

**Beneath the Trenchcoat –
The Character of Raymond Chandler's
Philip Marlowe**

Jelige: Marlowe

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1. Introduction

Stock characters of American literature and film are often used and re-used: they are reinterpreted according to the whims of screenwriters and directors, to the rules and regulations that may be present during the creation of the work of art, and, of course, to the expectations of the potential audience. Some of these characters offer more to their “consumers” than just one aspect, one meaning, or one possible interpretation. The classic figure of the hard-boiled private investigator falls into this category. The shabby, down-on-his-luck, hard-up man with his trench coat and fedora is an iconic image easy to visualize for every fan of 20th century cinema. Traditionally considered to be created by Dashiell Hammett and perfected by Raymond Chandler, the character survives well into the 21st century through the popular work of writers like Lawrence Sanders or Dennis Lehane. This private investigator might maintain a superficial façade in front of an equally superficial reader, but characters developed in quality crime fiction offer quite a lot to readers and “users” (screenwriters, directors, etc.). One such specimen is Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe.

The present essay focuses on three of Chandler’s original works: *The Big Sleep* (1939), *The Long Goodbye* (1953) and, to a lesser extent, *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), and two film adaptations: *The Big Sleep* (1946) and *The Long Goodbye* (1973). The aim is to demonstrate how Chandler shaped the character and how filmmakers brought him to life (Howard Hawks) and tried to finish him off (Robert Altman). I will examine the building blocks of Marlowe’s character in order to determine what makes the private investigator, i.e., who is the man we know by the name Philip Marlowe, and what makes the hard-boiled private eye? The main foci of the present analysis are Marlowe’s attitude towards sexuality and his own moral code.

Hardboiled fiction was not only a genuine American invention but also an extremely popular genre that naturally lent itself to film making. Writers usually disapprove of filmic representations of their favorite characters for lack of depth (as literature and film are two very different genres), but Hawks won Chandler’s approval¹ for using Humphrey Bogart as Marlowe in the 1946 version of *The Big Sleep*. Yet, the two Marlowes are quite different, especially in the way they relate to women and homosexuality. In the first part of my paper I explain the basic differences between the written and filmed Marlowes. Sexuality offers arguably the best grounds for such comparison because of the Production (or “Hays”) Code, which regulated sexual and violent content in Hollywood movies. In the second half I deal

¹ “... Bogart, of course, is so much better than any other tough-guy actor ... Bogart can be tough without a gun. ... Bogart is the genuine article” (MacShane 75).

with Robert Altman's attempt to not only represent but terminate the character of Marlowe. Chandler stopped working on his fictitious character in the late 1950s (as he died in 1959), and Altman shot his film (with Elliott Gould as Philip Marlowe) in the post-Hays Code era, which coincided with the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.

It is at this point where we must briefly introduce the Hays Code², which was in effect in Hollywood (and the U.S.A.) from March 1930 to the late 1960s. After the Supreme Court decision of 1915 that said films did not fall under the First Amendment (free speech), Hollywood studios, as a type of self-regulation, enlisted William Hays, Postmaster General under President Harding, to regulate the depiction of certain issues that had been criticized nationwide. Hays created a list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" to serve as a guideline for film studios. In 1929, a Jesuit priest, Daniel A. Lord, and a lay Catholic journalist, Martin Quigley, wrote a list of standards that reached even deeper than Hays' original list. Among an array of other issues, it regulated the possibilities of representation of homosexuality, sexuality in general and violence on the screen. Homosexuality was deemed a form of "sex perversion" (Prince 294) and in this form it was forbidden to be shown in a film. The stock character of the "fairy," the homosexual, was treated with ridicule and veiled implications were used to slip references to homosexuals under the watchful eyes of the Code.

In light of the above it is obvious why we must invoke the Hays Code in order to understand the opposition between the strongly heterosexual Bogart/Marlowe and the homosexual blackmailer Arthur Gwynn Geiger of *The Big Sleep*, or the different sexualities of the two Marlowes on the screen some 27 years apart. Further references to the Production Code will be made in the relevant paragraphs.

Contrary to what our foreknowledge of the Hays Code might suggest, Bogart's Marlowe offers a more physical, carnal, sexual interpretation of the detective, while Gould's Marlowe is almost castrated by the idling incompetence with which the investigator attends to his case and clients. Although Chandler approved and liked Hawks' adaptation, Bogie's macho icon swung towards womanizing by the end of the movie, in contrast with very last sentences of the novel: "On the way downtown I stopped at a bar and had a couple of double Scotchies. They didn't do me any good. All they did was make me think of Silver-Wig, and I never saw her again." (*The Big Sleep* 251) Furthermore, since both Chandler and Hawks treated homosexuality as the direct opposite of the heterosexuality of the private investigator

² Information on the Hays Code is from Stephen Prince's book.

(the latter, interestingly, with a heavier emphasis on in than the former), it also has to be addressed.

On the other end of the analytic spectrum, opposite to sexuality and carnality, is the ethical code – or principles – that is not only tightly attached to Marlowe's conduct with women, but it also plays a cardinal role during the private investigator's actions towards men, regardless of their sexual orientation or moral standing. Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973) brilliantly dismantles these very rules that govern Marlowe's life. I also explain the degree to which this code can be taken apart while keeping Marlowe's integrity and life as we understand it.

Conclusions will be offered about these core issues based on the analysis of the three books and the two films and I will also explain which Marlowe (Bogart's or Gould's) I consider being closer to Chandler's original.

2. Sexuality

Marlowe encounters several women throughout the course of the books and films. He looks at some of them as possible conquests, while some others are untouchable for him because of his moral code: these women are either his clients or are the perpetrators.

In the novel *The Big Sleep*, from 1939, Marlowe meets the Sternwood sisters: Vivian and Carmen. Their father, Marlowe's client, General Guy Sternwood, who hires the detective to investigate a case of blackmailing of which the General himself is the victim, describes her elder daughter, Vivian, as "spoiled, exacting, smart and quite ruthless" (*The Big Sleep* 12). In the novel, Marlowe meets her for the first time in the Sternwood Manor, and then she pays him a visit in his office in downtown Los Angeles. Afterwards, at Los Angeles based gangster Eddie Mars's casino, Marlowe saves Vivian from a mugger, and finally, when they are on their way back to the Sternwood Manor from the casino, Marlowe kisses her, but only in an attempt to pry information out of her about what Eddie Mars has against her with which she and her father, the General, can be blackmailed. Marlowe is clearly attracted to Vivian physically; however, he also knows (most probably from previous experience) the dangers of loving such a woman – so he keeps her at arm's length even though her attraction towards Marlowe is made obvious. The following excerpt from the scene at Marlowe's office describes this:

She took the photo out and stood looking at it, just inside the door. "She has a beautiful little body, hasn't she?"

"Uh-huh."

She leaned a little towards me. "You ought to see mine," she said gravely.

"Can it be arranged?"

She laughed suddenly and sharply and went halfway through the door, then turned her head to say coolly: "You're as cold-blooded a beast as I ever met, Marlowe. Or can I call you Phil?"

"Sure."

"You can call me Vivian."

"Thanks, Mrs. Regan."

"Oh, go to hell, Marlowe." She went on out and didn't look back. (*The Big Sleep* 66)

Marlowe reacts upon her offer on a purely physical level, lacking deeper emotions. Vivian understands this as a threat, i.e., she is aware of that her main weapon, bodily charm, does not work on Marlowe, and falls back on mockery and wisecracks in her reactions. The next quote is from their trip back to the Manor, right after Marlowe asks, for the umpteenth time, what Mars blackmails the Sternwood family with:

“Do I have to tell you I loathe your guts, Mister Detective?”

“You don’t owe me anything. I’m paid off.”

She tossed the shredded handkerchief out of the car window. “You have a lovely way with women.”

“I liked kissing you.”

“You kept your head beautifully. That’s so flattering. Should I congratulate you, or my father?”

“I liked kissing you.”

Her voice became an icy drawl. “Take me away from here, if you will be so kind. I’m quite sure I’d like to go home.”

“You won’t be a sister to me?”

“If I had a razor, I’d cut your throat—just to see what ran out of it.”

“Caterpillar blood,” I said. (*The Big Sleep* 165)

These quotes sum up well their relationship in the novel: their hostility is reserved entirely to a verbal level, because Marlowe’s moral code would obviously keep him from attacking a defenseless woman. Their relationship never blooms mostly because of Marlowe keeping his distance from his client’s daughter, but he also has a general suspicion towards women. This will become more significant and will be analyzed when dealing with Vivian’s little sister, Carmen.

The 1946 movie (with Humphrey Bogart as Marlowe and Lauren Bacall as Vivian) displays a completely different interaction. The screenplay contains many more scenes with the Bogart-Bacall duo together than the novel would suggest. Gene D. Phillips explains the underlying reasons for this:

Charles Feldman, a prestigious talent agent who numbered both Hawks and Bacall among his clients [...] advised [Jack] Warner [the producer] with Hawks’s support that, if Bacall got the same kind of negative voices for *The Big Sleep* that she had received for *Confidential Agent* [her previous film], her career might well be aborted. He therefore urged Warner, after he had viewed the film, to give Bacall “three or four additional scenes with Bogart, of the insolent and provocative nature that she had had in *To Have and Have Not* [Bogart’s and Bacall’s previous co-starred film].” Jack Warner [...] immediately commissioned screenwriter Philip Epstein (*Casablanca*) to provide the needed scenes. (Phillips 63)

This resulted in more screen-time for the duo. Vivian appears in Joe Brody’s flat when Marlowe shows up for the pictures taken from homosexual photographer-turned-blackmailer Arthur Gwynn Geiger’s shop; she is looking for the ones that were taken of her sister. The office scene was also lengthened and was given a lighter tone. Marlowe and Vivian play a prank through the telephone on a police dispatcher, and Marlowe, noticing that Vivian has an itch on the thigh, tells her to “Go ahead and scratch.” She does so. She is also present in the

house where Eddie Mars keeps his wife hidden (for which the reasons shall be discussed later) and where Marlowe is thrown tied up after getting caught by Eddie Mars's henchmen. Vivian and Mrs. Mars help him escape. The movie ends with Marlowe and Vivian in each other's arms, waiting for the police to arrive. The scene obviously suggests that they have a future together, especially after having confessed love to each other, although it might start with a lengthy explanation given to the authorities. This is definitely a happy ending that was expected from Hollywood, especially during and after the horrors of World War II. The cliché of the protagonist "getting the girl" is also fulfilled much to the satisfaction of the audience.

The other Sternwood girl's, Carmen's, role is tuned down in the film for the reason, as Chandler put it in one of his letters, that Martha Vickers, Carmen's actress, "was so good she shattered Miss Bacall completely" (*Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler* 75) and, as has been mentioned before, Lauren Bacall's prominence in this feature was of the utmost importance for her career.

As her father describes her to Marlowe, "Carmen is a child who likes to pull wings off flies" (*The Big Sleep* 12). She is childish and animalistic: she kills her brother-in-law simply because he would not want to go the bed with her. In her world this refusal can only be reacted upon with murder. A man she cannot control with her body is possibly a source of danger for her (a common feature in her and Vivian); therefore, she has to eliminate him. Charles Rzepka arrives at the same conclusion: "When [Carmen's] need to be the focus of erotic attention is denied, her only recourse is violence. She must eliminate the undesiring gaze that reveals to her her own emptiness. She must make the man to whom that gaze belongs stop not-noticing her, stop not-desiring her. Otherwise, she will cease to exist in the only way that has any meaning for her." (Rzepka 216) Marlowe falls into the same trap set by Carmen when he returns to his flat one night:

The bed was down. Something in it giggled. A blonde head was pressed into my pillow. Two bare arms curved up and the hands belonging to them were clasped on top of the blond head. Carmen Sternwood on her back, in my bed, giggling at me. The tawny wave of her hair was spread out on the pillow as if by careful and artificial hand. Her slaty eyes peered at me and had the effect, as usual, of peering from behind a barrel. She smiled. Her small sharp teeth glinted. (*The Big Sleep* 167)

When Marlowe tells her to leave, her almost snake-like reaction is the following:

Then I was aware of the hissing noise very sudden and sharp. It startled me into looking at her again. She sat there naked, propped on her hands, her mouth open a little, her face like scraped bone. The hissing noise came tearing out of her mouth as if

she had nothing to do with it. There was something behind her eyes, blank as they were, that I had never seen in a woman's eyes. (*The Big Sleep* 171)

This scene was completely omitted from the film as, according to the Hays Code discussed earlier, “complete nudity is never permitted” (Price 295). Her childish features are presented, e.g. when at the beginning of the movie “she tries to sit down [Marlowe's] lap while [he was] standing up.” Marlowe is repelled by her and her presence in his flat. In the novel, he tears “the bed to pieces savagely” (*The Big Sleep* 173) after she leaves and Marlowe sees her impression on the bed-sheet. When Marlowe comes to understand her secret, her being the killer, he takes her for a shooting practice – in the novel, but not in the film – but gives her a gun loaded with blank cartridges. He knows she would try to kill him, too, just as she did with her brother-in-law. In both versions, however, Marlowe ensures that she receives proper treatment in an asylum, and does not turn her over to the police. Marlowe does this without the General's knowledge of the events as he wants to grant the old man his peace of mind.

In the novels, Marlowe's core problem with women stems not from his inability to satisfy them sexually (cf. the cases of Eileen Wade in *The Long Goodbye*, or Miss Vermilyea in *Playback*), but from his inability to trust them enough to form a lasting relationship. Therefore, it can be inferred that Marlowe's overpowering masculinity is an emotional shield against women just as much as his outside cynicism against the moral demise of his environment (which will be further discussed along with Marlowe's ethical code). Cody Griggers in his essay supports the thought:

Chandler is not *redefining* gender in his characterization of Marlowe. He simply presents us a different view of masculinity. He presents us with a character for whom masculinity is *required* and not just present. This gives Marlowe a tempered, unemotional machismo that shields us from seeing what is inside him. As the main character of a detective novel, Marlowe *cannot* fall in love or break down and cry—he can never let down his masculine guard in front of the reader. [*Italics in the original.*]

This shield consists not simply of verbal sarcasm and wisecracks, but of physical action, too. A telling example of this is the aforementioned scene, when Marlowe throws Carmen Sternwood out of his flat, in *The Big Sleep* (Chapter 24). Carmen offers herself, her body, to Marlowe, but he refuses her. The most obvious reasons behind this are that Marlowe is loyal to his client, Carmen's father, and he knows that Carmen is still something of a child who sucks on her thumb regularly, “slowly, turning it around in her mouth like a baby with a comforter” (*The Big Sleep* 4). No matter how beautiful her body is, Marlowe resists her because it would be similar to child abuse to take advantage of her. After their previous

meetings in the Sternwood Manor, at Joe Brody's place and twice at Geiger's, Marlowe – not being naïve –, by that time, must have gathered that Carmen has some sort of a mental illness. (He is reassured about this during their final meeting when she asks him to teach her to shoot, then tries to murder him, in Chapter 31. In the movie his suspicions are reassured by Vivian.) All these accumulate to making him think that bedding Carmen would be like abusing a mentally ill girl whose father Marlowe likes, or, at least, sympathizes with. Instead of that, he offers Carmen a drink, tries to convince her to leave his apartment, and also threatens her that he will throw her out naked onto the corridor if she does not comply.

In the 1939 movie, however, this shield is absent; Marlowe's machismo is self-serving. The movie further strengthens Bogart's Hollywood icon of the macho man by introducing new female characters that are not present in the novel. The first of them is the librarian in the Hollywood Public Library, a place Marlowe visits to obtain information about famous first edition books. He plans to use this information to test Agnes Lowzier's (Lozelle in the novel) knowledge. (Agnes is the clerk in Arthur Gwynn Geiger's bookshop.) Upon leaving the library, Marlowe hands back a book titled *Famous First Editions* to a blonde librarian. The following dialogue ensues between them: "Did you find what you wanted?" 'Yes, thanks.' 'You know, you don't look like a man who'd be interested in first editions.' 'And I collect blondes and bottles, too.'" After this, Marlowe leaves for Geiger's shop. This part, written directly for the screen, takes some two minutes of the runtime of the film, but tells a lot about Marlowe's image and character. This woman asserts Marlowe's (Bogart's) role as a masculine, macho icon who – through wisecracking – proves us that he is not a fall-guy for women, and is always happy to deliver possibly abusive lines regardless of the recipient's gender. In other words, he can easily risk making women angry because he knows that many others would be happy to fall at his feet; nevertheless, he also cracks wise to men just as often.

The next (second) woman is the bookshop clerk in the ACME Book Shop opposite Geiger's shop. Chandler describes her in the following way:

I shoved on back into the store, passed through a partition and found a small dark woman reading a law book at a desk. I flipped my wallet open on her desk and let her look at the buzzer pinned to the flap. She looked at it, took her glasses off and leaned back in her chair. I put the wallet away. She had the fine-drawn face of an intelligent Jewess. She stared at me and said nothing. (*The Big Sleep* 28)

They are almost on the same level. The woman smokes and after Marlowe lights her cigarette, he tells her that he is a private investigator working for a client (he "levels" with her), and also

tests her about those fake first editions. He earns her trust and coaxes her into giving a detailed description of Geiger. After this, Marlowe leaves the shop. In their brief encounter, the woman clearly has the upper hand as she has vital information that Marlowe needs for his investigation. When it came to adapting this segment to the screen, the following happened:

In one early scene, for example, Marlowe quizzes a clerk in the Acme Bookstore (Dorothy Malone) about Geiger's rival bookstore across the street. Hawks had Bogart and Malone embroider their dialogue with sexual innuendo. "That wasn't the way the scene was written at all," Hawks recalled. "We just did it that way because the girl was so damned good looking." The upshot was that, by scene's end, the clerk seduces Marlowe in record time. (Phillips 58)

In the movie her intelligence is shown through her having glasses, but Marlowe asks her to take them off thereby lowering the woman's status and raising himself above her. The "girl" (not a "woman" here, and definitely not a "Jewess" – the actress' name, Malone, implies Irish heritage) also lets her hair loose after she takes off her glasses, further emphasizing the sexual overtone of the scene. Marlowe spends more time in the bookshop of the movie than in that of the novel under the pretext of waiting for Geiger and of the rain falling outside, and by doing so he acts out a scene familiar from screwball comedies. The clerk agrees to Marlowe's company by closing the shop and Marlowe opens up a bottle of whiskey after he decides to stay. Marlowe further asserts Bogart's machismo and overpowering masculinity, and the fast-forward cut from the opening of the bottle to Geiger's arrival to his own bookshop suggests further implied sexuality – all this under the auspices of the Hays Code.

The third minor female character is the taxi driver, another lady who is missing from the novel (in which her character is male and is completely insignificant). Marlowe hails her cab when he wants to follow a truck loaded with the then-deceased Geiger's pornographic articles. The driver is played by still another attractive actress, and her character enjoys the tailing so much that she gives her card to Marlowe so he can call her whenever he needs a taxi – or more: "If you can use me again sometime, call this number.' 'Day and night?' 'Night's better. I work during the day.'" This is, of course, is due to Marlowe's charm. The girl tells him that she is "[his] girl" for the job whom he can "use." Marlowe does not seem to mind. The already established male-icon status of Bogart's was thus raised even higher in this movie.

The already mentioned Agnes Lozelle is the clerk from Arthur Gwynn Geiger's antique book shop which also serves as a front for his pornography peddling racket. Her first meeting with Marlowe gains more importance when looked at from the aspect of

homosexuality; therefore it will be discussed in the next chapter. After the death of her boss, the pornographic books and pictures are delivered to a small-time crook, Joe Brody, who also happens to be Agnes's friend. When Marlowe, after the cab sequence, enters Brody's flat, he finds Agnes there, too. After some discussion between them, Carmen shows up, and a small fight breaks out among the people present. Agnes's actions during the fight, as they are described in the novel, are important to note:

Blonde Agnes came to life with a rush. She ducked her head and sank her teeth in my right hand. I made more noises and shook her off. [...] The blonde spat at me and threw herself on my leg and tried to bite that. I cracked her on the head with the gun, not very hard, and tried to stand up. She rolled down my legs and wrapped her arms around them. I fell back on the davenport. The blonde was strong with the madness of love or fear, or a mixture of both, or maybe she was just strong. (*The Big Sleep* 93-94)

Agnes is described as an animalistic being here. The movie differs from the novel in this part in more than just Agnes being a brunette. This awkward and (for Agnes) humiliating fight scene is completely missing from the movie. Joe Brody, nevertheless, tells Agnes to "shut up" when Marlowe is talking to him about the police and the blackmail that Geiger pressured Marlowe's client with. Agnes is no "territory for conquest;" she never becomes the object or Marlowe's desire. She can be cold and calculating: close to the end, she offers Marlowe key information through a proxy, her next boyfriend, the small-sized, but honorable Harry Jones. Jones gives his life for his love, but when Marlowe tells Agnes a lie about Harry's whereabouts, she quickly forgets him, takes Marlowe's money and shares the information with him. Agnes is selfish, sometimes wild, sometimes cold and calculating, and these aspects are kept in the movie, too. Chandler describes her as a despicable human being and woman, and through this, he makes her possibly the only clearly and fully (both physically and emotionally) undesirable woman in the story for both Marlowe and the readers.

Having mentioned the least wanted woman, it is time to describe perhaps the most attractive female character (for Marlowe, at least) of the novel who was utterly neglected in the film: Mona Mars. Eddie Mars's wife willfully goes into exile after her husband asks her to do so in order to make other people believe that Vivian's husband, Rusty, left town with Mona. Rusty, however, was killed by Carmen, the younger Sternwood girl, and this serves as the basis for Eddie's blackmailing the Sternwood family. Mona, as an ultimate sacrifice, cuts off her hair to make herself more difficult to recognize, and puts on a silver blonde wig, compelling Marlowe to give her the moniker "Silver-Wig." This is not present in the film, most probably because the filmmakers did not want to corrupt the beauty of a Hollywood

actress in any way. Therefore, considering the importance of women looking good on the screen, the actress was not asked to cut off her hair and put on a wig. Furthermore, Mona has only a small, almost ignorable part in the film; she serves merely as a plot device. Vivian is given all the tasks Chandler cast on Mrs. Mars. In order to understand her importance in Marlowe's life, we have to examine two quotations. The first one is from the novel:

It seemed there was a woman and she was sitting near a lamp, which was where she belonged, in a good light. Another light shone hard on my face, so I closed my eyes again and tried to look at her through the lashes. She was so platinumed that her hair shone like a silver fruit bowl. She wore a green knitted dress with a broad white collar turned over it. (*The Big Sleep* 207)

In the second quotation the "silver fruit bowl" simile is explained by Rzepka:

Mona's platinum-coloured hair, which reminds Marlowe of an upended silver bowl, is in fact a wig, which she removes to be sociable, like the knight raising his vizor in the General's window [...]. Gleaming metallicly on Mona's cropped head, the removable wig also resembles a helmet, representing her knightly status and chaste devotion to her husband, Eddie Mars. (Rzepka 213)

Mona Mars is the only woman who can live up to Marlowe's expectations about honorable women. Even though he later tells her that her husband is a criminal and hires people to kill others, she does not believe him. She is as faithfully loyal to her husband as Marlowe is to his client. As Rzepka explains, the position of the knight from the picture of the Sternwood Manor untying a girl (*The Big Sleep* 1) is reversed here: Mona unties Marlowe – the damsel frees the knight. The novel ends with the following, dark, almost pessimistic paragraph: "On the way downtown I stopped at a bar and had a couple of double Scotches. They didn't do me any good. All they did was make me think of Silver-Wig, and I never saw her again" (*The Big Sleep* 251). This is radically different than the one offered by the film in which Vivian frees Marlowe (and Bacall's career is further strengthened) and Mona is just another minor, dumbfounded character.

The novel was written in 1939, before World War II, during the Great Depression. Obviously, Chandler's hands were not bound by the Hays Code while he was writing the novel, and his personal taste favored a darker, depressive tone (summarized in the last three sentences quoted above) over the Hollywood-style happy ending. For Marlowe, Mona is the only morally upright, honorable person, willing to make sacrifices, in the world of crooked criminals. For him, she means unattainable perfection, and he knows that they have no future together. This aspect was most radically changed in the film by marginalizing Mona's role

and introducing Bacall's character instead of Mrs. Mars – all this done for the simple reason of helping the rising star of a young American actress. Vivian and Bogart's Marlowe form a couple by the end of the movie and in real life, as well: Bogart married Bacall after the filming ended.

3. Homosexuality

Due to his overtly macho and masculine behavior, Marlowe has often been the subject of academic criticism that postulates that he is, in fact, homosexual. Whereas this seems to be an overly categorical statement, there are some sequences from the novels and arguments connected to them that must be discussed if Marlowe's social character is to be understood.

Michael Mason in his essay brings up the sequence where Marlowe finds Carmen in his bed which has already been discussed from a purely heterosexual aspect: hence, a repeated description of the situation is unnecessary here. After Carmen's departure follows a paragraph that Mason sees as a crucial argument for Marlowe's homosexuality: "I went back to the bed and looked down at it. The imprint of her head was still in the pillow, of her small corrupt body still on the sheets. I put my empty glass down and tore the bed to pieces savagely" (*The Big Sleep* 173). Mason quotes here Chandler's first biographer, Frank MacShane, who said that this "is an extraordinarily violent reaction" (Mason 93). This is amplified later on in Mason's essay:

But I would adduce also Marlowe's domesticity, which I mentioned earlier: not only the frequent bed-making, but the airing of the rooms (the ventilation obsession ...), emptying of ashtrays and careful brewing coffee ... Although there is an attempt by Chandler to represent Marlowe's domestic base as minimal and characterless ... there is in the novels a distinct competing strand of attention to his environment ... (Mason 98)

However, this is a faulty argument. In my opinion, Marlowe, by "tearing the bed to pieces savagely," lets off the steam and tension that has accumulated in him during his conversation with Carmen. He is, after all, a male human being; he has desires and he admits that Carmen has a beautiful body: "It's so hard for women – even nice women – to realize that their bodies are not irresistible" (*The Big Sleep* 170). He has also consumed some alcohol by the time Carmen leaves, so the savagery is justified physiologically, as well. Through his actions, he tries to get rid of anything that would remind him of Carmen, and tries to purge the "corruption" that was brought into his immediate environment: "... this was the room I had to live in. It was all I had in the way of a home. In it was everything that was mine, that had any association for me, any past, anything that took place of a family. ... Such as they were, they had all my memories" (*The Big Sleep* 171-172). Carmen intrudes into this sanctuary with "her small corrupt body." He is clearly disgusted with her and her fastness, but it would be too farfetched to conclude that Marlowe is disgusted with women in general, or that he is a homosexual. As a complement to the previously discussed "child abuse" aspect of a possible

sexual intercourse with Carmen, Rzepka offers another explanation for Marlowe's disgust: "Carmen herself is already little more than a walking, talking *Playboy* centrefold, an endlessly replicable object who is never really 'there'. ... [Marlowe's] rage, however, reflects not frustration, but dread. For Chandler, this is the ultimate horror of vicarious sex: its objects are ghoulish, un-dead" (Rzepka 216-17). As for his domesticity, he does not have a maid. He has to keep his home clean all by himself if he wants to have it that way. Being a masculine, "macho" man does not necessarily entail being a slob at the same time, not even in Chandler's world. His coffee brewing habits are actually closer to him being sober – in contrast with his heavy drinking habits³.

The movie goes directly against any homosexual subtext by bringing the question out right into the open. It happens during Marlowe's first meeting with Agnes, the scene that was invoked but not detailed previously. Marlowe visits Agnes with the intention of getting to know more about her boss, i.e., doing the detective's legwork, collecting information. Gene D. Phillips offers insight into the circumstances of the shooting of this particular scene:

While working out this scene on the set before the cameras rolled, Hawks and Bogart engaged in the same sort of improvisation they had employed in the scene just described. They decided that Marlowe should disguise his true identity as a gumshoe, in order that Agnes, the bookstore clerk (Sonia Darrin), will not suspect his true purpose. "Can you play a fairy?" Hawks asked Bogart, who replied, "Start your cameras." Bogart walked up to the store, Hawks recalled, put his sunglasses on the bridge of his nose, "pushed the brim of his hat up, and went in as quite an effeminate character." (Phillips 58)

We can see here that the easiest, most straightforward way for a private detective to conceal his true identity is to act as a homosexual. This suggests that a homosexual man who emphasizes his feminine side is on the far end of the masculine scale; he is the exact opposite of the "gumshoe." By witnessing Marlowe acting out a parody of such a man, we can infer that overt homosexuality is despicable for men like him. (The macho icon Bogart playing it makes the scene even stronger.) This parody is further emphasized by Marlowe toying with Agnes – after she is incapable of telling that Marlowe asks for non-existent first editions, therefore uncovering herself – with lines such as: [after not getting what he asks for] "You do sell books, hmm?" and "'Well, I'm already late for my lecture on Argentine ceramics, so I guess I won't wait.' 'The word is ce-REH-mics and they ain't Argentine, they're Egyptian.'"

³ Using coffee as a symbol for sobriety has been continued by Lawrence Block and his private investigator, Matt Scudder, who, after putting down alcohol for good, drinks lots of coffee – as a subliminal assertion of his sobriety.

‘You did sell a book once, didn’t you?’” Throughout this dialogue, Marlowe, even in the role of a “fairy,” is able to verbally overpower Agnes, a woman. As Phillips points out, this aspect of the character is present in the novel already, although in a much shorter description: “I had my horn-rimmed glasses on. I put my voice high and let a bird twitter in it” (*The Big Sleep* 23). Marlowe in the novel also delivers his lines in this section in “a polite falsetto.” The homosexual overtone is obviously there, but nowhere near as strongly as it is expressed in the movie. The film utilizes artistic creativity to show the viewer here material that would have been otherwise purged by Hays Code censors.

It seems appropriate here to interrupt our discussion of homosexuality and explain the relevant paragraphs of the Production Code in some detail. It has two significant sections strictly regarding this topic: “Sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden.” And “Obscenity in word, gesture, reference, song, joke, or by suggestion (even likely to be understood only by part of the audience) is forbidden” (Prince 294-295). It is strange, therefore, that Joseph Breen, the enforcer of the Hays Code on the set of *The Big Sleep*, let Hawks and Bogart act out the aforementioned “fairy” scene. Phillips helps us understand this contradiction:

On this point, film scholar Vito Russo, who wrote the book *The Celluloid Closet* [...] said in discussing homosexuality in the movies with me that the sissy was one of Hollywood’s homosexual stock characters. “They were always a cliché, a joke, and hence were not to be taken seriously,” he said. Consequently, the censor allowed them to be depicted – or in this instance lampooned – on film. (Phillips 61)

This also strengthens the contrast between the serious hero of the detective and the “lampooned fairy.” It is by no mistake then that Geiger, the blackmailer, is homosexual. He is the moral opposite of Marlowe: a sneaky, slimy criminal working through a proxy (i.e., through “black”-mail). Later on we encounter another criminal, Mars, who is not afraid to confront Marlowe face-to-face. He is, in accordance with the previous claim, straight; he has a wife. Chandler also depicted him in a somewhat more favorable light. He refers to Marlowe as “soldier,” and as it is excellently explained by Rzepka (pp. 214-216), this militaristic terminology immediately connects Mars to General Sternwood from Marlowe’s aspect. Respect, therefore, goes hand-in-hand with references to the army, sexual straightness (General Sternwood, after all, has fathered two daughters), and honor. Mars, with this, enters a grey area – that of the sympathetic criminal – in Marlowe’s ethical code and the private investigator leaves him alive at the end of the novel.

Mars's death in the film, again, may be attributed to the Hays Code: "...correct entertainment raises the whole standard of a nation. Wrong entertainment lowers the whole living conditions and moral ideals of a race" (Prince 296). The Code also distinguishes "between sin[s] which repel [...], and sins which often attract" (Prince 299) and Mars's casino operation and gangster character makes him fall into the latter category⁴ – especially because he has his "dirty work" done by proxy: Lash Canino. Whereas blackmailing directly makes Geiger despicable, murder by proxy shifts the title "killer" from Mars to his henchman, leaving only the casino on Eddie's account. To put it simply, due to the Hays Code, Eddie has to die.

Hawks had to veil the relationship between Geiger and his lover, Carol Lundgren (which is explicit in the novel). His tools for this cover expression were

... overdecorated residence, with its Oriental décor, all beaded curtains and sculptured vases, suggesting the exotic East; and by the florid silk dressing gown Geiger is wearing when he is murdered. ... Hawks was able to suggest that the relationship of Geiger and Carol was homosexual in the code of the time by which homosexuals were identified in films and thereby sneak it by the censor. (Phillips 61)

It is important to note here that these inventions were not those of Hawks as he made it certain that the audience would understand what he meant by them. This effect could not necessarily have been achieved through new ways of suggestion. (It is also a salient indicator of the constant war waged by the censors and the directors in that era of Hollywood.)

All these sequences are easily refutable should they be utilized to serve as basis for establishing Marlowe's homosexuality. With the novels, and to refer back to Marlowe's shield of masculinity, Slavoj Žižek's opinion also supports the *femme fatale*'s effect on the protagonist:

... what is really menacing about the femme fatale is not that she is fatal for *men* but that she presents a case of a "pure," nonpathological subject fully assuming *her own* fate. When the woman reaches this point, there are only two attitudes left to the man: either he "cedes his desire," rejects her and regains his imaginary, narcissistic identity (Sam Spade at the end of *The Maltese Falcon*) ... (Žižek 66) [Italics in the original.]

It is unnecessary to quote the other option as this (i.e., Spade's) way is precisely on which Marlowe acts. She rejects Carmen in order to retain his sanity and integrity. This is not homosexuality but a kind of black-or-white way to cope with women: embrace them with

⁴ Providing for the illegal needs of the public has made heroes since Al Capone's time and the Prohibition Era.

everything they have to offer, or ignore and renounce them completely. Marlowe chooses the latter.

Having said that, Red Norgaard's character and his sequence with Marlowe in his boat in *Farewell, My Lovely*⁵ may prove to be a harder part to debunk.

Norgaard is the dockworker who takes Marlowe out to a casino ship, owned by yet another gangster, off the coast of Los Angeles. During their trip, Marlowe quite uncharacteristically confesses to Red: "I'm scared," I said suddenly. "I'm scared stiff...I'm afraid of death and despair," I said. "Of dark water and drowned men's faces and skulls with empty eyesockets. I'm afraid of dying, of being nothing, of not finding a man named Brunette" (*Farewell, My Lovely* 262-63). Cody Griggers in his essay notices the strange connection between the two that forms so quickly, and offers an explanation for it, too:

No female character in the novel ... could make Marlowe bare his soul to the reader so directly as Red is able to do. Marlowe simply seems to relate better to men. They are closer to his own understanding – he knows how they think. Only men are able to drink and smoke like Marlowe or be as independent and solitary and toughened as he is able to be.

The key here is "understanding." As has been mentioned, the women Chandler puts in Marlowe's way are mostly villainesses (like Carmen, Vivian, or Agnes), or are never to be seen again (like Mona). Looking in from the outside of the novels, this is overly sexist, but this is Marlowe's world. These women make him inexpressibly lonely, therefore he has to clinch every possibility to bond with other people; in this case, it is male-bonding. Red Norgaard seems to be an understanding partner in conversation. He comforts Marlowe: "You had me going for a minute. You sure give yourself a pep talk. Brunette might be any place. On either of the boats, at the club he owns, back east, Reno, in his slippers at home" (*Farewell, My Lovely* 263). The "problematic" sequences are those in which Marlowe describes Norgaard: "He took hold of my hand. His was strong, hard, warm and slightly sticky. "I *know* you're scared," he whispered" (*Farewell, My Lovely* 269). And:

He had the eyes you never see, that you only read about. Violet eyes. Almost purple. Eyes like a girl, a lovely girl. His skin was as soft as silk. Lightly reddened, but it would never tan. It was too delicate. ... His hair was that shade of red that glints with gold. But except for the eyes he had a plain farmer face, with no stagy kind of handsomeness. (*Farewell, My Lovely* 257)

⁵ Though it would be easier to completely ignore his character under the pretence that he is not in *The Big Sleep*, I deem it only fair to include him in the present essay when the possibility of Marlowe's homosexuality is discussed.

Griggers also picks out sentences from this paragraph. By way of explanation, he only stalls, however: “Therefore, while the *reader* may be concerned with the intimate details of Marlowe’s private life, wondering about his past romances and relationships, Chandler is telling us simply to take Marlowe for what he is – a man of honor.” Griggers does not give a proper answer as he does not ask a real question about whether or not this sequence can be understood as a conversation between (latent) homosexuals. Marlowe turns towards the first person he sees fit to pour some of his problems onto. This conversation and description is an insight into the true Marlowe, the “romantic,” as he describes himself to Bernie Ohls in *The Long Goodbye* (329). The only part that really stands out is the sentences about Norgaard’s eyes. The rest is just Marlowe’s semi-unconscious reflecting on a sailor having such a soft palm. The last sentence suddenly brings us back the “real world” when Marlowe takes a perceptive step back and states that Norgaard has nothing special about him except for his strange-colored eyes. It should also not be forgotten that Chandler used this kind of close description in *The Long Goodbye*, too, in a sequence when Marlowe is threatened by a gun by his friend, Terry Lennox, who believes that he committed a murder during the last night:

I did a fast wash-up in the bathroom and the bell of the timer went just as I got back. I cut the flame and set the coffee maker on a straw mat on the table. Why did I go into such detail? Because the charged atmosphere made every little thing stand out as a performance, a movement distinct and vastly important. It was one of those hypersensitive moments when all your automatic movements, however long established, however habitual, become separate acts of will. You are like a man learning to walk after polio. You take nothing for granted, absolutely nothing at all. (*The Long Goodbye* Chapter 5)

The striking similarity between the two scenes stems from the fact that Marlowe feels his life is in danger on both occasions. Therefore, his observation about Norgaard’s hands and eyes are most likely to be the result of the same heightened perceptiveness situations like these bring out of him. And the last sentence, especially the words “of being nothing,” describes an existential crisis Marlowe goes through. He almost breaks the fourth wall when he subliminally becomes conscious of the unrealistic simplicity and emptiness of his life. His life hangs on a thread and there is barely anything that ties him to this world – much like in the paragraph in which he describes his room in *The Big Sleep* after his encounter with Carmen. What we read here is plain (existential) fear, not the longing of a homosexual man.

Gershon Legman, quoted by Mason, also comes up with the theory of Marlowe being homosexual after reading and analyzing the Red Norgaard sequence. Chandler’s response to

him was the following, as quoted by Mason: “Mr Legman seems to me to belong to that rather numerous class of American neurotics which cannot conceive of a close friendship between a couple of men as other than homosexual” (Mason 99). It is up to everyone’s personal preference whether to accept the author as the ultimate authority over his or her own work; however, to reach back to the previous argument, Marlowe could be happy if he could find the suitable woman, which finally happens in *The Long Goodbye* with Linda Loring. Marlowe grows intimate with her, but she exists Marlowe’s life at the end of the novel, only to come back at the end of *Playback*: “I’ll come, darling. I’ll come. Hold me in your arms. Hold me close in your arms. I don’t want to own you. Nobody ever will. I just want to love you” (*Playback* 195). These are Linda Loring’s words with which she ensures Marlowe about her love and compassion. After this comes a description of Marlowe’s room, the one he has telephoned from:

I looked around the empty room—which was no longer empty. There was a voice in it, and a tall slim lovely woman. There was a dark hair on the pillow in the bedroom. There was that soft gentle perfume of a woman who presses herself tight against you, whose lips are soft and yielding, whose eyes are half blind. ... The air was full of music. (*Playback* 195-96)

Furthermore, Chandler’s unfinished story, *The Poodle Springs Mystery* (later finished by Robert B. Parker under the title *Poodle Springs*) starts with the couple already being married. Marlowe finally finds love, even if that means that he has to reconsider his priorities. The wedlock would eventually make him value his life more than the client’s interest, but I see his marriage as the strongest counterargument against his supposed homosexuality. Mason tries to blunt the significance of *Playback* by writing that “[the novel] has always been the black sheep among Chandler’s novels for his readers, a forgettable work that somehow does not belong in the canon, which suggests how necessary the homosexual side of Marlowe was for Chandler’s peculiar kind of excellence” (Mason 100). Given the meticulousness Chandler worked on *The Long Goodbye* with (as discussed by Phillips on pp. 137-139), it is doubtful that this novel is in any degree less significant than the others just because of the perceived deterioration of Chandler’s literary qualities in his older age. Furthermore, Linda Loring’s character only appears on the very last pages, as she is not an active agent in the plot of the novel, so it would not have taken a great effort from Chandler to exclude her completely – yet he decided not to do so⁶.

⁶ On a personal note, I consider myself an avid fan of Chandler and of his work, and I enjoy *Playback* just as much as the other novels.

And even before the very last of Chandler's finished Marlowe novels, we can find salient proof of the lack of Marlowe's supposed disgust towards women in the (already discussed) character of Mona Mars. The important role she played when sexuality in Marlowe's character was discussed comes back as a refutation against his homosexuality. She and Marlowe only meet in Chapter 28 of *The Big Sleep*, although she is the only female throughout the whole novel towards whom Marlowe feels real, emotional, not purely physical attraction. Marlowe describes her eyes as "lake blue" and she also has a "smooth silvery voice." If these were not enough, the already quoted last sentences of the novel make sure how Marlowe feels towards her which show that Mona Mars was the only character Marlowe really cared about after properly solving the cases at hand. Most probably, as has been pointed out already, the reason for this was that Marlowe saw her as a true, honest (although somewhat naïve) and innocent player in their game. If Marlowe is a static character – a question beyond the scope of the present paper, but in itself worthy of a whole essay –, Mona's presence (and disappearance) in the first novel already decides Marlowe's sexual orientation. If Marlowe is dynamic, *Playback* and *Poodle Springs* close Marlowe's quest for sexual self-identity with the aforementioned marriage. And if Mona is good enough to cause Marlowe grief and Linda to bring happiness into his life, they are also good enough pieces of evidence to conclude the argument against Marlowe's homosexuality.

4. Marlowe's Code of Honor

Marlowe's code of honor goes way beyond the way he treats women: it is an internal driving force, his own code of conduct. It is this code that is taken apart Robert Altman's 1973 movie, *The Long Goodbye*. Although in the two and a half decades following *The Big Sleep* (1946) Marlowe's character was adapted several times in various media: movie screen, television and radio, it was in the early seventies when Altman came up with the idea "to put Marlowe to rest for good" (quoted by Richard Ferncase, 87). It was originally, however, Leigh Brackett's initiative⁷ – who reprised her role as screenwriter from *The Big Sleep* – to give the story a distinctively different ending than the one Chandler's original has. Considering Altman's statement, it is all the more interesting to note that Marlowe, after killing his "friend," Terry Lennox, does not kill himself, nor is he apprehended and incarcerated by the police. This movie gains utmost importance in the search for Marlowe's essence: through deconstructing his figure, stripping him down to the bare essentials without the previously discussed shield of integrity, one can sneak a glimpse into Marlowe's true self.

In this movie⁸ Marlowe is shown as a down-on-his-luck, shabby character whose only source of happiness is his cat. (In the original novels Marlowe does not own an animal of any kind.) The film starts with Marlowe woken up by his hungry pet. He mixes something for the animal but it is not satisfied, so Marlowe has to go to a supermarket for a proper can of cat food. The problem comes when he cannot find the type his cat likes, so he buys another one and back in his flat he painstakingly empties the can and fills an already empty one, taken from the bin, of the type the cat favors. After this scene, the cat leaves the house through the cat door and is never seen again. Marlowe's miserable existence is shown here first as being unable to fool even his cat; he is not good at lying, as this scene tells us, but he is also a "loser" as his "friend", Terry Lennox, calls him at the end of the movie. Ferncase quotes Altman, "the real mystery of *The Long Goodbye* is where Marlowe's cat had gotten to." The emphasis is on Marlowe's inability to satisfy other people, his cat, or himself. Finding his cat would mean completing something, achieving a goal in his life. Altman refrains from giving him even this much satisfaction. The once great private investigator has been reduced to a "cat man" who locks the door of his flat with a padlock and displays suicidal tendencies throughout the movie. Marlowe's lack of human connections or responsibility for anybody

⁷ As told by Brackett herself, "the ending, where Marlowe commits the murder, was in the script before Altman came onto it" (McGilligan 24).

⁸ This part of my essay is based on Richard K. Ferncase's short article, "Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*: Marlowe in the Me Decade", where it is directly quoted. Due to the three-page length of the article page numbers are omitted.

has been turned into a death wish. He smokes lots of cigarettes, lighting or smoking one nearly in every scene, in a very health-conscious California where nobody smokes anymore except for our private eye. Marlowe is not the heavy drinker here as he was in the novels; his vice is tobacco. The drinking that is heavily emphasized in the novels is shifted to his client, Roger Wade, a full-blown, raging alcoholic. This character bears many similarities to Ernest Hemingway just as much on the inside as on the outside: he is a writer, dons a beard similar to Hemingway's, etc. He also commits suicide by walking into the sea in a drunken state and his body is never found. (Ernest Hemingway also committed suicide at the age of 61 but did so with a shotgun.⁹) Wade tells Marlowe that he is owed "fifty grand" which is the title of a short story by Hemingway, as well. Wade's character is Robert Altman's (and to a certain degree, Raymond Chandler's) way of paying homage to Hemingway. As the famous playwright, Tom Stoppard, screenplay writer for the aforementioned *Poodle Springs* (the adaptation of Chandler's last, unfinished Marlowe novel) notes in his article in *The New York Times*: "Evelyn Waugh called Chandler the best writer in America. But Chandler knew where it came from, and it came from Hemingway. Those stop-frame sentences are an open declaration of his pupilage, 20 years after the amazing vignettes and short stories that made up *In Our Time*." In the event of losing a client Marlowe is seen losing his work that plays an important, definitive part in his life. Altman (and Brackett) strips him of an important aspect of his life, but it is yet not the last, most crucial blow.

Ferncase points out that Marlowe is "a man out of his time." He represents ethics from the 1950s, drives a "late 1940s Lincoln, and lights his unfiltered cigarettes with strike-anywhere matches." He also refuses to get rid of his tie when asked by Wade when the two drink together on the beach, only when incarcerated can Marlowe be forced by the police to take off this part of apparel. (The only other person to wear a tie in the movie is the incompetent gangster, Harry, who serves as comic relief more than a serious threat to Marlowe's life. With their neckties, these two people are put on the same level.) His detachment from this world is summarized in his catchphrase, "It's okay with me." Through this he shows that he has given up trying to understand the world around him; he is out of joint and is not really bothered anymore by the strange events of modern times. He is an archetypal modern Hamlet who is unfit for the purposes laid before him but still feels the urge to go down on this path. Hamlet is motivated by his father's ghost. Marlowe's driving force is his own moral code which he cannot refrain.

⁹ The biographical data on Hemingway is taken from Caroline Hulse's website.

While Marlowe's office is not shown here, his flat is in a real building on High Tower Drive, Los Angeles. In this unique building with a private elevator Marlowe's neighbors are a group of yoga-practicing, marihuana-smoking girls, representing a new age, new trends and tendencies of which Marlowe is not a part. Looking at the place and neighborhood where the flat is and at Marlowe's financial circumstances, it is highly unlikely that in real life he would have been able to afford the rent.

Gould's Marlowe lost his overly macho, sexist, misogynist attitude towards women that was so apparent in Bogart's way of acting out the character, bringing him closer to Chandler's ideas the author put forward in his important essay, "The Simple Art of Murder:" "...he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things" (*The Simple Art of Murder* 18) Or as Ferncase puts it: "Gould's Marlowe never violates the detective's code of sexual ethics to bed down with a client, as Marlowe does with Eileen Wade in Chandler's original novel. In fact, Marlowe is anything but a lady's man (as Bogart was *par excellence* in *The Big Sleep*.)" Up to *The Long Goodbye*, Chandler's Marlowe does not "bed down" with his clients. He does so in this novel with his would-be wife, and in *Playback*, too, where he sleeps with the secretary of the attorney who originally hires him. This is a violation of his ethics, but, in the long run, Chandler corrects, or, rather, justifies, this mistake by marrying Marlowe to Linda Loring. Altman, therefore, changed Marlowe's moral code, but it is obvious that he did so not because of simple prudery – Marlowe's neighbors, the aforementioned girls, are seen naked on several occasions. This change in the plot serves as a contrasting point between Marlowe's old ethics and the promiscuity of the age, represented by the girls. Gould's Marlowe is also always polite with Mrs. Wade, both before and after the death of her husband. Marlowe never tries to take advantage of her loss even though she openly flirts with him. He is always more eager to leave Mrs. Wade's company than she is to let him go. In this way the previously analyzed macho aspect of Marlowe's character is lost; while Gould's Marlowe is desperately trying to adhere to his moral code while interacting with women, he is symbolically castrated – especially in contrast with Bogart's "womanizing" characterization. After his job, Altman takes away Marlowe's masculinity.

Conversation is given a special twist in this movie. There are several scenes (e.g. when Marlowe talks with Mr. Wade on the beach, or in the house with Mrs. Wade when her husband commits suicide) when the voices in the discussion are choked by the sound of the waves of the sea, showing that spoken words here only have a secondary, marginal role.

Marlowe cracks wise to the gangsters, especially to the foolish “thug” Harry, but he is often heard talking to himself. He is hushed down when trying to communicate with Dr. Verringer’s patients in the garden of the asylum. He then reacts with his catchphrase and in a sense he debunks Gill Plain’s idea of the great detective overcoming his chaotic world through verbal mockery and wisecracking. He is often heard mumbling, not reacting directly to his conversational partners, which is similar to a voice-over, but we never get to know important thoughts or real information. Again, Marlowe cannot cope with what is around him.

When Roger Wade returns (or is returned) home, he has an important conversation with his wife of which Marlowe is not a part. He is sent out to “count the waves,” so the couple can have their own privacy. This destroys the first person singular narrative of the novels as Marlowe is not in the center of action anymore. The audience witnesses an event that the private investigator does not – we know more than Marlowe does.

After Wade’s death, Marlowe gets into an argument with the police detectives who show up at the Wade residence. The main detective leading the official investigation has better, snappier comebacks to Marlowe than the private detective can come up with and he falls back on threatening the police officers with going to the governor (Ronald Reagan) to complain, which is understandably a weightless threat. His words have lost their power. In an argument with Marty Augustine, the main villain of the story, and his thugs, he cracks wise to them. Marty asks if it was supposed to be funny and Marlowe says “It’s the only thing I can come up with.” After this, he is beaten by the gangsters; verbal overpowering (replacing actual murder), that has been Marlowe’s main weapon against foes, lost its place to physical abuse.

In the last scene, after shooting Terry Lennox, Marlowe plays a tune on a little harmonica; he is relieved of Lennox’s burden and the case is finally closed. Music replaces words here altogether. Gould’s Marlowe cannot rule his world because it has never been his. Marlowe lives in chaos and the only way he can come up with to cope with it, after the last shred of his dignity has been taken away from him through treason, is murder. When Marlowe finally finds his friend, Terry Lennox, and it turns out that he actually did kill his wife, something breaks in Marlowe. After all he suffered from the police, all the torture and pain he endured for his only “friend,” he has to face the final truth delivered by Terry: he, Marlowe, is “a born loser.” Marlowe’s reply is that he cannot even find his cat and then pulls out his gun and shoots Lennox to death. This represents the ultimate end for Marlowe. By this action, he ends his life and ethics, throws away his moral code and starts a new chapter. This is the point where Altman deals the final blow to the private eye’s character. There is nothing more left to

lose. In this respect he is similar to Roger Wade: they are both strong men broken by the circumstances. They suffer humiliation, but while Wade decides to kill himself instead of Dr. Verringer who humiliated him in front of his (Wade's) guests, Marlowe shoots the man, Terry, who led him to his demise: he kills the "humiliator." But to both of them life, as they have known it, ends – both men die.

The Vietnam War and the Watergate Scandal of 1972 must have left their mark on the atmosphere of this film. The false words and demagoguery of the politicians, the Vietnam failure and Nixon's desecrating the presidential office and eventual resignation showed that verbal action often contradicts reality. Lying, treason, and murder are the crimes of Terry, too, so Marlowe (a character originally coming from Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency) falls back on the only solution he can think of to release the paradoxical situation between his friend's treachery and his own moral code, and ends Lennox's life. Terry can also be understood as Nixon's alter-ego, especially with Nixon being a Californian, but there is no direct reference to this in the movie. Marty Augustine, however, mentions in a conversation with Marlowe that he owns real estate next to President Nixon's, thereby likening himself to him.

Ferncase in his article also mentions that Altman mocked Hollywood by rolling the end credits to "Hooray for Hollywood," and making the gate guard of Malibu Colony a celebrity impersonator. This is Altman's way of showing the "mean streets" of Los Angeles. There is the necessary crime, murder, but the obvious decadence and false, gilded values of the wealthy Californians are also present. In this way, Altman grasps and presents the essence of the social critique Chandler included in his original novel.

Being a "cat man" in a world of dogs, Marlowe has a rough time with Wade's Doberman, and in Mexico his way is also blocked by a lazy dog lying on the road. Marlowe is the cat, and the dogs of the movie always delay him. The camera also shows us a pair of copulating dogs instead of focusing on Marlowe when he walks past them. Ferncase points out in connection with the camerawork:

The photography by Vilmos Zsigmond is unlike the heavy chiaroscuro of traditional *noir*. Venetian blinds cast no shadows in this detective film. Instead, post-flashing technique creates a diaphanous ozone of pastel hues, blue shadows, and highlight of shimmering gossamer. The effect, rather than one of inscrutable darkness and menace, is more like the insidious glare of a smoggy Los Angeles afternoon. More remarkable is Zsigmond's restless camera, which prowls nervously throughout the film. The camera dollies almost imperceptively around the characters, often zooming in to seemingly inconsequential details while the main action continues to play offscreen. In contrast to the rock-steady oblique compositions of older *noir* works, this unmotivated

camera movement has a subliminal effect on the viewer, one of instability and uncertainty. (Ferncase 88-89. Original italics.)

Besides the obvious contrast between the dogs and Marlowe, the wandering camera suggests that the ongoing action is not important. The view often turns away from Marlowe's figure, e.g. in the case of the copulating dogs, and the Mexican police officer and the local coroner also ask Marlowe to stand up when a funeral procession passes by the police headquarters. All this indicates that Marlowe is nobody, an empty character in his own film, unable to properly fulfill any role and he is never taken seriously. The helpful "knight in shining armor" and honest friend of the novel has been reduced to a clumsy fool; a man who bent the law and faced authorities is now a puppet of higher powers. He cannot even rescue Roger Wade from the waves of the sea and he "even lost [his] cat." And by losing his client, his friend and his ethical code, the man known as Philip Marlowe is destroyed.

5. Conclusion

So who is Philip Marlowe after all? To arrive at a definition, let us take an indirect path and quickly dismantle his character again, down to the bare essentials. The question subconsciously proposed at the beginning of the previous chapter also leads us to the conclusion of the entire paper: Why did not Altman kill Marlowe?

As Chandler wrote, “I do not care much about his private life.” (*The Simple Art of Murder* 18) Marlowe is, in the noblest sense of the word, a nobody. As Altman shows it with peculiar acuity, Marlowe is just a set of rules, a moral code. He has no tangible life (especially, in the 1973 film, after his cat leaves him, but the previously quoted Carmen-scene from *The Big Sleep* also describes his almost empty flat) and all he is left with is a set of rules to live by. Through Terry’s treason, he is brought to the brink of this code and then, by killing Lennox, he falls. The code is thrown out of the window, and Marlowe follows suit. Altman (or, rather, Brackett) touched a nerve here: this is Philip Marlowe. Leigh Brackett described the movie in an interview in almost the same way, using similar words, as has been put forward in the present essay:

The ending of the book was totally inconclusive. You had built up a villain. You feel that Marlowe has been wounded in his most sensitive heart, as it were—he’s trusted this man as his friend; the friend has betrayed him. What do you do? We said let’s just face up to it. He kills him. In the time that we made *The Big Sleep* you couldn’t do that because of censorship, had you wanted to do it. We stuck very closely to Chandler’s own estimate of Marlowe as a loser, so we made him a real loser—he loses everything. (McGilligan 24)

Also, Marlowe’s work is defined by his principles and not the other way around. He is a private investigator because this is the job his rules allow him to be. Before the beginning of *The Big Sleep*, he was fired from the district attorney’s office (where he was also a detective) for, as he puts it, “insubordination;” most probably because he was unwilling to comply with an order that went against his code. All he was left with was the possibility of going into the private sector as a private eye.

On the other hand, however, one cannot ignore Bogart’s “carnal” take on the character. He represents a more physical Marlowe: he enjoys dames, drinks and “collect[s] blondes and bottles.” While it has become publicly accepted that Bogart’s Marlowe is the “original,” partly due to Chandler’s endorsement of *The Big Sleep* (1946), and since it was shot in the era of the writing of the novel, it can nevertheless be argued that Altman’s film is

closer to Chandler's original idea of the character and tone of his novels. To continue the quote started previously, Chandler writes:

I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. ... He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. (*The Simple Art of Murder* 18)

This is the Philip Marlowe we see in Altman's film. It has to be noted, however, that the ending of *The Long Goodbye* (1973) has nothing to do with the character the viewers get acquainted with in the beginning. His fall and destruction are the result of Altman's desire to create the "final" Marlowe feature.

Hawks' version is richer of the "seduction" Chandler writes about and his sacred loneliness is ended, his "shield" is shredded by Lauren Bacall's Vivian. The Hays Code and Hollywood expectations for an ultimately positive outcome, a "happy ending," resulted in the actual ending of the film¹⁰. Chandler's original, bleak, depressive closing tone is lost and is only partially made up for by the shadowy, black and white *film noir* techniques. It cannot be denied, though, that Bogart's Marlowe fits well, too, into the brackets Chandler set up for his most famous creation. Sexuality is, as it has been seen, after all, a crucial part of the character. The 1946 adaptation brings this into the foreground, also resulting in a mockery of homosexuality. It would be an obvious argument to see homosexuality as an attempt at the deconstruction of Marlowe's (or, rather, Bogart's) macho sexuality, but in the 1946 version it is homosexuality that is mocked during Agnes' and Marlowe's first discussion in Geiger's shop. Also, as has been shown, academic arguments in favor of Marlowe's homosexuality are based mostly on the novels (especially on *Farewell, My Lovely*), not on the films. And even these arguments are not convincing enough and are easily refutable.

Before arriving at the very end of the paper, I deem it important to devote a paragraph to Leigh Brackett, the screenwriter of both *The Big Sleep* (along with William Faulkner) and *The Long Goodbye*¹¹. Supported by her grandfather, she became a professional writer despite her mother's wishes. Her initial successes were achieved by science-fiction stories; however, she was later praised for her hardboiled stories, as well. Brackett wrote stories in almost every genre. She worked, after *The Big Sleep*, with Howard Hawks multiple times, even though at

¹⁰ That results in an 8.2/10 rating for *The Big Sleep* (1946) and a 7.6/10 for *The Long Goodbye* on the website Internet Movie Database as of November 16, 2012.

¹¹ Based on the pertinent page on *The Thrilling Detective Web Site*.

first Hawks expected to be a male due to the dialogues she had written before. Her last screenwriting effort was George Lucas' *The Empire Strikes Back*. Her importance in the cases of the aforementioned two movies cannot be ignored. Marlowe's demise, according to her own words, were Brackett's idea, and her dialogue-writing skills, that were described as "so Chandleresque in style and approach it might have been written by Chandler himself," are clearly apprehensible in the 1946 film. Without her contribution, Marlowe as we know him today would not be the same.

As for a final conclusion, I propose that these two films, *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye*, are ramifications stemming from Chandler's original: one from 1946 emphasizing a positive, more physical, "carnal" aspect of the character, while the other from 1973 concentrates on the out-of-joint, more mental, slightly depressive tone that is also present in the novels. What it definitely shows us is that Philip Marlowe's character is deeper than a superficial overlook would describe and most probably will keep providing directors and screenwriters with ample material to adapt in the future.

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