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**Universitat Autònoma
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***The Femme Fatale, a Mirror of Post-War Male
Anxiety in Raymond Chandler's Farewell, My Lovely
(1940)***

Treball de Fi de Màster / MA dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to analyze the trope of the *femme fatale* in Raymond Chandler's hardboiled novel, *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) as a means to explore its relation to the author's trauma as a war veteran of the Great War and to the disorientation of post-war American society. The archetypal *femme fatale* is known as a sexually irresistible and dangerous woman, whose manipulative behavior lures men into their downfall. The trope is often read through a misogynistic lens, yet its presence in the novel might be interpreted as a projection of the detective's post-war vulnerability and fear of losing agency. This novel's *femme fatale* is a sexually liberated woman, who profits from her seductive tactics to secure her independence. It is argued that, as a result of their active role in the workforce during the Great War, most women were eager to fight for their newly acquired economic independence and to oppose the return to the domestic space. In this respect, the *femme fatale* not only emerges as a mirror of Chandler's war fears, but as the representation of women striving for independence through rebelliousness and, in this case, criminality. Although the *femme fatale* does not dominate the novel narratively, Velma Valento/Mrs. Grayle is at the core of Philip Marlowe's quest, as a transgressive and abusive version of the power women had acquired during the Great War and as a threat to Marlowe's authority in the resolution of the case.

Introduction

“Aw well, Hell,” I said. “A guy never gets to do anything in this country anymore.
Always
women.”

– Philip Marlowe, *Farewell, My Lovely*
(Chandler 1940:
196)

My dissertation focuses on the figure of the *femme fatale* in hardboiled crime fiction, and the effect this trope has on the representation of the male “detective hero” in the aftermath of the Great War. Based on Sarah Trott’s *War Noir: Raymond Chandler and the Hardboiled Detective as Veteran in American Fiction* (2016) as my theoretical starting point, I will analyze Raymond Chandler’s *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) to explore to what extent the trope of the *femme fatale* reveals both the author’s/hero’s own trauma as a war veteran and the disorientation of post-war American society. Trott argues that Raymond Chandler’s traumatic war experience had an impact on his detective novels, but more importantly, that it can help unravel the mystery around Chandler’s alter-ego, Philip Marlowe. By drawing a parallel between two categories conventionally associated to hardboiled crime fiction, the detective and the *femme fatale*, I will explore Chandler’s gender representation in his narratives as a result of his war experience and of the rights and independence that women gained during the First World War.

Although the explicit connection between a writer's life and their work is often a matter of critical disagreement as an aspect that cannot be enquired into without also enquiring into the complex issue of authorial intent (what is not present in a text is external to that text, and may lead to what Cleanth Brooke *et al.* have regarded as "the intentional fallacy"), a counter argument would be to suggest that such an obviously devastating experience as that which Chandler underwent in war must, plausibly, have created a profound psychological impact. It is the possible nature and form of this impact that I think can be meaningfully traced in Chandler's subsequent writing. This dissertation aims to add a new layer of meaning to the text by bringing it closer to the sphere of war literature and by reorienting gender associations so that male experience is not its exclusive focus.

The first chapter will explore the trope of the criminal *femme fatale* as a misogynistic construction in the aftermath of the Great War, and as a disturbing presence in hardboiled crime fiction—a male-oriented genre. The second chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the renowned detective Philip Marlowe by—firstly—examining the detective as a traumatized war veteran, and—secondly—concentrating on how the patriarchal order is restored only when the *femme fatale* is suppressed from the text.

The trope of the *femme fatale* is strikingly prominent in hardboiled fiction because of the power the character possesses to entice men—in this case the detective hero—into deceit and betrayal. Historically, the *femme fatale* finds its roots in ancient myths and legends that could be traced back to figures from the Bible such as Eve and Salome as well as characters in Judeo-Christian folklore such as Lilith, which have been extensively explored and theorized. In his chapter entitled "La Belle Dame Sans

Merci” in *The Romantic Agony* (1933), Mario Praz claims that “there have always existed Fatal Women both in mythology and literature, since mythology and literature are imaginative reflections of the various aspects of real life, and real life has always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters” (Praz 1933: 161).

The term itself “femme fatale” derives from the French language, meaning “fatal woman”, and although the *femme fatale* is a long-lasting icon but within the Western literature it was only “formulated as clear and recognizable “type” in the late nineteenth century” (Stott 1992: 9). This concept has been later explained in a famous definition by Virginia M. Allen in *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon* (1983) as a woman “who lures men into danger, destruction, even death by means of her overwhelmingly seductive charms” (Allen 1983: 7). Therefore, the figure of the *femme fatale* is known primarily for her seductive characteristic and its lethal effect on men and has manifested in multiple metaphorical forms such as the vampire, the spider woman, the temptress, the siren, the prostitute, and the murderess, among others.

Although these definitions provide key elements to characterize the image of the *femme fatale*, the rise of feminist literary theory has compelled a new reading of some of these early tenets. Indeed, there have been several feminist publications associating the *femme fatale* with male dismay, and one of the most influential is Mary Ann Doane’s *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (1991) in which the author asserts that the *femme fatale* “is not the subject of feminism but a subject of male fears about feminism” (Doane 1991: 3). In this view, the *femme fatale* would pose a threat to masculinity, as feminism is based upon establishing equality between men and women, and freeing women from patriarchal societal constraints.

This emphasizes the idea that this figure is the product of masculine fear of women as a result of women's desire to break out from their conventional role within the domestic sphere.

Bram Dijkstra's extensive study *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil* (1988) states that the *femme fatale* was "to the men at the turn of the century perfectly representative of the New Woman who, in their eyes, was seeking to arrogate herself male privileges, refused the duties of motherhood and was intent upon destroying the heavenly harmony of feminine subordination in the family" (Dijkstra 1988: 309). This supports the idea that the character of the *femme fatale* thus emerges from a misogynistic fear of women who question traditional womanhood. The *femme fatale* is a figure who refuses to serve the patriarchy, and what threatens society is precisely her sex appeal and undeniable attractiveness.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, the *femme fatale's* lethal and irresistible eroticism brings about the question of "abjection". In fact, Julia Kristeva's theorization of "abjection" in her well-known work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* could be adequately applied to hardboiled crime fiction in terms of how it seems to restore the patriarchal order by acting against transgressive women. In *Critical Keywords in Literary and Cultural Theory* (2003), Julian Wolfreys and Noël McAfee discuss how Kristeva's notion of the abject works: "The subject rids itself of something that is other than itself and yet part of itself, thereby seeking in the process of 'ab-jecting' to reestablish the boundaries of the self" (Wolfreys 2003: 5). Similarly, the *femme fatale* becomes "abject" in her being represented as an evil character, but more importantly she is an illustration of men's fears towards female abjection, because she does not respect borders or rules.

In *Farewell, My Lovely* the narrator private detective Philip Marlowe presents the reader a beginning *in medias res* which leads to the start of the detective's quest, searching for a young woman named Velma Valento—Moose Malloy's lost love. Moose Malloy hires the detective to find his girlfriend Velma, who works as a singer and dancer in a bar, after Malloy's eight-year incarceration. A series of murders are committed which raise more questions and generate more obstacles to Marlowe's inquiry in finding the mysterious "little Velma" while at the same time working for Mrs. Grayle, a wealthy woman who hires him to find her missing jewelry. As a classic example of hardboiled fiction, the novel introduces stock characters such as the detective Marlowe and the *femme fatale*, Velma Valento, who changes her identity to Mrs. Grayle. The story concludes with Marlowe solving the case, and the *femme fatale* escaping from the police and finally taking her own life.

American hardboiled fiction rose in popularity at the beginning of the 20th century as a subgenre of detective fiction, with Dashiell Hammett's novel *Red Harvest* (1929), but was in fact created by Carroll John Daly who, in 1922, wrote the first hardboiled story "The False Burton Combs." Dashiell Hammett became one of the most well-known hardboiled detective writers, followed by his successor Raymond Chandler, who in his essay entitled "The Simple Art of Murder" (1950), described Hammett as a "spare, frugal, hard-boiled [writer]," who "did over and over again what only the best writers can ever do at all." Chandler praises Hammett's style for giving "murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand" (Chandler 1950: 234).

In Chandler's view, the genre's main distinguishable characteristics are the slang language used, the sordid urban setting of the plot, the detective being at the

center of the story and finally the detection, all combined in a “realistic style” (Chandler 1950: 235), as well as a deviant *femme fatale*. In a chapter entitled “Raymond Chandler”, Leonard Cassuto states that “at his peak, Chandler transcended the crime genre within which he honed and practiced his craft. He was praised by the literati, imitated widely by his crime writer peers, and avidly read by the general public” (Cassuto: 168). Cassuto describes Chandler’s legacy as one of the most influential in the hard-boiled detective genre, and his style as “the product of an aestheticized, classically trained sensibility coming into contact with a demotic vocabulary” (Naremore 1998: 85).

Chandler’s novels are, as Jaber claims, set “in a world of crime and corruption usually with a male detective oscillating between the rich elite and the seamy underworld of gangsters and dangerous women” (Jaber 2016). The character of Philip Marlowe, who appears as the hero in all seven of Chandler’s hardboiled novels is often as “sardonic” and “knightly” (Abbott 2003) and becomes an example amongst the other fictional detectives of the genre; Chandler describes his protagonist as the kind of detective who steps away from the characteristics of what was known as the classical detective, such as Sherlock Holmes or Hercules Poirot.

He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man [...] a man of honour. [...] He will take no man’s money dishonestly and no man’s insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. 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. He talks as a man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. [...] The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth. If there were enough like him, I think the world would be a very safe place to live in, and yet not too dull to be worth living in. (Chandler 1950: 237)

Moreover, it is argued that Raymond Chandler incorporated biographical influences which have helped with the creation of his detective, as delineated by Sarah Trott “Marlowe’s persona displays distinct similarities to that of his creator” (Trott 2016:

215). Indeed, Trott alludes to the similitudes between the author and his protagonist Philip Marlowe, based on Chandler's war experience and the traumatic effects he suffered.

[...] the writer's peculiarities and character traits are vital in recognizing the transference in symptoms onto his detective protagonist. By acknowledging the symptoms suffered by Chandler himself, it is thus feasible to recognize Philip Marlowe as a traumatized war veteran (Trott 2016: 4)

It is important to note that Raymond Chandler's warfare involvement began when he enlisted in the Canadian Army in 1917, before he was sent to the front line in France in 1918 which marked the beginning of a severe distress: "Once you have led a platoon of men into direct machine gun-fire, nothing is ever the same again" (Trott 2013: 130). Trott's theory is that Marlowe's "nonchalant attitude towards death" (Trott 2016: 217) is based on Chandler's scarring war recollections, which resulted in the characterization of the detective as a "war troubled veteran of the Great War" (Trott 2016: 12), disillusioned by a corrupted society.

Philip Marlowe—the "modern knight in a dirty world" (Suwabe 2004: 66)—is in constant conflict with his antagonist, a *femme fatale* who is often the criminal in the story. As it is the case in *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), the *femme fatale* Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle has already committed several murders when Marlowe begins an investigation to find out her real identity. This *femme fatale* is a sexually assertive, greedy, aggressive and murderous character who flouts traditional feminine roles, while exaggerating the most seductive aspects of female sexuality. Velma Grayle rejects domesticity in exchange for more sexual and financial independence, which she achieves by marrying the affluent but elderly Mr. Grayle. This is done in an effort to secure her new identity and enjoy her freedom as a sexual and autonomous woman.

Velma Grayle's deviant hypersexuality is presented as a challenge to the detective Marlowe, who must assert his masculine authority and contain this evil and tainted, yet potent female character. In her book *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (2011) Heather Worthington points out that the negative representation of the *femme fatale* in hardboiled fiction aims to "valourise the male protagonist and endorse properly masculine behaviour; the invariably unpleasant fates of transgressive women function to enforce properly feminine behaviour" (Worthington 2011: 45). The image of female power projected by the *femme fatale* has to be dismantled in the end because, as Mary Borden suggests, "everything is arranged. It is arranged that men should be broken and that they should be mended" (2008: 79). The *femme fatale* can only be understood as a figure of potential transgression, whose existence is overridden by the power and authority of post-war patriarchy.

Chapter 1:

a) The criminal *femme fatale* as a misogynistic construction

“All the society dames talk like tramps nowadays. Probably some of them *are* tramps”

– Philip Marlowe, *Farewell, My Lovely*
(Chandler 1940: 94)

In this first chapter of this dissertation I start by examining the trope of the *femme fatale* in hardboiled detective fiction. I contend that it is the result of post-First World War male anxieties due to the shifting of gender dynamics, and suggest that the *femme fatale* is a threat to male dominance and control and therefore appears as a misogynistic construction. To understand the role of the *femme fatale* in *Farewell, My Lovely*, I will start by focusing on Velma Valento / Helen Grayle as a sexually liberated woman so as to assess the power that feeds her ambitions. Then I suggest that although Velma Valento / Helen Grayle’s criminality serves as a way to secure her independence, it is also the death knell that ultimately leads to her own destruction as a consequence of her transgressions. Finally, I analyze to what extent the *femme fatale*’s characterization as a ruthless social climber, who has no hesitation in killing to protect her interests, is deliberately revealed in clear opposition to Philip Marlowe’s working-class background and sense of social isolation and alienation.

The *femme fatale* is one of the most compelling female figures in Western literary

tradition and particularly central from the beginning to the middle of the twentieth century in Raymond Chandler's hardboiled crime fiction. This novel's *femme fatale* radiates an enchanting sensuality; Helen Grayle is the epitome of beauty and attractiveness. She is openly sexual and does not let her marriage stop her from seducing other men, including the private detective Philip Marlowe. Marlowe describes the *femme fatale*'s husband Mr. Grayle as an "elderly, liverish, [man who] stays home and takes calomel while Mrs. Grayle goes places and has a good time" (Chandler 93). As stated by Stephanie Blaser and John Blaser in *Film Noir's Progressive Portrayal of Women* (2008), the *femme fatale* "rejects the conventional roles of devoted wife and loving mother that mainstream society prescribes for women" (Blaser 2008). Mrs. Grayle benefits from her marriage, and the luxurious lifestyle it brings, to enjoy herself out drinking without her husband. In fact, the detective claims that when he speaks to her on the phone she usually sounds "as if she had a hangover" (Chandler 94).

Although the Great War was seen as a time of liberation for women, as they were given the opportunity to join the workforce to replace the men fighting at war, the war's aftermath proved difficult for them to defend these acquired rights and to further their participation in the wider economic, social and political debates. Although women over thirty got the right to vote in 1918—suffrage had only been a male privilege until then—most women were sent back home in order to make way for soldiers to have their jobs back. Yet those who had had a taste of political, economic and sexual freedom refused to return to domesticity. The trope of the *femme fatale* might thus portray a woman who displays, in Sandra Gilbert's words, the "female eroticism that the war energized" (Gilbert 1983: 442).

However, between the dark austerity of World War One and the Great Depression, there was a particular cultural movement that somehow allowed for this eroticism that the war had energized to explore other forms. This cultural movement was represented by a group of young women known as ‘The Flappers.’ They were mostly prominent in the Roaring Twenties and were considered the first generation of independent women. They did not want to give up the new roles they had taken up during the war so when the men returned from the battlefield, they kept pushing the conventional boundaries in pursuit of more economic, political and sexual freedom. As Joshua Zeitz suggests, “The flapper was distinctly real, the product of compelling social and political forces that converged in the years between the two world wars” (Zeitz 2006: 8). The Flappers drank, smoked, danced in jazz clubs, and engaged in sexual activities, which emphasized their reckless behavior and their disregard for what was considered conventional. They were characterized by their rakish attire; they wore shorter hair and shorter skirts. As female sexuality and premarital sex moved out of the shadows, another wave of sexual liberation led these women to push for further equality. The contraception revolution gave them the freedom to engage in sexual intercourse without having to face the consequences of pregnancy.

While before and during the Great War, a woman’s duty was essentially motherhood. The Flappers’ strong opposition to this ‘only’ function stood as a major threat to these domestic boundaries. The Flappers’ liberalism only ignited more controversies and threats to male authority, as female employment increased and, with it, women’s desire to lead independent lives. According to Zeitz, “many educated women surely rejected matrimony because they weren’t interested in sacrificing their careers” (Zeitz 2006: 132). These women redefined the notion of

femininity and this rendered them somewhat dangerous because they “experimented openly with sex and with style” (Zeitiz 2006: 17), allowing for sexual fulfillment and sexual expression to be major components in their lives. The Flappers are often associated with the figure of the ‘new woman’ “whose behavior and appearance constituted a major break with western, male-dominated civilization and was seen, in fact, as a dangerous threat to that civilization” in the nineteenth century (Yellis 1969: 63).

This era of extreme sexual freedom might be reflected in the characterization of Velma Valento/Helen Grayle, who is portrayed as nothing but a young attractive flapper, dressed in clothes delicately revealing “the lovely lines of her neck” (Chandler 129), and showing “her legs crossed” (Chandler 128). The *femme fatale* is also defined by the way she drinks alcohol; she usually “finished her glass at a swallow” (Chandler 125) and disregards patriarchal restraints on female behaviour, declaring “to hell with this polite drinking” (Chandler 125). Her manners subvert mainstream cultural codes of feminine politeness and decorum. She is the opposite to the well-mannered hostess that never participates in the drinking of the male guests to the family home.

Helen Grayle’s relationship with her husband is very significant to her characterization as a flapper. She asserts her authority—almost ‘masculine’ in its power—over her docile husband, when asking him to “mix Mr. Marlowe a drink” (Chandler 125) and then to leave the room so that she can be left alone with the detective, “do you have to bother with this, honey?” (Chandler 125). In response to her husband’s docile attitude, “Mrs. Grayle looked at the door for a moment and then put the smile back on her face and looked at me” (Chandler 125). This incident

somehow mimics how flappers fraternized with men but also the cunning with which the mind of the *femme fatale* orchestrates the situation to her own advantage. Marlowe feels pity towards the emasculated Mr. Grayle, and wants “to carry him out of the room just to show [his] appreciation” (Chandler 125). This not only indicates who exerts the authority within the Grayle’s marriage but also how gender roles are subverted in the relationship as it is usually women who are excluded from male talk, not the other way around.

In her attempt to seduce Marlowe, Mrs. Grayle makes sexual advances by kissing him. Her mouth is described as “half-open and burning and her tongue was darting a snake between her teeth” (Chandler 135). This seems to allude to a Medusa-like figure—known as the mother of monsters—suggesting that this sexually charged woman can leave behind a trail of ruined lives and also that female sexual agency ultimately gives birth to a fundamentally disordered and chaotic society. More importantly, this scene also conveys Marlowe’s anxiety, especially when the two characters are caught by Mr. Grayle: Marlowe “pushed her away and stood up and got [his] handkerchief out and mopped [his] face” (Chandler 135). The depiction of the stark image of Marlowe cleaning his face from Helen’s kiss, as if her sexuality would leave a filthy stain on him, suggests she is a tantalizing yet sufficiently dark and evil figure for him not to be afraid and disturbed. This episode reflects Marlowe’s sense of shame and disgust caused by the woman, as he “felt nasty, as if [he] had picked a poor man’s pocket” (Chandler 136), and also illustrates how female sexuality is still being feared and misapprehended.

It is important to note that, as Eric Leed suggests, “women in particular reacted to the war experience with a powerful increase in libido” (qtd in Gilbert and

Gubar 1983: 290). Yet, “this libido attached itself to the very symbols signifying the uniformization of roles” (Gilbert and Gubar 290). Perhaps it is Marlowe’s “detective” role that appeals to her as well as the fact that he is so detached from the domestic sphere she seems to abhor.

Valento/Grayle’s libidinous release is shown in her promiscuity, which even calls the attention of other female characters in the novel. Of Grayle’s sexual life, Anne Riordan claims: “she probably goes out with a hundred men” (Chandler 96). Yet, it is not only Marlowe’s masculine and virile strength that appeals to Grayle, the fact that he comes from the lower strata of society, that he is a rebel and an outcast in the world of the rich and powerful, is also a powerful thrill and turn-on. Mrs. Gayle is portrayed as an archetype transgressing the patriarchal order and refusing to abide by the pre-war norms that demand that a woman’s place is that of the devoted wife of the husband as dominant figure in the household.

Apart from being represented as a sexually liberated woman, the *femme fatale* is also constructed as a criminal. To understand the criminalization of the *femme fatale*, it is important to briefly refer to the historical context, and to the social, economic and political factors that were triggered by the Great Depression. Chandler’s return to the United States in the 1920s, not only coincided with the great disruption in gender dynamics discussed earlier, but also with a period of social, economic and political turmoil, in which, as Athanasourelis suggests, “traditional respect for law and order [was] severely eroded” (2011:120). In Athanasourelis’ words, “[Chandler’s] fiction reflects the direct experience of Prohibition” (Athanasourelis 2011: 120), that is to say, the law that prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. Although The Eighteenth Amendment—ratified in 1919

and enforced by the Volstead Act in 1920—had promised a safe and moral society by eliminating alcohol, forbidding its sale, manufacture and importation—it failed dramatically. Instead, the Prohibition Era witnessed a rapid growth in illegal activities such as bootlegging, speakeasies, gambling and prostitution.

This was a time of pervasive corruption of the law, of widespread organized crime by mobsters and gangsters who controlled most of the politicians, who also profited from the illegal activities. It is important to note that, apart from criminals like Velma Valento/ Mrs. Grayle, *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) also documents other historical elements from the period that are also recurrent in the hard-boiled genre, for instance gang leaders such as Laird Brunette, who ruled the city of Los Angeles and its crooked police, and the phenomenon of alcohol consumption represented by Philip Marlowe and Jessie Florian’s alcohol dependency. Referring to his novels, Raymond Chandler claims, in his celebrated essay “The Simple Art of Murder” (1950) that crime fiction entered “the realistic style” (Chandler 1950: 235) by portraying the nature of the American society of the time, and bringing back credibility and truthfulness into the detection of crimes.

In this realistic fashion, the *femme fatale* is presented as a dangerous woman. She is the “beautiful and perhaps promiscuous woman with a gun, who by the end of the story, might shoot a man dead” (Jaber 2016: 1). According to Jaber, Velma Valento/Mrs. Grayle is not only beautiful and wealthy, she is also the deceitful and manipulative wife of billionaire banker Mr. Grayle, and uses her sexuality as a weapon to destroy any man who interferes in her independence: “she meant to kill anybody she had to kill. She had a lot to fight for” (Chandler 286).

Velma Valento/Mrs. Grayle not only forges an identity so she can marry “an

investment banker or something, enormously rich, worth about twenty million” (Chandler 93) but is also willing to go to any lengths to maintain that position. In fact, in order to flee conviction for killing Moose Malloy, this *femme fatale* changes her identity not once but twice. She starts as Velma Valento, then she changes to Mrs. Grayle, and finally changes her looks again and move to another city. The multiple disguises adopted by the *femme fatale* suggest that these identities only serve as a way to cover her authentic self, which will remain associated with criminality until the end. The novel does not provide the reader with any information concerning the *femme fatale*'s past life before she works at Florian's nightclub, but it is suggested that at some point in her life “she was tired of dodging” (Chandler 292). Criminality will define who she is, even after committing suicide, as she will be remembered for being “a killer” (Chandler 291) at the end of the story.

This depiction of the *femme fatale* as a criminal corresponds to the classic assumption that the *femme fatale* embodies innate evil and danger; “she is therefore a calculatedly luscious siren” (Cook 1945: 442) but she is also “a woman who goes beyond the arena of dangerous sexuality to enter the realm of criminality” (Jaber 2016: 2). In both scenes in which Velma Valento / Helen Grayle commits murder, she is always carrying a gun that she handles subtly and professionally, such as when she shoots Malloy and when she attempts to shoot Marlowe but fails (Chandler 282). Even when she is caught by the police, she never hesitates to use violence to defend herself: she “turned and slipped a gun out of her bag and shot him three times through the coat he was holding” (Chandler 290). This not only shows the *femme fatale*'s criminal potency but also how evil and wrong a female character can be.

However, while the *femme fatale* is criminalized because she does not submit

to the requirement of domesticity, she is never presented as “a victim of a male-oriented criminal justice system and a broader societal order” (Jaber 2016: 10). On the contrary, she is portrayed as one of these women who “demonstrate ambition and autonomy and assume culpability in the crimes they fiercely commit to fulfill material gains” (Jaber 2016: 10). As Jaber suggests, therefore, these women “trouble the misogynistic stereotyping of the *femme fatale* as an archetype of seduction and manipulation by demonstrating multiple forms of agency” (Jaber 2016: 10).

Moreover, by acting as a free agent, Velma Valento / Helen Grayle embodies the sexual disorder that prevailed at the time, a sexual disorder that is aggravated by the return of the soldiers from war: These men “returned from combat to find a social order that is no longer familiar to them and an apprehension that women are overstepping their traditional roles” (Trott 2016: 15). If, as Trott suggests, “Philip Marlowe is not a hard-boiled hero, but a genuine war veteran of a ‘lost’ generation struggling for recognition and unable to accept the disorder of postwar American society” (Trott 2016: 156) then, this might explain his derogatory judgment of liberated and autonomous women like Velma Valento / Helen Grayle. This might also explain why he claims that “all society dames talk like tramps nowadays” (Chandler 94) and why he complains that they are all “rich bitches” (Chandler 104). As a veteran of the First World War who is back “into a changed and expanded postwar Los Angeles” and who is “forced to accept the changing social dynamic” (Trott 2016: 156), the detective’s masculinity might feel threatened by the individualism and toughness of the *femme fatale*.

The convoluted assumption that detective Marlowe’s war trauma is projected into misogyny could also be examined in his relationship to the other female

characters represented in the novel, because, as Suwabe suggests, “a woman is always a threat in Chandler” and this “foregrounds Marlowe’s misogyny and loneliness” (Suwabe 2004: 66). In effect, although the genre always privileges the physical and emotional security of the detective, Philip Marlowe appears as a somehow disillusioned man, who fails to recognize the gendered societal shift in which potent women like Velma Valento / Helen Grayle transgress the established patriarchal order, by controlling the men who rule the city and committing criminal acts.

The anti-heroine Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle also inversely embodies the fantasy of wealth and of the American Dream through the duplicity and criminal activities she embarks on to satisfy her desires of class mobility in the years following the Great Depression. Velma Valento leaves behind her past as a showgirl in a bar to become Mrs. Grayle, the wife of a billionaire living a luxurious life. Her new, rich lifestyle allows her to commit crimes and cover them up by seducing detective Marlowe to obstruct his investigation. Feminist scholar Mary Anne Doane claims that *the femme fatale* “never really is what she seems to be. She harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable” (Doane 1991: 1), and this is what makes her truly dangerous. When Anne Riordan conducts a side investigation to help Marlowe in his search for a missing jade necklace, she discovers that it belongs to:

“A rich lady who lives in Bay City, in an estate on the canyon. Mrs. Lewin Lockridge Grayle. Her husband is an investment banker or something, enormously rich, worth about twenty million. He used to own a radio station in Beverly Hills, Station KFDK, and Mrs. Grayle used to work there. He married her five years ago. She’s ravishing blonde” (Chandler 93)

Marrying money is a rather common method to ascend the social ladder. Velma Valento/Helen Grayle creates a duplicitous identity to achieve financial stability and satisfy her materialistic desires. This, to a significant extent, implies a manipulation of

the patriarchal economic system, as Ronald R. Thomas notes:

“The constantly shifting of identities that these women assume in these texts reflect, perhaps, the political and economic mobility women were beginning to gain in the culture, developments that were interpreted here as criminal threats to masculine power. In the American romance that these novels portray, the woman’s access to power is transformed into a form of sexual and cultural perversion that must be corrected” (Thomas 1994: 433).

Unlike Marlowe, who remains a social outcast, Velma Valento / Helen Grayle stands out as a character who is deemed powerful thanks to her extreme eroticism, with which she uses and abuses the male characters. She does not belong to the established hegemonic order but manages to climb the ladder because of her looks and sex appeal. Velma Valento / Helen Grayle belongs to the category of “the important people” (Chandler 223) within society to Marlowe. Her double identity not only empowers her through socioeconomic mobility but, at the same time, reinforces her “reckless” (Chandler 53) *femme fatale*’s defiance of the traditional gender roles of the patriarchal society.

Moreover, Velma Valento / Helen Grayle’s shortcut to wealth and prosperity also reflects a gendered social imbalance with the working-class detective. Her “highnecked white fox evening cloak”, her “emerald pendant” (Chandler 277) or the “clasp of diamonds at the throat” (Chandler 123) shows how different they are. To a significant extent, her deviant behavior might reveal Chandler’s anxieties about what McElvaine called a “‘feminization’ of American society” (McElvaine: 340) as a consequence of the Great Depression, when the “self-centered, aggressive, competitive, ‘male’ ethic of the 1920s was discredited” (McElvaine: 340). Unlike the ineffectual Marlowe, Velma Valento/ Helen Grayle might be perceived as a “version of the essential capitalistic American Dream, as an attempt at climbing out of the gutter to the heights of social respectability by becoming the wife of an affluent

banker” (Thomas 1994: 436). Velma Valento does not work her way up to the upper-class, she is only a singer and dancer at a bar with no professional qualifications outside of this domain, but it is first through larceny and then treachery, dishonesty, and sex appeal that she manages to get an employment at the “radio station in Beverly Hills, Station KFDK” (Chandler 93). That is how she meets the owner Mr. Grayle, the “elderly” and “liverish” man (Chandler 93) who undoubtedly cannot resist the “ravishingly blonde” young Velma (Chandler 93). The *femme fatale* effortlessly lures Mr. Grayle into creating a whole new world for her, as he “sold his radio to break contact with anybody who might know her” (Chandler 287).

Velma Valento / Helen Grayle is presented as Philip Marlowe’s antagonist and seen through a misogynistic lens. Chandler portrays her femininity as aggressive and prone to criminality and this reveals men’s disorientation and anxiety towards post-war social changes, particularly towards the gender imbalances, and the need to promote the restoration of masculinity as the only source of authority and power.

b) The *femme fatale* as a disturbing presence in hardboiled crime fiction

“She hung up leaving me with a curious feeling of talking to somebody that
didn’t exist.”

—Philip Marlowe, *Farewell, My Lovely*
(Chandler 1940: 271)

A feature of *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), which is also recurrent in some of Raymond Chandler’s other novels, is the pivotal contrast between the absence and the presence of the *femme fatale* in the text. Indeed, the *femme fatale*’s absence from the plot might not only suggest a deliberate disregard for women’s struggle to acquire social and political rights in post-war America, but also what Maysaa Jaber describes as a “tension between discourses of free will against those of containment and punishment that hardboiled narratives invoke” (Jaber 2016: 4). I will call attention to the fact that Velma Valento/Helen Grayle’s character might be perceived as a shadow-protagonist, whose absence reveals her attempts both to claim a place within the text by committing crimes and by destabilizing the figure of the detective. In this section I will draw a parallel between the anti-heroine Helen Grayle and the renowned Helen of Troy, as they can both be regarded as *femme fatales* because of the impact their excessive beauty has on men and because they trigger harm and death among them. Finally, the *femme fatale*’s last name—Grayle—will be explored in its connection to the legend of the ‘Holy Grail’ to illustrate Helen Grayle’s central position in the novel.

Mrs. Grayle’s presence in the narrative is limited to a few instances: the first one occurs in Chapter 18, when Philip Marlowe is invited over to meet Mrs. Grayle in her home, and a rapid and brief flirtation occurs between them which is interrupted by the

arrival of Mr. Grayle. After that episode, Mrs. Grayle's character is only implicitly mentioned, but never visible until the ending of the novel, in Chapter 39, with the confrontation between the detective Marlowe, Mrs. Grayle and Moose Malloy. Finally, in the last chapter of the novel, Velma Valento / Helen Grayle reappears three months after her escape, she is caught by the police, shoots the cop, and then kills herself.

From the start, Philip Marlowe's quest is to find a missing Velma Valento. Although Valento disappears changing her identity to Mrs. Grayle, she remains at the core of the plot and becomes a sort of puzzling absence throughout the story. As Jaber suggests, in Chandler's novels, the *femmes fatales* are "barely visible, yet the narratives invite us to read their agency through an (in)visibility that allows them to not only commit murder but thereafter manipulate the detective and undermine his quest for the truth" (Jaber 2016: 66). However, the absence of the (anti)heroine, suggests a male-oriented narrative and the author's need to exert patriarchal control over women, whose "invisibility" might be perceived "as a site for neglect and lack of power" (Jaber 2016: 52). Given that the reader is not invited to the *femme fatale's* plotting of her crimes, Velma Valento / Helen Grayle becomes peripheral in the narrative and the detective-narrator has the control of the action, until the denouement in which she asserts herself as a *femme fatale*.

Yet, I would also like to suggest that the *femme fatale's* inaction—reinforces her power in a way, as she is able to control the narrative and cause damage while concealing herself, and disappearing from the story and from the text. The *femme fatale* is the thread connecting all the characters together—the common link in putting the pieces of the puzzle together—and her identity is only revealed once she is

confronted by the detective Marlowe at the end of the novel.

When Velma Valento assumes her new identity—Mrs. Grayle—her former self disappears but continues to commit crimes, while also adopting the role of high-class wife of a billionaire. This is because, according to Michelle Mercure, she is “an actress in every sense of the word. She lies, cheats, double-crosses, even murders her victims” (Mercure 2010: 114). After the bank robbery—to which she is an accomplice—Velma Valento / Helen Grayle is the one who turns Moose Malloy to the police in order to receive the reward, and from that moment onwards she builds a new life for herself as the socialite Mrs. Grayle. She exudes exaggerated feminine glamour as a disguise to her criminality; her beauty is such that it could have ultimately saved her life, as Marlowe suggests, “We’d never have convicted her, not with her looks and money” (Chandler 291).

Like many other women in post-war America, Velma Valento / Helen Grayle steps out of the domestic space, but the construction of her new identity is problematic because of her secret criminal lifestyle. Although this allows her to act more freely, she will eventually have to face the consequences. She cannot be placed on an equal footing with the detective; that would put in doubt the strength and authority of the male hero. The *femme fatale* should be defeated to reassert patriarchy’s power, and to show that women who strayed from those norms can barely exist.

When Mrs. Grayle ends the phone call with Marlowe right before her second appearance in the novel, her invisibility as a woman is brought once again to the fore: “She hung up leaving me with a curious feeling of talking to somebody that didn’t exist” (Chandler 271). This might imply, not only her social and narrative

insignificance as a woman, but the narrator's anticipation that the *femme fatale's* duplicitous identity will be revealed.

It is interesting to explore the game of gendered dominance and subordination the two characters play and also distinguish the different ways in which Marlowe perceives the *femme fatale* and his weakness towards her. On the one hand, the detective sees Helen Grayle as a beautiful, high-class woman whose charms he might not be able to resist; this happens when he kisses her and almost loses his self-control. On the other hand, when the *femme fatale* is exposed as an impostor and a criminal, her charms disappear and she "ceased to be beautiful" (Chandler 279). In fact, "She looked merely like a woman who would have been dangerous a hundred years ago, and twenty years ago daring, but who to-day was just a Grade B Hollywood" (Chandler 279). This suggests that the *femme fatale's* power as a sexually attractive woman depends on her power as a criminal.

The detective is thus confronted by another kind of threat and is unable to act upon it, as explained by Jaber: "the anxiety that Marlowe displays towards women is not only sexual but also relates to power" (Jaber 2016: 53). This is interestingly revealed when Marlowe is not the one to catch and arrest her, but instead he lets her go, showing his sense of powerlessness before a woman who seems to be in control: "All she did was take her hand out of her bag with a gun. All she did was point it at me and smile. All I did was nothing." (Chandler 281). The same happens after she shoots Malloy, "(Mrs. Grayle) rushed for the door and I didn't stop her" (Chandler 282).

The fact that Mrs. Grayle is absent from the text helps her to conceal her identity and cover her crimes and this makes her all the more powerful as she keeps

evading conviction and creating further disguises for herself. When she becomes “a handsome black-haired, black browed torcher who could sing as if she meant it” (Chandler 289), she just repeats her trick of changing the color of her hair, making a living of her singing, and moving to Baltimore where she can become an unfamiliar face.

Before she is captured at the end of the novel, Velma Valento / Helen Grayle commits a number of crimes, which she always manages to get away with. Although she is never directly mentioned, she manages to become central to the text and, as Jaber notes, “master the game of seduction and domination” (Jaber 2016: 4). Velma Valento / Helen Grayle is the reason why Moose Malloy goes to jail, as she bribes Jesse Florian to avoid being recognized. She also murders Lindsay Marriott, who she considers the “weak link in the chain” (Chandler 285), because he has motive to blackmail her and, after that, she kills Moose Malloy, shoots a police officer and ultimately kills herself.

The entire plot revolves around her, around finding the missing Velma Valento and the stolen jade necklace belonging to Mrs. Grayle. This “invisible” woman challenges the power of the detective by hampering his attempts to impose law and order and, most importantly, by questioning the established cultural gender norms. Her dialogue with Philip Marlowe during the confrontation scene evokes a certain feminine sexual superiority, when she compares men—more specifically Marlowe—to “just lousy animals” (Chandler 278). With the use of the plural, Mrs. Grayle places the detective Marlowe on the same foot as her previous adult male victims.

“I don’t like men to receive me in their pajamas” she said. “It’s a funny thing. I like you. I liked you a lot. But I could get over it. I have often got over such things” (Chandler 278).

The *femme fatale*'s popularity creates a climate of patriarchal threat, disorientation, and anxiety, which ultimately gives rise to a desire to reestablish male control and make her disappear. She is too dangerous as she transgresses the boundaries of the docile and domestic housewife. Elizabeth Bronfen asserts in *Femme Fatale: Negotiations of Tragic Desire* (2004) that the *femme fatale*:

has enjoyed such popularity because she is not only sexually uninhibited but also unabashedly independent and ruthlessly ambitious, using her seductive charms and her intelligence to liberate herself from the imprisonment of an unfulfilling marriage. [...] Duplicity thus emerges as her most seminal value. (Bronfen 2004: 106)

Mrs. Grayle's control over men can also be depicted in her reaction when her husband walks in on her and Marlowe kissing:

“Forget him” (Chandler 135) “It’s alright. He understands. What the hell can he expect?”

“Well, I tell you it’s all right. Isn’t that enough? He’s a sick man. What the hell—” (Chandler 136)

Mr. Grayle becomes another victim unable to defend himself from his predatory wife, from her infidelities and disloyalty, and he feels abandoned and betrayed: he “went quietly out of the room. There was an infinite sadness in his eyes” (Chandler 135). The duplicitous criminal *femme fatale* does not abide by any authority, not even by the authority that Mr. Grayle is supposed to embody as her spouse. The image of the sick, elderly man married to a much younger woman does not only convey the idea that this marriage is based on mutual convenience; it also reinforces Mr. Grayle's position as another male victim of the *femme fatale*'s abuse.

Helen Grayle's name also holds a symbolic function to the hardboiled crime fiction, and especially to the trope of the *femme fatale*. Helen's name might be

interpreted as a reference to Helen of Troy, known for causing the Trojan War in Greek mythology, but more importantly, for her being an icon of female beauty and sexuality. In fact, it is when Helen of Troy flees with Paris—this act is considered an abduction in some versions of the myth—that the war in Troy begins. Much like in the case of Helen Grayle, it is because of Helen of Troy’s absence that the Greek warriors decide to fight the Trojans in an attempt to bring her back. Gene H. Philips observes that “Helen Grayle, like Helen of Troy, is a bewitching beauty associated with violence and death” (Philips 2015: 27). Both Helen Grayle and Helen of Troy use their beauty and sexuality to engender chaos and possess a forceful appeal which entices men to fight for them in their absence.

Like Mrs. Grayle’s, Helen of Troy’s beauty is perceived as “pernicious”, and Bettany Hughes argues that she is part of “a long line of sexually powerful women whose purpose is credited as being to bring down men, whose sex life is viewed as betrayal in pursuit of furtherment, perpetuating the ancient notion that female lust pollutes male intellect” (Hughes 2018). Also, just like Helen of Troy, Helen Grayle causes chaos between men: Moose Malloy goes to jail because of her and kills the nightclub’s manager Mr. Montgomery, and ‘accidentally’ kills Jesse Florian—all this to find his beloved “little Velma”. The detective explains this: “He had killed two people himself, but he was in love with her. What a world.” (Chandler 286). Even after Helen Grayle’s real identity is discovered, her husband Mr. Grayle, remains loyal to her, because “He’s so crazy about her he doesn’t care whose lap she sat in” (Chandler 285).

The *femme fatale*’s last name—‘Grayle’—is also worthy of attention. Analyzing what is behind the character’s name choice might help understand Helen

Grayle's focal position in the novel and in the hardboiled genre as a whole. The last name "Grayle" might be an allusion to the quest for the Holy Grail, a word play which might refer to Marlowe's quest to find Velma Valento but also to his "search of a hidden truth" (Chandler 1950: 237), which turns out to be the discovery of the murderess Mrs. Grayle. Interestingly, there is still a remaining 'hidden truth' that is never to be uncovered, the *femme fatale*'s real name (Chandler 285). The fact that "Velma Valento" is not a real, but a stage name is something that Marlowe presumes from the start (Chandler 27).

Like many other characters who use aliases in Chandler's novels, Helen Grayle / Velma Valento proves, as Peter Wolfe suggests, that "multinymity denies the stability and wholeness of a unified, continuous self" (Wolfe 1985: 36). However, the *femme fatale* does not seem to negate herself, but rather conveys the implicit message that she is forced into a duplicitous and fractured identity because the patriarchal discourse of the traditional hardboiled detective novel does not accept her powerful and openly sexual ways.

Chapter 2:

a) Philip Marlowe, a hardboiled traumatized war veteran

“She made an impatient gesture, so I stopped fooling around and got my battle-scarred frown back on my face.”

– Philip Marlowe, *Farewell, My Lovely*
(Chandler 1940: 94)

In this part of the dissertation, I will first focus on the trope of the detective, Philip Marlowe, and to what extent he can be perceived as a war veteran, by exploring Raymond Chandler’s experience in the First World War and the effect it had on the representation of his protagonist. If, as Ross Macdonald claims “a novelist lives through his characters” (MacDonald 1949: 28), then it might be possible to suggest that there are some elements from Chandler’s combat life that helped create Philip Marlowe as “a character born from the traumatizing impact of war” (Trott 2016: 31). I will therefore discuss certain aspects in the novel that seem to reproduce or perpetuate the detective’s suffering resulting from his war experience: his sensory responses to his recurring blackouts, either due to his exposure to drugs or to fighting, and his alcohol dependence.

In effect, Raymond Chandler’s mythical detective, Philip Marlowe, might indeed bear a striking resemblance with his creator. But before turning to the possible evidence proving Marlowe’s connection to Chandler’s war trauma, I will begin by exploring the author’s scarring warfare experience during the First World War.

Although most biographers claim that Raymond Chandler was injured during the First World War and witnessed the deaths of the men in his platoon, Sarah Trott states that “there is no evidence to support the claim that such an event ever occurred” (Trott 2016: 112). In fact, Trott argues that Chandler suffers from what she calls “survivor guilt” (Trott 2016: 48) because he had to leave his comrades when he was transferred back to England to the newly established Royal Air Force. Yet, military historian and writer Chris Dickon did record by March 1918 that “Chandler was stationed in Arras, France with the British Columbia Regiment” and that, less than a year earlier than that. “Arras had been the scene of an apocalyptic showdown between the British and the Germans” (Welton 2020). This would confirm that Chandler was actually on the Western Front at that time and that his deployment there supposedly ended in June 1918.

In this dissertation, I settle on the theory, as claimed by biographers such as Thomas Hiney, that Chandler was wounded and that “the bombardment had so depleted his own outfit that it was disbanded and survivors, including Chandler, were transferred back to England” (Hiney 1997: 4). This version of events would explain the author’s post-war trauma or “shell-shock” and the possibility that he could project its symptoms onto his detective Philip Marlowe.

Born in Chicago to an alcoholic father Maurice Chandler, Raymond Chandler spent most of his life in England with his mother, Florence, who became a dominant figure in his life after his father had disappeared at a very young age. Chandler’s passion for literature and language grew as he got older. He began writing poetry and articles, and in a letter to Leroy-March written in 1957 he claimed that after his Civil Service, he faced a difficult financial situation: “I holed up in Bloomsbury, lived on

next to nothing, and wrote for a highbrow weekly review [*The Academy*] and also *The Westminster Gazette*... But at the best I made a bare living” (Day 2014: 48). His European heritage and class-consciousness were reflected in his writings which mixed both “the detective tradition with its forgotten descendants, like the epic, quest, and medieval knight errant traditions (Skenazy 2014: 2). Sarah Trott argues that Chandler’s poetry about chivalry “would later develop into an important facet of Philip Marlowe’s character” (Trott 2016: 34).

In 1912, he took a loan of £500 from his uncle and migrated to the United States, to do something else for a living. He settled in California for a few years and took his first job as a bookkeeper at the LA Creamery. According to his military record, with the outbreak of the First World War, Raymond Chandler returned to Europe and enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1917, where he served with the Gordon Highlanders in the trenches in France, and rose to the ranks: “only two months after arriving in the trenches [he got] promoted to non-commissioned rank and given command of a platoon of thirty men” (Hiney 1997: 5). It is argued by several biographers such as Frank MacShane and Tom Hiney that “Chandler’s service in France ended abruptly when an artillery barrage of eleven-inch German shells blew up everyone in his outfit” (qtd in MacShane 1976: 29) leaving Chandler either the only or among the survivors, who were later sent back to England to serve in the Royal Air Force. This episode marks the start of long-lasting trauma and distress, which Chandler later recalls in 1957 when he wrote: “Once you have led a platoon of men into direct machine gun-fire, nothing is ever the same again” (qtd in Trott: 130). Alcoholism and depression were major indicators of the psychological damage that he suffered. Hiney notes that “it was during his four months’ training in Waddington

[that he] discovered his taste for alcohol” (Hiney 1997).

His war experience was a pivotal moment for Raymond Chandler, and the psychological damage and emotional distress caused by the war followed through throughout his life, with severe alcoholism and worsened depression, to the point in which he attempted suicide several times. Chandler’s behavior and coping mechanisms were common among war veterans, who, in Stephen McVeigh and Nicola Cooper’s words, were commonly portrayed as “damaged loner(s)” and “as member(s) of a disturbed and socially advantaged underclass” (McVeigh and Cooper 2013: 5). This coincides, as discussed in the previous chapter with Philip Marlowe’s characterization as an outcast working-class character whose duty, like that of soldiers, excludes him from ordinary society.

Referring to how Chandler’s war experience affected his literary career, Tom Hawthorne claims that “when a German shell landed near [Chandler’s] trench, he suffered a concussion, a fate that would befall many of his characters, including his proxy, Marlowe” (Hawthorn 2018). This seems to suggest that Chandler never fully recovered from this shock, and constantly used it as a literary influence. The writer’s recurring nightmares and flashbacks, as well as his “unpredictable behavior, mood swings, alcoholism, oscillating swings between intimacy and loneliness” (Trott 2016: 31), are the most common symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and he seems to have projected them into his writings, probably for therapeutic reasons. So much so that, as said above, Philip Marlowe would become “a catharsis to alleviate Chandler’s stress,” and “someone he can pour all his thoughts, emotions and traumas into.” (Trott 2016: 213).

This is reflected in the detective’s sensory responses to his blackouts. After he

is beaten up in a fight, or when he is submitted to physical torture as a prisoner, Marlowe has these flashbacks which are reminiscent of battle scenes, as his mind seems to recall vivid and graphic images of corpses and blood: “I think I went to sleep just like that, with a bloody face on the table” (Chandler 157).

The symbiosis between the writer and detective has not only been acknowledged by literary scholars. Chandler himself has claimed that “there’s a lot of him in me” especially “his loneliness” (qtd. in McShane 1976: 253). In fact, loneliness becomes a significant aspect in the detective’s characterization. He constantly seeks isolation, hiding behind “a shield of cynical apathy” (Jaber 2016: 53) and dedicating his life to solo solving his cases.

It is also important to note that *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) is not the only novel by Chandler portraying a war traumatized detective. As Benjamin Welton suggests, “Chandler’s fiction is heavy with war veterans” (Welton 2020). His best-seller and his first lengthy text *The Big Sleep* (1939), includes the characters of General Sternwood, a military war veteran, and Rusty Reagan, “a former gunrunner and non-com in the Irish Republican army” (Welton 2020). Another text which portrays war veteran characters is Chandler’s successful novel *The Blue Dahlia* (1946) in which three aviators discharged from the United States Navy, John Morrisson, George Copeland and Buzz Wanchek return to California after the war. Buzz Wanchek is diagnosed with shell-shock, he is severely wounded from the war as a result of a shell fragment that struck his head, and has to wear a steel plate around it. This causes him headaches and memory loss (Phillips 2000: 188). The war veterans in Chandler’s novels seem to be physically and emotionally damaged, and return to a society that is unknown to them, a society dominated by corruption, immorality and

crimes which as I argue in my previous chapter, are embodied by the character of the *femme fatale*. Chandler's characters are, as Trott suggests, "tainted with a sense of discontentment and disillusionment that typifies the state of mind of many veterans" (Trott 2016: 161).

The Lady in the Lake (1943), a novel published during the Second World War and following the attack of Pearl Harbor in 1941, also features several references to the war, like, for instance, the presence of a war veteran, Bill Chess. Yet, it is in his subsequent novel, *The Long Goodbye* (1953), that Chandler portrays the "first fleshed-out character explicitly characterized as a war veteran" (Trott 2016: 269) Terry Lennox, who is also "an alcoholic rounder" and "who Marlowe sees as a genuine friend" (Welton 2020). This friendship between two war veteran characters reveals Marlowe's close connection and affinity to the men who resemble him and have lived through similar experiences. The veteran Terry Lennox also shows his scars as "the enduring legacy of an injury incurred during the Second World War" (Trott 2016: 269).

The symbolism behind a battle scar is worthy of attention because, apart from literally depicting a physical reminder of war trauma, it can also be perceived as a mark of honor—which in hardboiled crime fiction is one of the most significant traits of the hero. Jeffrey Sychterz claims that "the scar is the one proof—albeit an ambiguous one—of one's experience of battle and identity as a soldier" (Sychterz 2009:140). Interestingly, in *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) Philip Marlowe refers to his "battle-scarred frown" (Chandler 94) with an emphasis on the term "battle" which might indirectly allude to war.

Although in this novel the reader does not have access to many details about

Marlowe's physical appearance, Sarah Trott states that in *The Long Goodbye* (1953), Chandler gave Marlowe "a physical imperfection similar to his own" (Trott 2016: 208). Tom Hiney refers to that same physical imperfection, claiming that Chandler's nose "was broken during one house rugby game, a fracture which in his adulthood would give his face a tough look (Hiney 1997: 16). Philip Marlowe's bearing a visible scar on his face might suggest that Chandler's intention to acknowledge some physical evidence of his trauma as a reminder of that painful past in the trenches, and to make it part of his detective's characterization.

Although Philip Marlowe is presented as the "tough guy", this trait grows out of the fact that he constantly goes through hardship, physical and emotional torment and threats from gangsters and criminals. In the novel, Jules Amthor—the psychic—describes the detective as "a dirty little man in a dirty little world" (Chandler 157). Yet, the character is endowed with heroism and valiance to fight against the evilness of the LA underworld. According to Chandler, "if there were enough like [Marlowe], the world would be a very safe place to live in" (Chandler 1950: 237).

However, deep in his heart, Philip Marlowe fights a series of emotional and psychological battles which, as said before, are revealed in brutal and bleak imageries of death, blood and war. These flashbacks emerge when the detective is beaten unconscious in a fight or when he is exposed to drugs and hallucinates. The detective's unconscious state reveals what might be brief visions of profound pain, similar to those endured by soldiers. When he, for instance, says "I felt like an amputated leg" (Chandler 65) as he is waking up from an incident in connection to Lindsay Marriott's case, he might be unconsciously alluding to the war mutilated

soldiers returning from the battlefield, something he associates to the sort of pain he experiences.

Another significant reference to the imagery of a soldiers' corpses occurs when the detective wakes up and finds that Lindsay is dead:

He lay smeared on the ground, on his back, at the base of a bush, in that bag-of-clothes position that always means the same thing. His face was a face I had never seen before. His hair was dark with blood, the beautiful blond ledges were tangled with blood and some thick grayish ooze, like primeval slime. [...] I held the light on his face. He had been beaten to a pulp. One of his hands had flung out in a frozen gesture, the fingers curled. [...] His legs were crossed. There was a trickle as black as dirty oil at the corner of his mouth (Chandler 71)

Ana Carden-Coyne claims that "the violated body was pervasive after the war. [...] The images were not only potent memory triggers but became the dominant mode of remembering" (qtd. in Brault-Dreux 2015). According to Trott, these words, with their careful attention to detail, could have "come straight from a war poem" (Trott 2016: 205). Indeed, while slightly different in their expression of experience, the laments for the death of young warriors that form a large part of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* might be related to the laments for the loss of Marlowe's friend. There is a clear emphasis on the victim's face; Marlowe notices the blood flowing through Lindsay's fair hair and the substance coming out of his mouth. Yet, the detective shows a phlegmatic attitude towards these images, not out of carelessness, but out of experience. He is not open about his emotions even when Anne Riordan comes to let him know that Lindsay is dead (Chandler 69).

Tom Hiney explains that "Chandler could not help but absorb all the details he had witnessed in wartime France; from the way a man's eyes look just after death to the viscosity of blood that seeps from a fatal head wound. These observations he would use in his later fiction" (Hiney 1997: 45). Lindsay's dead body seems to be

transformed into that of a dead soldier at war. Although the detective witnesses many deaths in the novel, this scene is one of the few with an exhaustive description, as if Marlowe were recalling the very vivid and traumatic memories of “no man’s land” in France. The meticulous description of Lindsay’s corpse also conveys that, as Trott argues, Chandler’s war experience “may have been sufficiently traumatic to encode the disturbing events in the form of vivid sensations and images that were later projected into his stories” (Trott 2016: 226).

Marlowe’s state of delirium and unconsciousness due to his exposure to drugs at Bay City also reveals his traumatized soul and fragile masculinity, even if this is disguised behind a tough and cynical façade. In effect, he loses consciousness after getting beaten by an Indian boy, working for Jules Amthor, the psychic. As a result, Marlowe is dragged by two Bay City policemen to a private hospital run by Dr. Sonderborg, and there they inject him with heroin. This leads to a powerless state which Abbott describes as of “bodily helplessness and even impotence” due to the extreme degree of intoxication (Abbott 2003: 192). Drugs have an important role in Chandler’s life. He was prescribed morphine several times and the disorienting experience of drugs may have triggered these warlike images (Trott 2016: 238).

In *The Typology of Detective Fiction* (1966) Tzvetan Todorov calls Chandler’s novels “the story of the vulnerable detective” (qtd. in Landrum 1999: 26). This vulnerability is adequately reflected in Marlowe’s lapses into unconsciousness and in the endurance of painful events, connected with violence, death and war-like imagery, like that of “a dead man and a moonless sky” (Chandler 145) and the hearing of “voices and the screwy thoughts” (Chandler 170). Marlowe of course notices that he is hallucinating and that the smoke is “not quite so real” (Chandler 169), yet the scene

is certainly reminiscent of a battle scene.

Caroline Alexander states that “the majority of shellshock cases were perceived as emotional collapse in effect of the unprecedented and hardly imaginable horrors of trench warfare” (Alexander 2010). Suggesting that Marlowe’s distress and lack of confidence stems from a latent yet traumatized past, Chandler shows the reader in glimpses of the detective’s fears, such as when he says: “I talk too much when I’m scared too” (Chandler 68). When confronted with a strong fear of death, Marlowe similarly questions his confidence and sense of purpose: “I’m afraid of death and despair” and “Of dark water and drowned men’s faces and skulls with empty eyesockets. I’m afraid of dying, of being nothing...” (Chandler 251). There is, once again, a reference to the war, to dead soldiers and to their corpses, which Megan Abbott explains as Marlowe’s “lapses into unconsciousness, his feelings of fragmentation and dissociation” (Abbott 2002: 81).

The detective is physically, morally and mentally exhausted after being left unconscious in “an agony of nausea and staggering and dazedness and clinging to the edge of the blow and making animal sounds for help” (Chandler 169). He depicts what seems to be the sounds of pain and anguish soldiers make, reliving a vivid and realistic episode in the trenches. These hallucinations project images of Marlowe’s subconscious feelings, in which the imageries of the war are translated into the hardboiled setting of urban Lost Angeles, as if the detective were reliving his experiences in a different type of war. Phillips states that “Marlowe’s complexity allows for a greater degree of realism” (Phillips 2003: 16), one which seems to connect Marlowe’s traumatic images with Chandler actual trauma.

After the incident at Bay City, Marlowe has “nightmares and [wakes] out of

them sweating” (Chandler 190) due to the shock and agony he endures when he is beaten up and injected with drugs. These symptoms might also be associated with the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following a distressing and horrific event. If Marlowe’s trauma as a war veteran re-emerges from his subconscious when he is knocked out, then the detective might experience all the hysterical and anxiety states associated with shellshock once again.

After Marlowe finds Laird Brunette—who is the last piece of the puzzle before he exposes the *femme fatale*—and returns home, he also seems to experience some discomfort that resembles, in Trott’s words, “the wartime condition of trench foot” (Trott 2016: 224), an infection caused by long immersion in cold water or mud: “[He] took his shoes off and walked around in [his] socks feeling the floor with [his] toes. They would still get numb again once in a while” (Chandler 270). This feeling of numbness might be an indication of repressed trauma and pain, especially with this emphasis on “still” and “again” which suggests that this trauma is a perpetual condition, it is a recurrent feeling that resurfaces “once in a while”.

This foot syndrome was so severe among soldiers so as to cause amputation from infection, and even death if the infection got worse. Marlowe remembers the pain as he removes his shoes and can feel his numbed feet. This might have also been the image that comes to Marlowe’s mind when Mr. Grayle catches him kissing his wife Mrs. Grayle: “I felt as cold as Finnegan’s feet, the day they buried him” (Chandler 135). Although the reader has no information of who “Finnegan” is, this could allude to the death of a fellow comrade and the emphasis on the “feet” might resonate once again with the “trench foot” ailment.

Another significant factor suggesting that detective Marlowe suffers from

severe trauma is the prominent theme of alcohol. Indeed, much like his creator, Philip Marlowe's dependency on alcohol is very obvious in the story and prompts the reader to associate it with the trauma he might have suffered following the war. He might use alcohol as a means of escaping from his painful past. What Rita Elizabeth Rippetoe regards as the pervasiveness of alcohol in Marlowe's world (Rippetoe 2004: 61) is best illustrated by Marlowe's "office bottle" (Chandler 105) and the fact that the drinks made him "feel a lot better" (Chandler 91). This not only suggests that perhaps alcohol is a sort of remedy for Marlowe to hide his frustration and his pain, but it further emphasizes the correlation between Chandler and Marlowe.

Chandler had a long history with alcohol. His father was a heavy-drinker, and Chandler himself certainly began drinking while he was serving in the war; his dependency on alcohol got to the point in which it became a major factor in the loss of his job in the Dabney Oil Syndicate. In fact, Barry Day states that "it was the alcohol as much as the Depression that ended his business career" (Day 2014: 62). The character of Marlowe follows similar suit. He constantly struggles to find a job and to earn a living, especially after mentioning that he got fired after working for the D.A's office (Chandler 126). This depicts Marlowe's struggle to return to society after the war, and implies that he uses alcohol as a way to "obliterate [his] growing sense of helplessness and terror" (Herman 2001: 49).

After Marlowe is hit in the head during his compromised job with Marriott Lindsay, the detective recalls: "I ate my dirt last night and banged myself to sleep with a bottle" (Chandler 89). Trott argues that Marlowe uses alcohol as "a relaxant to numb his memory and senses" (Trott 2016: 239) not only about this particular incident, but about any pain which could be triggered by his past war trauma.

Marlowe seems to resort to “his office bottle” every time he is confronted with anxiety, which most of the time involves the figure of the *femme fatale*. For instance, Marlowe “brought the office bottle again” (Chandler 93) when Anne Riordan conducts a side investigation about Mrs. Gayle. In his failed attempt to focus on his professional business, the detective tries not to steer away from the job and repeats “let’s focus” and “let’s get what’s left of our minds—or mine—on the problem” (Chandler 130). Yet, Marlowe commits an error of judgment and violates his code by falling under the *femme fatale*’s spell: “I tried to keep [my] eyes where they belonged” (Chandler 128) but Mrs. Grayle plies him with more drinks, “she poured a fat slug of mellow-looking Scotch into [my] glass” (Chandler 128). It is the kind of liquor “that you can drink forever, and all you do is get reckless” (Chandler 129).

Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle knowingly tries to get Marlowe drunk enough to make him lose control and perhaps to get him to reveal any information he might know about her. She asks the detective: “Lin told you my name?” (Chandler 129) and if “Mr. Marriot—tell you how the holdup happened?” (Chandler 127). Thus, his alcohol dependence is one of the detective’s biggest weakness. He craves drinking to soothe his pain, but he also struggles to resist it, as he feels he has no control over it. Yet, the *femme fatale* uses his weakness against him to manipulate and double-cross him.

b) Patriarchal restoration through textual eradication?

“Aw well, Hell,” I said. “A guy never gets to do anything in this country anymore.
Always women.”

– Philip Marlowe, *Farewell, My Lovely*
(Chandler 1940: 196)

I have argued that Raymond Chandler’s detective Philip Marlowe is portrayed as the author’s alter-ego, whose wartime trauma has been transposed to the hardboiled landscape of Los Angeles. As a veteran, Marlowe’s mind relives his traumatic war experience but also expresses his disillusionment with the changes brought to American society upon his return from war and with the arrival of the Second World War. There are various textual indications that hint at the possibility of his reliving his war trauma. In this chapter, I will discuss certain scenes that seem to reproduce or perpetuate the detective’s suffering resulting from his war experience: his sensory responses to his recurring blackouts, either due to his exposure to drugs or to fighting and his alcohol dependence.

However, although there is clear evidence of the detective’s physical and emotional vulnerability and of the multiple obstacles he finds in his quest for the mysterious *femme fatale*, he emerges victorious in the end. Philip Marlowe is able to restore the patriarchal order by ultimately eradicating the *femme fatale* from the text. As has been shown in this dissertation, the *femme fatale* never dominates the narrative, but she destabilizes the authority of the detective by undermining his power

and derailing his attempts to solve the mysteries and restore order. Yet, hardboiled crime fiction is, as Irwin contends, a “men’s genre” (Irwin 2008: 273), and this novel is no exception. Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle only serves the purpose of reinforcing Marlowe’s agency, who ultimately unravels the mystery behind her true identity as an impostor and a criminal and brings a sense of justice and resolution to the patriarchal society. He is a man that abides by his codes of honor and morality.

The novel’s resolution is the *femme fatale*’s downfall. Kristen Garrison claims that Marlowe “survives as a hero, however, not because he unequivocally wins and the bad guys just clearly lose, but because he is uncompromising in his commitment to truth” (Garrison 2010: 106). This implies that Marlowe decides to resume his role as hero when he discovers the *femme fatale*’s true identity, by resisting his lustful temptations for her and overcoming the threat that she poses to his male agency. Yet, Marlowe’s characterization as a war veteran plays a crucial role in the way he perceives the *femme fatale* is represented. The detective is constructed so as to overcome the dangers and chaos he encounters throughout the novel in order to assert his masculine codes of honor in the end.

In an era in which war veterans are presented as disenchanting victims who are deeply disturbed by social changes, this man is able to accomplish his mission to “uphold the eternal values or lay down his life and honor in the attempt” (Day 2014: 121), just like a soldier would on the war front. This final triumph restores a sense of purpose, identity and control that seems to have been lost in France. Since Marlowe’s function within the hardboiled genre is to protect the patriarchal values, assert his masculine authority in order to save damsels in distress, to protect women who are depicted as ‘victims’ in need of a savior (Jaber 2016: 24), his fight turns out to be

mainly against the *femme fatale*, because she represents a dangerous threat that the detective must defeat in order to recover his agency as a hero.

However, Philip Marlowe embodies a type of masculinity that needs, as Margaret Abbott suggests, “constant maintenance and reconstitution” (Abbott 2002). In fact, in Abbott’s words, “these men repeatedly find themselves dissembling, fainting, unconscious, overpowered and out of control while their ideals of masculinity continue to require of them self-discipline, toughness and the quintessential hardness that gives the genre its name” (Abbott 2002: 8). The unmistakable male perspective in the novel requires Marlowe to preserve his orthodoxy of values, even if he must step outside orthodoxy to succeed.

To solve the case and restore the dominant and prevailing societal norms, Marlowe seeks a sense of comradeship like “those he relied upon so heavily during wartime” (Trott 2016: 156) in pursuit of justice and truth. This is rather curious, since Marlowe is depicted as a solitary and alienated man whose behavior is seen as somehow unpleasant by the other characters. He claims “I enjoyed being me” (Chandler 34), and has this “uninhibited” (Chandler 50) sense of humor and often characterized as morose and cynical. His antisocial behavior is a recurring problem. So much so that, during their meeting, with Lindsay Marriott, he declares that “I’m afraid I don’t like your manner” (Chandler 51), to which Marlowe responds “I’ve had complaints about it” (Chandler 51). Marlowe also avoids any close association with women, especially with the *femme fatale*, because as Megan Abbott suggests “Marlowe’s notion of masculinity utterly depends on hermeticism, on remaining free from contagion” (Abbott 2003).

Yet, despite his lonely nature, Marlowe seeks the help of Red Norgaard, a

former policeman in Bay City, who helps him on his lead about Laird Brunette, and gets him on Brunette's casino ship. Red Norgaard's presence in the story—although brief—is significant because of the closeness and affinity between the two characters, towards this as Marlowe realizes that Red is also an honest man, that he also wants to reform society from its ills.

When Red Norgaard claims “I was on the cops once. They broke me” (Chandler 247), Marlowe realizes that Red is also against the organized crimes and corruption of men like Laird Brunette, who can get anything done without leaving a trace. When the detective realizes that Red is actually a victim of this corrupted system, that he got thrown out of his job in the police force to become a “water taxi” man (Chandler 242) because people like Brunette took over the city of Los Angeles, the two men start forging a bond based on their common moral code and will to fight against it.

Both Marlowe and Red share this common ground, and Marlowe's behavior towards Red is different from his attitude towards the rest of the characters—especially with women. Some scholars have suggested that this relationship might imply some homoerotic closeness between two men. According to some critics such as Gene Phillips, Marlowe's derogatory remarks about homosexuals reveal his desire to “mask his own repressed homosexuality” (Phillips 2000: 28), and Frederic Jameson describes the relationship as the sort of “homoerotic male bonding sentimentalism” Marlowe might experience whenever he encounters a man of honor like himself” (qtd in Phillips 2000: 28).

Marlowe's thorough description of Red expresses a kind of fascination towards the former policeman, but also draws a major distinction to his behavior

towards women like Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle:

“He smiled a slow tired smile. His voice was soft, dreamy, so delicate for a big man that it was startling. It made me think of another soft-voiced big man I had strangely liked. [...] I looked at him again. 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 soft as silk. Lightly reddened, but it would never tan. It was too delicate. [...] his hair was that of shade of red that glints with gold. But except for the eyes he had a plain farmer face, with no stagy kind of handsomeness.” (Chandler 245-247)

Marlowe’s bond with Red might also resonate with the bond soldiers in the trenches shared, which Trott describes as “brotherhood produced under combat conditions” (Trott 2016: 247). This is emphasized by Red’s use of the term repeatedly “pardner” (Chandler 245) to refer to Marlowe. This explains why he trusts him as he would trust a friend: “I told him a great deal more than I intended to. It must have been his eyes.” (Chandler 251). Although there is no indication to whether Red Norgaard is a war veteran, the bond between the two men, which is born out of respect and a common sense of honor, resembles the bonds shared by soldiers at the front.

The importance Marlowe gives to chivalric masculine values and patriarchal morals is threatened by Velma Valento / Helen Grayle. After Red helps Marlowe to get on Laird Brunette’s ship, this was the detective solves his last piece of puzzle and reveals the *femme fatale’s* identity. For Marlowe to able to protect and restore the patriarchal social values and norms the *femme fatale* needs to be removed entirely from the male-dominated text. Therefore, she is made to commit suicide at the end of the novel, as a way to cleanse the vices and transgressions associated with her character. As Stevie Simkin argues that “the death of the transgressive woman is seen as an act of purgation” (Simkin 2014: 89).

Velma Valento / Helen Grayle stays in a little hideout for over three months in which “she lived in peril, like the sailors” (Chandler 284) and becomes a target for the

authorities, as she is forced to recreate another identity and constantly look over her shoulder. The *femme fatale* has to relive the same story once again, and goes back to the life she once knew, that of a beautiful woman singing in a bar. Nobody seems to recognize her voice, except Jessie Florian, which puzzles her: “I thought I had a voice that would be remembered. A friend recognized me once, just hearing it on the radio” (Chandler 290). Right before the police arrests her, Velma Valento / Helen Grayle “shot herself clean through the heart—twice” (Chandler 291). Her death can be regarded as the necessary completion of the story. Heather Worthington claims that the punishment of transgressive women in crime fiction “function(s) to enforce properly feminine behaviour” and to “valourise the male protagonist and endorse properly masculine behaviour” (Worthington 2011:45).

The *femme fatale*'s suppression from the text by death is seen as necessary to assert Marlowe's masculine power in the plot, to vindicate his professional value as a detective, and to prove his ability to maintain order and protect the American society. At the end of the story, the only anxiety Marlowe seems to feel is “not finding a man named Brunette” (Chandler 251), a necessary endeavor to be able to accomplish his heroic quest.

The novel thus implicitly promotes masculine authority as the only power to outlive female agency, which is depicted as chaotic, and ineffective, and forces women into compliance and subordination. As John Cawelti suggests: “the only possible resolution for the insecurity caused by the conflict between the need for women as sexual and social fulfilment and the threat of feminine independence and domination is the simultaneous possession and destruction of the female” (Cawelti 2014: 159). Despite the *femme fatale*'s efforts to threaten the detective by challenging

his mission and his physical and emotional safety, the male-dominated narrative of punishment and eradication prevails.

Conclusions

In this dissertation I have addressed some aspects which I find crucial in order to provide a clear and thorough analysis of the trope of the *femme fatale* in Raymond Chandler's novel *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) in the context of the First World War, and to explore the figure of the hardboiled detective Philip Marlowe as a traumatized hero. I have argued that the novel relies on the trope of the *femme fatale* to explore the author's trauma as a war veteran and to characterize the disorientation of post-war American society.

My analysis of Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle as a *femme fatale* has shown that her extreme sexuality and radiating beauty have been used as her main weapons to gain more power and secure her independence, and more importantly to cover her crimes. A primary consideration throughout my thesis is that the *femme fatale's* criminalization is a rather misogynistic interpretation of women transgressing the legal and social norms of the patriarchal system. I have suggested that Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle's ability to cheat, betray and deceive jeopardizes not only the detective's authority, and his duty to bring her to justice, but poses a challenge to Chandler's male-oriented narrative.

This paper has also explored the historical context by examining women's active role in the workforce during the Great War, and their eagerness to fight for further economic, social and sexual liberation and to oppose their return to the domestic space and to their duties as mothers and loyal wives in the aftermath of war. In this respect, I have argued that the *femme fatale* emerges as the representation of these women's strive for independence and equality. My proposition is that the *femme fatale's* sexual power engenders anxiety in a male-dominated society, which reinforces the gender disorder in the aftermath of the Great War.

By placing Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle in clear contrast with the detective Philip Marlowe, who is depicted as an outcast, alienated man, suffering from a deep-rooted frustration, I have highlighted not only Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle's potency as a sexual woman and a criminal, but also her destabilizing power on the detective's masculinity and on his professional value as a detective.

My chapter on the detective Philip Marlowe directly explores the intermingling relation between the protagonist and his creator Raymond Chandler, to

examine the possibility that Marlowe suffers from war trauma. Sarah Trott's theorizations have been crucial to my argument and thus through a thorough analysis of the similarities between Chandler's experience and Marlowe's disillusionment in the novels, signs of trauma have been detected, for instance, in the detective's alcohol abuse and in the use of warlike imagery to describe his blackouts.

Philip Marlowe's traumatic past resurges and is further triggered by the *femme fatale*, who reinforces the detective's need to restore order in the society and assert his masculine authority, eliminating the threat and danger brought by Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle. Particular attention has been given to Velma Valento / Mrs. Grayle's death at the end of the story, which has been approached as the logical closure tending to restore patriarchal rule.

Raymond Chandler creates his hero-detective and his antagonist, the *femme fatale*, to express the tensions and disenchantment within post-war American society, a society undergoing tremendous cultural and societal changes which become fundamental structural elements in Chandler's novel.

Further Research

I hope that this thesis will help contribute to the study of the *femme fatale* as a major literary theme in the aftermath of the Great War and of Chandler's hard-boiled fiction as an anticipation of the rise of the Film Noir during the Second World War. In case future research is conducted, I would like to examine the impact of the trope of the *femme fatale* from the perspective of gender studies in the hard-boiled detective fiction written during and after the Second World War, more specifically in Philip Kerr's novels. Philip Kerr's *The Lady from Zagreb* (2015) could be an interesting novel to analyzing using the same parameters as in this dissertation but within the context of the Nazis and Germany setting, with detective Bernie Gunther hopelessly fighting against the gorgeous actress.

Beyond this, there are several questions that I would like to further develop concerning Chandler's novel, which, due to restrictions of time, space and immediate relevance, I have been unable to tackle in this dissertation. For instance, there are several lines of research that would enhance this study, such as considering to what extent the *femme fatale*'s suicide at the end of the story can be regarded as an act of emancipation from the oppressions of the patriarchal society.

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