributes Spade’s story to his need to impart upon Brigid an understanding of one’s need to rely only on oneself in Chapter Four of her book *Private Investigations: The Novels of Dashiell Hammett* (1985). Dean DeFino discusses the concept of redemption in Realism using the Flitcraft Parable as his focus in his essay “Lead Birds and Falling Beams” (2004). Charles Rzepka asserts that the Flitcraft story encapsulates the meaning of Hammett’s book as an allegory of the American Dream in *Detective Fiction* (2005). Martin Harris connects the Flitcraft story with Joseph Ruben’s 1987 film *The Stepfather* to discuss toxic artificiality in his article “Hammett’s Flitcraft Parable, the *Stepfather*, and the Significance of Falling Beams” (2006). Leonard Cassuto takes a different approach toward the story, instead focusing upon the strength of domestic ties and the incongruity of Flitcraft’s actions in Chapter Two of his book *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality* (2009). R. Mac Jones discusses Flitcraft in the context of Spade’s relationship with Effie Perrine in his brief essay “Spade’s Pallor and the Flitcraft Parable in Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon*” (2013).

gothic, in part due to the extreme jeopardy felt by Flitcraft, but also in part due to Spade's conception of his own perpetual vulnerability, especially with regard to Brigid. Her interest lies not in his story, and as soon as he stops talking, she says, "How perfectly fascinating" and then leaves her chair to stand "close" in front of him, her eyes "wide and deep" and tells him "I don't have to tell you how utterly at a disadvantage you'll have me, with [Cairo] here, if you choose" in an effort to romantically manipulate him (445). Spade has already given her an allegorical warning of the radical uncertainty which exists in the world, an uncertainty which is one of the few things he respects, and she stubbornly refuses to hear it in her rush to protect herself.

Hammett's detective is a man who understands the need to sever all emotional ties in order to come out ahead in the crime game, but O'Shaughnessy's only power lies in her siren-like ability to draw men to her sexual charm so she can exploit them for her own personal gain. The contrast between her and Joel Cairo, the apparently gay associate, highlights their cutthroat methods of seduction, betrayal, and theft. They get into an altercation which quickly turns violent, arguing over who did, or didn't, "make" a young man back in Constantinople, and they wind up slapping each other silly until Spade intervenes. It seems only natural that murder should accompany such a course frame of mind, and Spade's acceptance of the harsh randomness of his life is part of what allows him to not only see through their games but beat them as well. In the gothic, there is always the struggle to reveal the truth behind the façade, and Hammett's answer is to cast a detective who appreciates the nature of his task and who relies upon his own instincts to distinguish between the real and artificial. In the case of Brigid O'Shaughnessy, Spade has got her all taped up from the beginning, only leaving the reader to guess wonderingly at the ethicality of his methods after the fact. Just as Flitcraft could not trust in fate to take care of him,

Spade, too, relies only on himself and his intuition to guide him through the threat of extreme jeopardy which looms large over San Francisco on a daily basis.

And if all of these gothic elements are present, what does the presence of extreme jeopardy say about this kind of detective fiction? In the Golden Age detective fiction of the past, authors set their detectives to the task of restoring stability to the environment which has been destabilized due to crime, often murder. Hammett's fiction has no shortage of bodies (sometimes letting them fall in piles like the sixteen quick deaths mentioned by the Op earlier), but there is a great deal of latitude for speculation on whether the Op or Spade have left their circumstances better than they found them. True, the Op does succeed in ridding the town of Personville of many of its thugs, bootleggers, gamblers, and thieves, and Spade sees to it that Gutman's gang goes down and O'Shaughnessy will pay for the death of his partner, but even though there is resolution, there is little of the relief which is typically found in other kinds of detective fiction. Think, for instance, of the blissful return to normalcy at the end of many of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, where Holmes and Watson return to Baker Street for a nice lunch or a snatch of peaceful slumber after a particularly difficult case. The implication is that Doyle's detectives have the luxury of domestic serenity, while in most cases, Spade and the Op do not. There can be no return to normalcy, since the concept of normalcy is itself a social construct and antithetical to the crushing weight of uncertainty which Hammett's detectives must bear. Add to that the incredibly hostile environment in which the detectives live, and the sum total is a life of constant peril, isolation, and cynicism.

Hostile Environment: The Mean Streets of California

With his unique brand of gothic, Hammett brings his readers into strangely original spaces and then inserts his detectives into even stranger, more menacing ones. Many locations

seem rather commonplace from the outside, like Elihu Willsson's mansion or Sam Spade's studio apartment, but their darker interiors contain elements of disturbing betrayal and violence. Just as the detective can find no solace or peace of mind by investing in a personal relationship, he also cannot find refuge in a quiet place of his own. All places are public spaces for Hammett's detectives, with little opportunity for private reflection without the constant situational awareness his vocation requires. For this reason, he can go nowhere without a vigilant sense of self-preservation and assessment of his surroundings. His environment is a combination of the American Urban and Frontier Gothics. The Urban Gothic depicts the cityscape as evoking what Cassuto calls "a secularized version of the fear and foreboding that [gothic] architecture could create" ("Urban American Gothic" 156). In the Frontier Gothic, the intrusion of men into the 'frontier' is seen as "an encounter which historically was violent, consuming, intrinsically metaphysical, and charged with paradox and emotional ambivalence" (Mogen, Sanders, and Karpinski 14). From these two veins of design, Hammett extracted the crucial elements which allowed him to so effectively construct characters and environments in his fictional worlds. The ominous presence of the hostile environment becomes almost a character in the background, looming over the detective's activities and threatening to end his investigation if he makes a false move. In the closed-door mobster meetings which take place around the circular table in Elihu Willsson's library and in Sam Spade's cramped living space, the alarming sense of physical confinement is almost palpable, leading to a heightened sense of tension in each room.

In *Red Harvest*, the Op has been hired by Elihu Willsson to look into his son's death and soon vows to clean up the corruption of Personville and eliminate all the major players who have a hand in its rampant depravity. All this, despite knowing full well that Willsson himself is one of these key men. After shooting an intruder in his bedroom, Willsson tells him, "I want

Personville emptied of its crooks and grafters” (38). The Op replies, “I’d have to have a free hand – no favors to anybody – run the job as I pleased” (39). He warns the old man, “you’re going to get a complete job or nothing. That’s the way it’ll have to be. Take it or leave it” (40). When Elihu eventually takes it, the blood starts flowing down the streets of Personville in earnest. The Op arranges an evening meeting between all of the leaders of the various local gangs in the dusky gloom of Elihu’s library in an attempt to stoke the flames of conflict which are already burning with such intensity in toxic Poisonville. In a scene of tension so thick it could be cut with a knife, the Op proceeds to expose the truth behind plot after plot which had been carried out by the individuals present against rival gangs, the police, and even old Elihu himself. As the pressure increases, “everybody was sitting very still, as if to call attention to how still they were sitting. Nobody could count on having any friends among those present. It was no time for careless motions on anybody’s part” (131). When Whisper Thaler gets up to leave the meeting which everyone knows will only end with a bloodbath, bootlegger Pete the Finn gets up and addresses him and the rest of the group, saying:

This busting the town open is no good for business. I won't have it any more. You be nice boys or I'll make you... I got one army of young fellows that know what to do on any end of a gun. I got to have them in my racket. If I got to use them on you I'll use them on you. You want to play with gunpowder and dynamite? I'll show you what playing is. You like to fight? I'll give you fighting. Mind what I tell you. That's all. (131-132)

Although Whisper casually strolls out without any outward reaction to Pete’s threats, the whole group soon departs, as “none wanted to remain until anybody else had time to accumulate a few guns in the neighborhood” (132). The Op and Elihu Willsson are left behind in the library, and the Op asks the old man “Where do you stand now?... Are you behind me?” to which Elihu

answers “If you win” (133). From this point forward, as if there had been any doubt previously, nobody and *nowhere* is safe, and the real chaos begins.

In the case of Sam Spade, the henchmen have infiltrated his home and trapped him and Brigid O’Shaughnessy inside it. At nearly midnight Brigid pounced on Spade as he entered his building, and “just inside the living-room-door fat Gutman stood smiling benevolently at them. The boy Wilmer came out of the kitchen behind them. Black pistols were gigantic in his small hands. Cairo came from the bathroom. He too had a pistol... Gutman said: ‘Well, sir, we’re all here, as you can see for yourself. Now let’s come in and sit down and be comfortable and talk’” (542). This little chat lasts for two whole chapters as Gutman and his bunch attempt to get Spade to give them the falcon, and he continues pumping them for information. While the Op chose to divulge secrets to get his desired result, Spade must do the opposite and extract as much evidence *from* this gang as he can before they secure their object and high-tail it out of town. In an effort to create dissention in the ranks, Spade demands that they produce a ‘fall guy’ to take the blame for all of the murders committed in the search for the Maltese falcon. Initially, Gutman replies dismissively “Well, sir, from what we’ve seen and heard of you I don’t think we’ll have to bother ourselves about that. We can leave the handling of the police to you” to which Spade replies harshly “If that’s what you think... you haven’t seen or heard enough” (546). Easing a schism between each player and diving them from a gang into individual stakeholders, Spade continues offering up one person after another until the miniscule square-footage of the apartment becomes a intimidating, claustrophobic vacuum. When he repeatedly offers Wilmer Cook as the ideal patsy, the young man rushes him and says, “You bastard, get up and shoot it out if you’ve got the guts. I’ve taken all the riding from you I’m going to take” to which Spade replies, with “amusement” in his smile, “Young Wild West” (551). This likening of Wilmer

Cook to a frontier gunslinger is not a wholly inaccurate comparison, but one must also include the likes of Spade, with his questionable ethicality, as an equal contender for the title. Both seem right at home in the urban trenches, although Cook's allegiance to Gutman has already put him at a heightened risk which Spade would simply never take by working solo. As this other conference of criminals continues:

Cairo cried in a voice shrill with indignation: "Suppose we give them you, Mr. Spade, or Miss O'Shaughnessy? How about that if you're so set on giving them somebody?"

Spade smiled at the Levantine and answered him evenly: "You people want the falcon. I've got it. A fall-guy is part of the price I'm asking. As for Miss O'Shaughnessy... if you think she can be rigged for the part I'm perfectly willing to discuss it with you."

The girl put her hands to her throat, uttered a short strangled cry, and moved farther away from him. (553)

If O'Shaughnessy thought for a moment that the domestic safety of Spade's home might be extended to her as his potential love interest, she was sorely mistaken. Instead, his apartment is just as dangerous as any of her anonymous hotel rooms or the street outside her partner Thursby's hotel where he was gunned down. There is no place where she can find sanctuary, which keeps her right under Spade's thumb. By redirecting her manipulative gestures, he is able to capture Brigid and turn her over to the police as the 'fall-guy' he has been so eager to secure. The trust which seemed to exist between Spade and O'Shaughnessy was a smokescreen to disguise his intentions until the more active portions of his investigation could be resolved. In a discussion between Gutman and Spade, Gutman asks him whether he intends to share the

proceeds of the Maltese falcon with O'Shaughnessy, to which Spade replies "That's my business" (567). Gutman then offers him a piece of advice, saying "if you don't give her as much as she thinks she ought to have, my word of advice is – be careful," while "Spade grinned and began to roll a cigarette" (567). This is the first and only direct intimation that Brigid herself is capable of violence when provoked, and Spade's response shows that he either doesn't take Gutman seriously or feels that he has the situation well under control. Future events prove that he does. When Gutman leaves the apartment after discovering that they had all been deceived about the falcon, he comments to Spade that he's sure, "now there's no alternative, you'll somehow manage the police without a fall-guy" and Spade assures him "I'll make out all right." "I was sure you would," Gutman replies, leaving Brigid and Spade alone in the apartment for their iconic final scene of betrayal (573).

The role of Hammett's gothic in this context is to create a place where nothing is ever as it seems. Gothic fiction pollutes the physical environment until everything natural has been contaminated. Places which would usually be seen as safe, even the protagonist's own home, are open to the intrusion of evil or the criminal element. Rather than defending against the intrusion of Stoker's prowling vampire, the detective must guard himself against interference by forces of a more human kind: prostitutes, gangsters, and murderers. The role of the 'other' is filled instead by society's misfits, among whom the detective is somehow able to coexist and function rationally according to what he believes it takes to preserve his life and get the job done. The place, whether dismal Personville or decadent San Francisco, Hammett has selected it due to its ability to reflect the hostile duality of glittering city and putrescent wasteland. Mike Davis terms the emergence of this new hard-boiled gothic spectacle 'noir,' and calls it a "a fantastic convergence" of American elements "focused on unmasking a bright, guilty place" (18). He

further asserts that the noir of the 1920s “was like a transformational grammar turning each charming ingredient of... arcadia into a sinister equivalent” (38). Whether closed up in an urban apartment building or the library of a rich man’s estate, normally benign or even desirable environments acquire the menacing glare of antagonism in gothic texts. The separate contribution this makes to detective fiction is to relocate the scene of action away from scenes of the privileged class and into domains that Hammett’s average readers might themselves have a chance to encounter.² Dennis Porter describes these more realistic gothic places as the “perverted fiefdoms of the owners of capital and of those strong-arm men who support them and live off their greed” (197). By taking the setting of the investigation out of the parlor and into the city streets, Hammett capitalized on the national insecurities surrounding anonymous urban areas which were no longer capable of being regulated by community standards and instead relied upon a corrupt police force and the tough, gritty investigator who operated outside of the laws of civil society. Adherence to the earlier British or American standards of ‘polite’ murder stories was no longer practical, and Hammett used his knowledge of fellow authors’ work and the changing appetite of the public for a more accessible vernacular experience of the hard-hitting man on the street. This illustrated his vision of what was uniquely his own and easily separable from the other types of detective fiction being produced. The integration of gothic settings and themes helped to boost the popularity of this kind of detective fiction and establish new points of engagement where authors of detective fiction could build upon gothic foundations to frame scenes both unusual and macabre. It is in this tumultuous and hostile environment that the

² Leonard Cassuto discusses how the conflict in Hammett’s fiction is a cultural response to Progressive Era sympathies for the working man and the growing anxiety over an economic crash that would ruin both poor and rich equally in his book *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (2009).

detective must seek to bring his cases to fruition and expose the deception which lies underneath the complex façade of human duplicity.

Tearing Away False Fronts: Your Sam's a Detective

While the fictional private detective is often represented as a reasonable character with unique skills of observation and deduction, his metamorphosis in Hammett's fiction is distinctive. Sam Spade and the Continental Op are both men who follow their own code of conduct which is a noticeable departure from so-called 'gentlemen' of the past who relied upon a chivalric ideal to guide their own behavior. Richard Slotkin calls his idea of such a man "an uncommon common man" or rather, "a man who knows the world of crime as if from the inside but who also has a chivalric sense of 'honor' or justice" (218). While this may be true of other authors' detectives, Hammett's characters are a little different. Rather than adhering to this commonly-accepted guide to morality, Spade and the Op are gothic transgressors, distorting the line between right and wrong. Both men are capable of committing acts which are at least illegal and at most immoral in their quests to solve their respective mysteries. They do not cater to women as gentlemen are expected to do, they do not resist their violent impulses, and they don't see the law as anything other than a nuisance to get in their way. However, regardless of how far they push the limits of propriety and even human decency, they still manage to solve the case and get to the bottom of the conflict. Although they are rough-and-tumble men among men, they are also capable of achieving success in their investigations; it just never gets them anywhere except right back where they started. Only Hammett's specific type of detective can withstand these conditions of extreme jeopardy and such a hostile environment and also see through the artificial veneer which disguises the authentic darker truth beneath. In the gothic depictions of his detective characters, even seduction and murder are not off the table. The Op and Spade must

coexist in the same world as the criminals they engage with in order to maximize the benefit of their liminal position, occupying both police-like and criminal-like terrain, and continue their unravelling of mysteries.

As an unusual departure from the well-mannered detective, the Continental Op doesn't just shoot back to defend himself; he shoots to kill, if he thinks it's the right thing to do. That isn't limited to his conflict with bootleggers and other gangsters. As we've seen earlier, he's not afraid to 'pot' a corrupt cop, too, if he needs to. When the Op promises Elihu Willsson to clean up the city of Personville and eliminate the influence of the criminal element, there is little doubt that he intends to follow through with it, no matter the consequences. In fact, when Elihu attempts to renege on their deal, the Op asks him, "You haven't forgotten that your check was to cover the cost of investigating crime and corruption in Personville, have you?" The old man snorts, "That was nonsense... We were excited last night. That's called off," to which the Op replies, "Not with me" (57). Rather than approaching the task with the lackadaisical indifference of his criminal counterparts, the Op sets out to force Personville's underworld elements to completely self-destruct. Although everyone else seems blind to the many deceptions being perpetrated against and between competing groups, the Op is able to disentangle the truth from the façade and hold people accountable for their own mischief. He tells his difficult client that:

I'll give you nothing except a good job of city-cleaning. That's what you bargained for, and that's what you're going to get... Your fat chief of police tried to assassinate me last night. I don't like that. I'm just mean enough to want to ruin him for it. Now I'm going to have my fun. I've got ten thousand dollars of your money to play with. I'm going to use it opening Poisonville up from Adam's apple to ankles. (57)

The Op intends for this case to be solved according to his own standards, and nobody, not Elihu Willsson, Police Chief Noonan, or anybody else is going to stop him. While many might object to the means by which the Op goes about cleaning up Personville, few can argue with his results, including Willsson. The Op proudly declares, “I’m not licked, old top. I’ve won. You came crying to me that some naughty men had taken your little city away from you. Pete the Finn, Lew Yard, Whisper Thaler, and Noonan. Where are they now?” and the answer to that is, *dead* (176). The Op has determined that the best way to beat the criminal element in Poisonville is to join it, divide it, and then destroy it from the inside out. While everyone else is terrified and trying to simultaneously strike out and defend their own behind, the Op wheedles his way in to pick at the festering scab of outward cordiality which is being oh-so-tenuously maintained between rival gangs. First appearing to align himself with one group and then another, his accomplices seem all too willing to help eliminate one another. While visiting Dinah Brand, the Op tells her he’s been “Attending a peace conference out of which at least a dozen killings ought to grow” right before he gets a telephone call. On the other end is Reno Starkey’s voice, saying “I thought maybe you’d like to hear about Noonan being shot to hell and gone when he got out of his heap in front of his house. You never saw anybody that was deader. Must have had thirty pills pumped in him,” to which the Op replies laconically “Thanks” (134). He is the kind of man who can live on both sides of the ethical line, unlike the vast majority of his sleuthing forefathers. On the one hand, he has the ability to see things as they really are, meaning that Hammett’s detective possesses keener insight than is perhaps average among such men, similar to detectives of the past. But on the other hand, the Continental Op is capable of extreme violence, up to and including murder, in the face of threat or opposition.³ His approach in Personville, to cause the

³ Christopher Breu’s book, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (2005) discusses the escalating violence of the detective in relation to the shifting perception of masculinity toward a rougher working-class ideal.

rival gangs to simply kill one another off, is certainly one way of approaching such a task, and it does prove just as effective as (if not more than) any attempt to drive them out of town peaceably or recruit a completely new police force. This solution, rooted in the Wild West lawlessness of the Frontier Gothic, allows the reader to slip into a world full of intrigue, greed, and incendiary actions, neatly aligning the urban setting with the anxieties of the wilderness. Like a solitary cowboy who uses his gun to keep peace on the prairie, the Op roves Personville, firing off rounds for the 'noble' cause of abolishing corruption. This blurring of the lines between right and wrong, especially the idea of 'right at any cost' that Hammett was so fond of, helps to infuse the everyday actions of the criminal element with a larger moral implication when observed by the cynical detective working his case. He may not follow the rules during his investigation, but at the end he still comes out on the right side of the law.

Sam Spade has the same attitude of dismissive neutrality toward any socially constructed or chivalric ideal. His actions are the actions of a man about his business who does not waste time considering whether what he is doing is 'right' or 'wrong.' Spade is often under fire by critics who do not approve of what they see as his seduction of Brigid O'Shaughnessy for the furtherance of his investigation. This is an interesting objection, especially when one considers that Spade already has a reputation as a ladies' man, and we see his artificial physical and verbal interactions with Iva Archer which seem further evidence that he might have taken his opportunity to "play hell" with Brigid as he encourages Miles Archer to do after their first meeting (397). However, there is a good deal of evidence to the contrary which allows Spade to get away with abandoning any chivalric ideal of rescuing his client and instead unmasks her as the false, duplicitous liar that she is. This inclusion of a kind of gothic doubling with regard to O'Shaughnessy's character helps to transform her more fully from the outward angel, which

everyone else can see, into the hidden monster which only Spade accurately observes inside her. J. K. Van Dover takes that idea one step further, saying that “the degree to which Brigid O’Shaughnessy understands *herself* is not at all clear... neither Spade nor the reader is certain that she is telling the truth, or even that she knows the truth” (142, emphasis added). Spade is able to justify his actions against O’Shaughnessy because he knows in his gut that she is the one responsible for not only Miles’ death, but the majority of the chaos surrounding the Maltese falcon as well. When they’re alone in the apartment, Spade confronts O’Shaughnessy with his partner’s murder:

Miles hadn’t many brains, but, Christ! he had too many years’ experience as a detective to be caught like that by the man he was shadowing. Up a blind alley with his gun tucked away on his hip and his overcoat buttoned? Not a chance...But he’d’ve gone up there with you, angel, if he was sure nobody else was up there. You were his client, so he would have had no reason for not dropping the shadow on your say-so, and if you caught up with him and asked him to go up there he’d’ve gone. He was just dumb enough for that. He’d’ve looked you up and down and licked his lips and gone grinning from ear to ear – and then you could’ve stood as close to him as you liked in the dark and put a hole through him with the gun you had got from Thursby that evening. (577)

He gets O’Shaughnessy to admit that she killed Miles Archer in order to frame her partner, Floyd Thursby, for the murder. This would rid her of an unwanted accomplice and eliminate another competing share in the proceeds of the falcon’s sale; a purely pragmatic move. Although it seems outwardly that Spade is seeking vengeance on behalf of his partner, there is much more behind Spade’s complex and often contradictory motives. If we believe that he truly cares for Brigid, it is easy to focus on his anger at her for playing with his emotions, and merely using him to get

what she wanted, when he demands, “You knew you needed another protector, so you came back to me. Right?” and she tearfully plays her part, insisting “Yes, but – oh, sweetheart! – it wasn’t only that. I would have come back to you sooner or later. From the first instant I saw you I knew –” but Spade cuts her off. Instead, he says ‘tenderly’: “You angel! Well, if you get a good break you’ll be out of San Quentin in twenty years and you can come back to me then” (579). At this point, it becomes extremely difficult to tell whether their declarations of love, or any of their other statements, are true or merely meant to manipulate one another toward their ultimate goal. Instead of their being joined as a couple, the schism of a permanent divide is being driven between them with every statement they make.

Spade continues to insist that because he knows the truth, he must turn Brigid in. In a voice which is tagged as “soft” and “gentle,” even as he holds her destiny in the palm of his hand, he tells her “I’m going to send you over. The chances are you’ll get off with life. That means you’ll be out again in twenty years. You’re an angel. I’ll wait for you... If they hang you I’ll always remember you” (579). O’Shaughnessy is horrified at the fact that her ability to wrap men around her little finger has failed so miserably and is in denial that anyone could see past her act to the real, stone-cold Brigid inside. She tries to dissuade him by pretending his betrayal is all a joke, since she is used to laughing at the men in her life, and chides him “Don’t, Sam, don’t say that even in fun. Oh, you frightened me for a moment! I really thought you – You know you do such wild and unpredictable things” (579). But as the truth of what he is saying becomes clear to her, she lays it all on the line by asking dramatically, “You’ve been playing with me? Only pretending you cared – to trap me like this? You didn’t – care at all? You didn’t – don’t – I-love me?” (580). This is what ultimately sets Spade off, and rather than being a patient gentleman, he turns the tables on her, saying, “You came into my bed to stop me asking

questions” (580). There is no love in this world of Hammett’s, and there is no trust, either. Spade tells O’Shaughnessy “I don’t care who loves who I’m not going to play the sap for you... You killed Miles and you’re going over for it. I can’t help you now. And I wouldn’t if I could” (581). Sam Spade is unwilling to admit whether he ever really had any feelings for O’Shaughnessy at all, leaving the reader in a quandary of trying to fill in the gaps in their relationship. It’s impractical to look back on earlier detectives to find a clue as to how Spade might be feeling, since he has so entirely left the gentrified norms of the Golden Age behind him. Instead, consider the question O’Shaughnessy demands of Spade and his candid response:

BO: Tell me the truth. Would you have done this to me if the falcon had been real and you had been paid your money?

SS: What difference does that make now? Don’t be too sure I’m as crooked as I’m supposed to be. That kind of reputation might be good business – bringing in high-priced jobs and making it easier to deal with the enemy. (583)

This statement sums up much of Spade’s reputation. While he appears to be a ladies’ man, his identity is much more tied up in his role as a detective. The complete absence of home and family attests to that. The same is true of his seeming cooperation with criminals in their illicit plots, in that it is difficult to distinguish whether he is willing to do whatever it takes to make some money off the deal or whether he has a larger aim in mind. Again, the sparsity of his living conditions and his turning in the \$1,000 bill he got from Gutman to the police seem to negate the possibility of his being motivated by money more than his reputation as a detective to solve his case. Just like Brigid O’Shaughnessy, Sam Spade is a walking contradiction, but it appears that Spade is the one who ultimately wins at their game, retaining his freedom to return to the office on Monday and begin another case.

In Hammett's gothic environments, one of the main threats ordinary people face is the inability to distinguish between upright citizens and scheming delinquents. This insecurity leads to significant value being placed on truth. One way that Hammett puts his detectives in the role of transgressor is by creating moral ambiguity. These men do not have wives or families to return to at the end of the day. They hardly represent the ideal of what a 'nice family man' ought to be. However, they are not irretrievably fallen, either. Hammett's detectives take actions that most people would not, they laugh in the face of common moral platitudes, and they do not consider societal boundaries to apply to them if it gets in the way of completing their task. They do not morally judge their clients; they only focus on the successful resolution of their case. But there is a definite method to their approach, a specific set of conventions to which they adhere, regardless of standard behavioral norms. Even when the reader is repulsed at the means by which he gets there, they cannot deny the detective's ability to effectively root out a satisfactory solution in conditions of absolute chaos and betrayal. Hammett's complication of the typical detective character, imbuing him with more than just superficial eccentricities, gives him an everyman quality with the exceptional deviation being his sheer tough-guy appeal and reliance on his instincts rather than some fancy calculus of probabilities. He's a loner, without home or family, and the domestic does not play a major part in what he investigates. In fact, the usual comfort in family ties does not exist, and has been replaced by an anonymous city full of henchmen, bullies, and thieves. Lives are far more disposable, especially in the hands of violent criminals, and the detective of hard-boiled fiction has joined in the ranks of the misanthropes in order to better understand and ensnare them. This could reflect the evolving public consciousness of the 1920s surrounding the financial and legal volatility of the period, where money and lives came cheap. Without the formal police structure to enforce the law, the detective is forced to take

on the role of police, judge, and jury to make split-second decisions on whether to punish fellow transgressors or turn a blind eye. John Cawelti explains how the “modern urban worlds” where Hammett’s detectives live are profoundly decadent due to the link between crime and respectability, and the detective serves as a twentieth-century American hero who condemns his city’s endemic violence (155). In this decadent environment of discord, the detective does not have the luxury of standing by as a third party observer and has instead transgressed into the criminal melee in order to do what he thinks is right.

Parting Thoughts

Gothic detective fiction in the United States has been characterized by exceedingly unique characters, situations, and settings, and the work of Dashiell Hammett represents the highly evolved hard-boiled culmination of over a century of development. The mixing of his clipped literary technique, gothic atmosphere, and intense sense of scene help to create stories which seemed to defy explanation. Whether Dashiell Hammett’s style is called Naturalism, Hard-Boiled, or Gothic, all of these assertions can be substantiated. He made a turn away from earlier detective fiction’s roots in domestic conflict by omitting most personal relationships from the lives of his detectives and by setting his scenes outside the tranquility of the home, except when those domestic spaces are invaded by the criminal element. The constant pressure placed on the detective to get to the bottom of his conflict is punctuated by danger, violence, and copious amounts of lies. His use of gothic imagery and themes such as extreme jeopardy, a hostile environment, and the tearing away of false fronts, in the construction of his stories, gives them greater tension and complexity for incisive commentary on the toxicity of artifice and greed. There is an additional payoff in Hammett’s work, a heightened reader response beyond the cheap thrills and fast-paced action other types of hard-boiled detective fiction offer.

The way that Hammett employs the imminent threat of extreme jeopardy in his stories brings the reader right to the edge of their seat. *The Maltese Falcon* has a voyeuristic quality not unlike Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, in the way that the main character is constantly in some kind of anonymous and varying peril. The main difference is in how Sam Spade is himself a disruptive force in the universe, rallying against the persecution of Iva Archer, Lt. Dundy, Gutman, Cairo, O'Shaughnessy, and of course, young Wilmer Cook. While Emily flees through backdrops of intimidating scenery to escape her many persecutors, Spade works his way through the urban frontier of San Francisco, making moves based on his network of informants. The Op, whose role is even more stripped down than Spade's (in that he is not even granted a name or a home), bears every bit of his share of the burden of jeopardy Hammett places on his shoulders. Although he travels around a much larger geographical area than just San Francisco, his situation remains one of imminent peril at the hands of the vast criminal network. Although Spade, too, is morally ambiguous at times, he seems driven to succeed against the criminal element, come what may. Hammett explains in the preface to the 1934 edition of *The Maltese Falcon*, that "Spade had no original. He is a dream man in the sense that he is what most of the private detectives I worked with would like to have been and what quite a few of them in their cockier moments thought they approached" (quoted in Ward 135). While Spade is still a younger man, the Op has years of experience behind his middle-age status, and he typifies Raymond Chandler's assertion that a detective "must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world" (59). He must be willing to face extreme adversity and still come out on top, a characteristic that Hammett's detectives display with all the limited pride they can muster. Like the simple justification that Spade gives Effie for his actions in their final scene of the book, "Your Sam's a detective" (584). Beyond that, he really doesn't have too much to say.

The role of the gothic and hostile environment in which the detectives live and work has almost the semblance of an actual human being. In *Red Harvest*, the city of Personville, aka Poisonville, is a stark contrast to earlier gothic environments, like Green's masquerade ball in XYZ or Paris in Poe's Dupin stories, because earlier locations were set up more as settings for the characters to play out their own conflicts versus being a part of the conflict as well. In Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, we see the building up toward this thoroughly stratified society, where Twain layers his human beings into ranked groups according to race, but Hammett takes the same concept and creates a hierarchy of criminality which places the 'honorable' man at the top, and includes the police and gangsters in varying strata below like a grim sociological pyramid. These conflicts become even more dynamic when all of the players are caught up in one place, like the various mobster meetings that Hammett seems so fond of creating in his stories. In Hammett's mind, there is nowhere that is safe from the infiltration of the criminal element or the caustic influence of criminality, not even in the detective's own home. Instead, he must be on his guard twenty-four hours a day to shield himself from the potential danger associated with his position: for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, and for as long as he manages to live.

This type of character is difficult to understand, separate as he is from the comforting influence of domestic tranquility. Spade is not a family man, although he respects his secretary, Effie's, love for hers. The Op is not a gentle man, although he does abide by his own code of honor. These men are complex, flawed, motivated, and long-suffering in their roles. When compared to detectives of the past, their purpose seems to have evolved into something much more than as a simple problem-solver. The detective has become something more, an image of what a man could become when he is stripped of all links to domesticity or comfortable, suburban life. His place is in the cities among the urban refuse of our nation's greed. Often

linked to Hammett's social commentary or his socialist views, the detective character represents the unabashed truth emerging from the polluted environment of artifice. Although he lived in several different states and places, Hammett chose the withering bloom of California, with all its glitz, glamour, and promises of financial success, as the proper stomping ground of his economically disadvantaged and clear-sighted investigator. While everyone else seems blinded by the possibilities of a windfall of wealth through illegal and immoral pursuits, the detective is clear-sighted enough to recognize the truth behind the lies of undeserved prosperity, knowing better than anyone that the possession of wealth only leads to greater conflict. He rejects the lure of easy money and instead sets his sights on a grander accomplishment, one that nobody else can achieve: the active, methodical resolution of organized crime.

Now one might argue with this assertion, claiming that the detectives of the past have always been responsible for the intuitive abolition of crime. Edgar Huntly investigates the death of Waldegrave in search of justice and peace for his dead friend's sister. Dupin investigates the death of the L'Espanaye women, hoping to vindicate the wrongfully accused and bring the correct perpetrator to justice. Green's Secret Service agent seeks to prevent a violent death in XYZ, and Twain's Wilson wishes to convict the violent Tom and vindicate the docile Chambers after Judge Driscoll's murder. The main connecting thread which is woven through all of these circumstances is that the detective is cast in the role of restoring domestic peace in the homes and families of the victims. Hammett's investigators cannot do this, they don't plan to do this, and they recognize that it is impossible to expect a restoration of domestic normalcy when it has never been present in their world in the first place. Hammett's gothic scenes are the antithesis of everything 'normal,' and the atmosphere they create helped to inspire many other authors to replicate his techniques, developing and elevating the hard-boiled form into one of the most

popular genres in American culture. Without his artistic aspirations and vision, the evolution of gothic detective fiction would lose much of its provocative richness.

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