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## **“Remembrance, alas, is a Tricky Business” (Lynn 78): Memory and Biography in the Established Account of Raymond Chandler’s World War One Experience**

Sarah Trott, Ph.D.

Biographies are difficult to write. Their validity and accuracy depend on numerous variables and factors that are often outside the biographer’s control or knowledge; from the honesty and personality of the subject, to the quality of research of previous biographers. On occasion the biographer’s own personal prejudices, or those of others, may influence the biographer’s conclusions. Likewise, each biographer may place greater or lesser emphasis upon a given fact, event, written document or correspondence. This, of course, can inevitably lead to false impressions and factual errors that become misleading and erroneous. Such is the case with the biographies of renowned American crime fiction writer Raymond Chandler, whose biographers have never given adequate consideration or respect to the crucial event that not only shaped Chandler as a person but which potentially directed his writing: his traumatic war experiences during the Great War. Chandler’s experiences during the World War One have remained inadequately examined<sup>1</sup>, with the majority of the accepted version assembled from short fragments of the writer’s own correspondence. Chandler’s principle biographer, Frank MacShane, presented a vague (and occasionally inaccurate) account of the writer’s war experience and subsequent biographers, such as Tom Hiney and Tom Williams, have each drawn upon MacShane’s original work to shape their own accounts instead of investigating and challenging previous versions. While their interpretations of Chandler’s wartime experiences do touch upon selected truths, overall they are vague, brushing over details, locations, and experiences, to the extent that they become incredibly ambiguous and in some instances, incorrect. Consequentially, establishing an accurate biographical account of Chandler’s war experience fundamentally alters our approach to his novels and places his work at the intersection of memory and trauma in a genre not generally recognized for its significance in the American canon.

By drawing upon Chandler’s correspondence – the closest thing we have to his ‘memoirs’ - this article highlights the notable and misleading disparity between memory and biographical accuracy. Significant inconsistencies exist between the commonly accepted version of Chandler’s war experience, first presented by Frank MacShane in his 1976 biography *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, and the military files and documents pertaining to Chandler’s military experience with the Canadian Army during World War One. While many of the broader details, such as Chandler’s enlistment, his shipment to England, and deployment to France are accurate, MacShane’s account of Chandler’s front line activity

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Sarah Trott’s recent examination of Chandler’s war experience and work in *War Noir: Raymond Chandler and the Hard-Boiled Detective as Veteran in American Fiction* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2016).

is non-existent (stating instead that he remained in reserve training with the Canadian Army), and his account of Chandler's abrupt return to England in June 1918 is fundamentally incorrect.

MacShane acknowledges that Chandler's war experiences "were too overwhelming to digest" and he "rarely spoke of his service in France, saying that it was a nightmare he preferred to forget" (qtd. MacShane, 1976: 29). Yet despite acknowledging Chandler's reluctance to discuss his war experience, MacShane nevertheless attempted to construct an account of Chandler's time in France - replicated by subsequent biographers - from just two small sections of Chandler's correspondence. This has created and perpetuated a version of events that is deeply flawed and, in certain areas, inaccurate. However, using Chandler's military file and documentary evidence from the Seventh Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, it is entirely possible to construct an accurate account of his experiences in France. By doing so, a new version of Chandler (and his protagonist, the detective Philip Marlowe) emerges, placing him within the sphere of the era's literary greats including writers of the Lost Generation whose work linked their traumatic war experience to their disillusioned view of American society. By simply establishing an accurate version of his war experience and acknowledging the traumatic impact upon his work, Chandler - whose most celebrated efforts include the novels *The Big Sleep* (1939), *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), and *The Long Goodbye* (1953), Academy Award nominations for the screenplays to Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944) and George Marshall's *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), and his adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train* (1951) - can therefore be reconfigured as a significant writer in the American canon.

Perhaps the most famous case of biographical misrepresentation is Carlos Baker's biography, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (1967). Baker's version of Hemingway's war experience, according to Kenneth Lynn, "[spoke] for myth-lovers everywhere," and that "the myth of what happened at Fossalta" (86) has been perpetuated in most contemporary biographical accounts. Lynn asserted that Baker's 1972 text had placed too much credence upon personal correspondence without historical evidence. The subsequent version of Hemingway's war experience, he suggested, had not been objectively analysed and was consequently assumed to be fact. Herein lies the problem; by failing to investigate Hemingway's claims of heroism and conducting additional research, Baker presented an embellished and incorrect account that, over time, became accepted reality. Knowing that Hemingway considered it an "awfully satisfying feeling to be wounded" (Lynn 92), Baker preserved the image of Hemingway as a masculine hero. As Lynn concedes, objectively interpreting information and differentiating between fact and fiction, especially when it comes to a writers' correspondence, is an undeniably "tricky business" (78).

Similarly, while Chandler's correspondence is incredibly vague, there is enough information to recognize that his wartime experiences are worthy of further investigation. The aim, therefore, is to challenge MacShane's original version of Chandler's war experience (and the problematic willingness of subsequent biographers to unquestioningly rely upon the original biography) to create a more precise account of the writer's war experience. This 'new' version highlights the problematic nature of memory

and biography. It also explains how Chandler's detective Philip Marlowe can be viewed through the lens of war and trauma. By modifying how we view Marlowe, the traditional theory of Chandler's private investigator as a chivalric knight can be expanded into the age of contemporary warfare: instead of a knight seeking justice and aiming to right the wrongs of a corrupt society, Chandler's detective can be understood as a veteran of the Great War simply by re-examining and emphasising the importance of the writer's war experience. By setting aside the traditional knightly theory and the original flawed biography, it is then possible to interpret the writer and protagonist through the prism of war and traumatic memory.

In various biographies of the author, Chandler's war experience has, thus far, lacked any in-depth examination and consideration in studies of his work,<sup>2</sup> which has permitted a theory of Marlowe as a 'knight' and chivalric hero to develop. The logic for this concept is not completely unreasonable considering that researchers have generally focussed their biographical research on Chandler's British upbringing and classical education as the reasons for Marlowe's honest motivations and principles. The rank of 'knight' does, after all, tend to be associated with the ideals of chivalry, a code of conduct for the perfect courtly Christian warrior. Knights were expected to fight bravely and to display respect, professionalism and courtesy. They honoured a social code which encompassed the values of gentility, nobility, and treating others reasonably, with the ideal knight demonstrating unwavering loyalty, armed prowess, and social fellowship.

While Marlowe does possess these qualities – in particular his investigative code of conduct and deep loyalty to clients – we can move away from Marlowe's supposed "knight-errantry" (Speir, 67) by refocusing biographical attention not on Chandler's classical education, but instead on a significant traumatic moment in Chandler's life: his front-line experience of the Great War. In this sense, Marlowe's supposed commitment to knight errantry can be relocated to a much more contemporary, inter-war environment. By disputing prior biographical versions and presenting a revised account of his wartime experience, we can apply a traumatic framework to Chandler's novels that allows us to view Philip Marlowe not as a "Hero Out of Time" (Speir, 105), but as an inter-war Los Angeles veteran who is more concerned with survival and self preservation than traditional knightly notions of chivalry and gentility.

Unlike many American writers of the time, the 28 year-old Chandler chose not to enlist in the army of his birth-nation but with the Canadian army. Rationalising this decision, he noted that having been raised in England "it was... natural for me to prefer a British uniform" (Bodleian). Unlike MacShane's version, Chandler *was* involved in front-line action with the Canadians in the Allied trenches in France. Unfortunately biographical accounts pay little attention to the necessary detail. Instead, the accepted version has furthered an account of the author's experiences between March-June 1918 that is vague, and seldom accurate.

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<sup>2</sup> The exception to this is Sarah Trott's recent *War Noir* (2016)

Had a correct biographical account been provided by MacShane in 1976, studies of Chandler's life and work *could have* significantly deviated from the traditional knightly theories. As an American academic writing in the years following the Vietnam War, and who had taught at McGill University, Vassar College, University of California at Berkeley, and Columbia University, MacShane should have recognized the problematic nature of relying on correspondence, and also the significance of war experience and its impact upon writers and their works. Even by the time of his death in November 1999, his work had been criticised for its "lack of 'critical acuity'" (Guardian), but this did not prevent Tom Hiney from reproducing MacShane's account of Chandler's war experience for his own biography *Raymond Chandler: A Biography* in 1997, and Tom Williams from following suit in his more recent attempt, *A Mysterious Something in the Light: Raymond Chandler, A Life* (2012). MacShane's version of Chandler's war has therefore been replicated without challenge or further investigation, which has permitted a certain version of events to fasten itself unquestioningly into the public consciousness.

The primary source of contention with MacShane and Hiney's biographical accounts is the repeated use of, and disproportionate reliance upon, Chandler's correspondence as the basis for constructing an account of his war experience. A fervent letter-writer, Chandler's correspondence extends to thousands of pages. But while it is an extremely valuable source of information about his life, it divulges very little that could be used to construct a sufficient account of Chandler's war experience. One conceivable reason for this is explained by Dorothy Gardiner in an outline of the biographical material to be used in a proposed collection of Chandler's correspondence, and later published with Katherine Sorley Walker as *Raymond Chandler Speaking* (1977). She says: "All his school friends were killed in the war; this may be one reason he says so little of his own part in it" (UCLA). Emphasizing MacShane's acknowledgement of Chandler's reluctance to discuss his experiences, Therese Benedek notes that a soldier's unwillingness to verbalize their experiences is a protection against the "humiliating memory" (55) of killing during wartime. She says: "With the killing he has to remember the fear he experienced and the threatening depth of his own emotions, so different from what he had been taught all his life" (ibid). In combat, the individual's anxieties about the brutality of war do not necessarily rise to the surface because war is a 'kill or be killed' environment where the survival of the individual is paramount. However, following demobilization, "when the soldier is released from his group and stands along among civilians, the memories of the inhuman hatred and humiliating fear which he felt and the recollection of what he did, or felt capable of doing, separate him, like a wall, from civilians" (56).

Chandler only allusions to his experiences exist in his later correspondence, and then only indirectly. In the years before his death in 1959, and on the verge of a nervous breakdown, Chandler's correspondence during this period is ambiguous and occasionally unreliable. Yet despite this, Chandler himself supposed that "all writers are crazy," but he also suggested that "if they are any good, I believe they have a terrible honesty" (UCLA). This interesting label, of possessing a "terrible honesty," identifies the works of many post-World War One writers and, according to Ann Douglass, 'survival' became the most prized historic truth (33). So committed was the drive for candour that Malcolm

Cowley noted in *A Second Flowering* (1974) that “They all recognized the value of being truthful, even if it hurt their families or their friends and most of all if it hurt themselves” (27). Yet while it is difficult to gain an accurate understanding of Chandler’s wartime experience, many of his key references about the war, and his feelings regarding his experiences in France, do appear in sections of his correspondence.

Richard Holmes notes that the “inventive power” of biography, and its ability to “reconstruct and to intrude,” has always posed significant problematic questions in the field of biographical studies. In particular, he argues that,

Biographers base their work on sources that are inherently unreliable. Memory itself is fallible, memoirs are inevitably biased; letters are always slanted towards their recipients; even private diaries and intimate journals have to be recognized as literary forms of self-preservation rather than ‘ultimate’ truth of private fact or feeling. The biographer has always had to construct or orchestrate a factual pattern out of materials that already have a fictional or reinvented element (qtd in Batchelor, 17).

Letters written to an Australian student, Deirdre Gartrell, in the three years preceding his death encapsulate the bulk of what has traditionally been cited as evidence of Chandler’s war experience. Herein lies the underlying difficulty in using his communication with one particular correspondent to create an ‘accurate’ account of Chandler’s war experience: it simply cannot be done. The bulk of what MacShane assembled derives from sections of just two letters, both written to Gartrell in 1957. These small passages have since become the basis of our entire understanding for Chandler’s combat experience. In the first of these Chandler notes:

Courage is a strange thing: one can never be sure of it. As a platoon commander very many years ago, I never seemed to be afraid, and yet I have been afraid of the most insignificant risks. If you had to go over the top somehow all you seemed to think of was trying to keep the men spaced, in order to reduce casualties. It was always very difficult, especially if you had replacements or men who had been wounded. It’s only human to want to bunch for companionship in the face of heavy fire. Nowadays war is very different. In some ways it’s much worse, but the casualties don’t compare with those in trench warfare (Bodleian).

And in the second letter, he remarks: “...I have lived my whole life on the edge of nothing. Once you have led a platoon of men into direct machine-gun fire, nothing is ever the same again” (Bodleian).

While we may glean a moderate amount of information from these passages, their reliability is ambiguous. The letters are particularly problematic because in the correspondence Chandler demonstrably perceives both Gartrell’s vulnerability and her admiration for him, which unquestionably

seem to appeal to his sense of honour. And, encouraged by his correspondence with a much younger woman, his correspondence eventually became playful, and occasionally flirtatious. As such, because of their wistful and sentimental nature, the content of these letters needs to be considered with caution. What MacShane, and later Hiney, do not divulge in their respective biographies is that Gartrell herself had doubts about the truthfulness of Chandler's correspondence. In a 1960 letter to Helga Green, Gartrell wrote:

I never knew how much to believe... [H]is words sometimes ran away with him [...] Ray wrote to me more as a father to daughter, than writer to writer... He used to worry about my developmental problems,... give me advice, sometimes by cable, or even telephone, when I appeared on the brink of some madcap scheme, and sigh with relief when I recovered from my foolishness. [...But] I [only] wanted an anonymous outlet for my writer[']s thoughts... First flattered and then incredulous, then irritated [...] at losing my iceberg confidante, [...] gradually we changed; Ray realised I had shown him only one aspect of myself, and so he felt a little cheated and disillusioned. So [...we] drifted apart, letters fizzled out. (Bodleian)

While MacShane uses and cites Chandler's letters to Gartrell as evidence of Chandler's war experience, he does not once cite Gartrell or provide an adequate context for the correspondence. Instead, MacShane alludes to the content of Chandler's letters to her as fact. Unsurprisingly, as Richard Holmes notes, by doing so it held up a "mirror up to each succeeding generation of biographers" (qtd in Batchelor, 19), encouraging each new biography to accept the preceding text as reality. This 'mirroring' is highlighted most prominently in Tom Williams's 2012 biography. While portraying certain events relatively accurately, Williams still nevertheless relies upon MacShane's original 1976 version of Chandler's war experience, informing readers that:

...the 1976 biography repeats another of Ray's tales:

In June [1918] Chandler's service in France ended abruptly when an artillery barrage of eleven-inch German shells blew everyone up in his outfit, leaving him the sole survivor. The explosion concussed him, and he was taken behind the lines and shortly afterwards was returned to England.

This is a typical Ray story, one that casts him as a hero against all odds, and it is the sort of thing he liked to tell his fans (67).

This passage raises two fundamental dilemmas. Firstly, Williams does not tell us *why* he assumes that this was a "typical" Chandler tale, and therefore assumes knowledge of the author's disposition that is impossible to realize or authenticate. Secondly, he does not explain *why* he believes that Chandler would

have wished to divulge these stories to his fans.<sup>3</sup> By applying Holmes's 'mirror' theory, Williams does not attempt to challenge MacShane's previous account of Chandler's war experience, nor does he attempt to advance the accepted (though, inaccurate) version of the writer's familiarity with the front-line.

It therefore becomes increasingly unclear where the theory that Chandler was 'blown up' stems from. Instead of such a violent end to his war experience, Chandler's military file shows that on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1918: "2025271 Pte. Chandler, R.T., No. 1 Coy. – Proceeded to England 11-6-18 to report to R.A.F H.Q., England" (Library and Archives Canada, *Battalion Orders, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1918*) for retraining with the Royal Air Force. More revealingly, his military file validates that Chandler was, at that time, not physically injured. Bill Rawling at the Directorate of History and Heritage in Ottawa corroborates that any transfer for hospital treatment would be apparent on Chandler's military file and would have prevented any transfer. He notes: "If he was wounded... a transfer [to England] would not have been considered until he was able to pass a medical examination...[and] given that antibiotics had not yet been developed, and that even sulfa drugs were decades in the future, convalescence from wounds could take months" (Correspondence with author, 17 April 2008). Without documentary evidence to support a claim that Chandler was wounded, it would appear that Chandler was transferred back to England in accordance with the battalion's orders where he was re-assigned to the Royal Air Force.

Despite MacShane's misleading account, by remaining mindful of the context of Chandler's letters to Gartrell it becomes possible to clarify some of the details pertaining to his war experience. Chandler notes, for example, that he had been a platoon commander and was aware of the human sacrifice on the front line and sending troops 'over the top'. Despite MacShane's insistence that Chandler had only been in reserve, Peter Leese notes that even low-level combat, such as that experienced by soldiers supposedly in reserve, could be just as traumatic as the all-out trench warfare witnessed in other areas of the Western Front (26). While MacShane and Hiney are correct in assuming that Chandler was in a reserve position for the *majority* of his time in France, they do not take into account the entirety of his war experience. Chandler's discharge papers prove that he had been involved with fighting on the front line: answering the question "Did you at any time serve at the front in an actual theatre of war", Chandler responded by writing "7<sup>th</sup> Bn. 8-3-18 – 11-6-18" (LAC, *Military File*). This demonstrates that Chandler *was* within close proximity to the front line. The War Diaries for Chandler's Seventh Canadian Battalion confirm this, showing that scouting and raiding parties were very active during the time Chandler was present (LAC, *War Diaries March-June 1918*). By confirming Chandler's presence on the front line, we also display awareness, most likely drawn from personal experience, of human reactions during traumatising situations by noting the hopeless sensation of trying to keep soldiers

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<sup>3</sup> Certainly, having examined the archives at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and at the University of California, Los Angeles, I have not been able to uncover any information that suggests Chandler divulged war stories to his fans/correspondents. The only surviving descriptions of Chandler's time in France during the First World War appear to be his letters to Deirdre Gartrell.



spaced to avoid unnecessary casualties. And considering Chandler's words that having "led a platoon of men into direct machine-gun fire, nothing is ever the same again", he appears to demonstrate a familiarity with not only the front line and leading men into battle, but also the traumatising impact of his experiences.

In *The Art of Literary Biography*, John Batchelor notes that "while biographers strive for the degree of accuracy that their art will allow" their work ultimately concerns "invention" (2). Biography is "a balancing act" (Batchelor 4), that when disregarded can, for example, in the case of Carlos Baker's account of Ernest Hemingway's war experience, lose all sense of objective equilibrium and eventually become fallacy. Likewise, the event described by Tom Williams above – of Chandler being the sole survivor of an artillery barrage that killed his platoon – is evidence that MacShane's account has been perpetuated through repetition despite evidence establishing that no such event occurred.

Setting aside the hypothetical and unproven version of events created by MacShane, and subsequently 'mirrored' by later biographers, the Seventh Battalion War Diaries, available from the Canadian Archive in Ottawa Canada, offer an irrefutable source to establish Chandler's movements during the months he spent in Northern France, and demonstrate that Chandler's war experience was vastly different from the biographical account imagined by MacShane. John Worthen notes that biographers "remain profoundly ignorant of many things in the lives of their subjects..." (qtd in Batchelor 227), and what is evident from the War Diaries is that Chandler's true war experience was far more traumatic than simply training in reserve, as MacShane and Hiney have depicted.

Drawing on documents at the Canadian Archives it is possible to provide a context through which we can appreciate Chandler's wartime experiences. The Seventh Battalion of the First Canadian Infantry Division, the battalion to which Chandler was assigned, had previously successfully defended Vimy Ridge in April 1917 and had also emerged triumphant after the battle of Passchendaele in November 1917. Without citing a source, MacShane notes that "In the London press the Canadians were criticised for not being directly involved in the German spring offensive" (1976: 28), and yet by the time of Chandler's arrival in France in March 1918 the Canadian divisions were experiencing an extraordinary amount of heavy fighting and artillery bombardments in the Arras region (LAC, *War Diaries 1917-1918*). None of the various biographies emphasise the proximity of Canadian activity to the German front line during the last few months of the war and also the momentous contribution of Canadian troops to the Allied war effort in general. MacShane and subsequent biographers severely underestimated the high degree of danger that the Canadian divisions – and therefore Chandler – would have been exposed to while located in such precarious positions.

The Seventh Battalion War Diaries prove that it *is* possible to plot the battalion's movements, including the First Division's (and therefore Chandler's) three rotations into the front line, to create a reliable account of the writer's experiences. In doing so we are able to ascertain the traumatic ordeal Chandler would have experienced on the Western front, and begin to understand the impact it would have had upon his later writing.

Although the four Canadian Corps Divisions were officially in reserve, they also represented the front line of Allied defence in an extremely dangerous area for much of the time Chandler was in France. By the time Chandler was assigned to the Seventh Battalion of the First Canadian Division in France on 16 March 1918, vast numbers of German troops and artillery pieces, freed from the Eastern Front by the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Russia, signed on 3 March 1917, had re-located to the Arras area. In early 1918 the Canadian divisions had worked arduously to repair and strengthen their damaged defences in preparation for a German counter-offensive that, according to intelligence, would occur at the end of March. When the offensive began on 21 March, the Canadian Corps had three divisions on the front line: “from the north to south the 1<sup>st</sup> Division opposite Hill 70, the 4<sup>th</sup> in front of Lens, and the 3rd Division in the Avion-Mericourt sector. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was in the Corps training area at Auchel, eight miles west of Bethune” (Nicholson, 378). Almost immediately the First and Second Divisions were taken out of the line and placed in reserve leaving only two divisions holding a 17,000-yard front.

Nicholson notes that on 26<sup>th</sup> March the two Canadian reserve divisions were transferred to the British Third Army located to the south of Arras. Chandler’s First Division was stationed “astride the Arras-Cambrai road” while the Second Division was located “on its immediate right in the Neuville-Vitasse sector” (379). Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Currie, commander of the Canadian Corps noted that by the end of March, “We are holding a 10 mile front with two divisions” (qtd in Nicholson, 382), and by mid-April 1918 the Canadian Corps alone, in an extraordinary feat, was holding a defensive front of more than 16 miles.

The German redeployment from the Eastern Front pushed the Canadian Corps to “breaking point” putting it “under the continued threat of an overwhelming attack.” Defence of the front-line was, “altogether too much,” said Currie, “but owing to a lack of men in the British Army it cannot be helped” (cited in Nicholson, 1962: 382). With the Battle of the Lys raging to their north, and ever-decreasing ranks to draw upon, the Canadians outside Arras prepared for the German offensive and found themselves in an increasingly unsafe position. As Nicholson harrowingly describes, “the Canadians found themselves in a dangerously deepening salient. To deceive the enemy regarding the frugality of their dispositions they ‘adopted a very aggressive attitude.’” During April and May, the months where Chandler witnessed front line action, “The artillery maintained a vigorous programme of harassing fire, supplemented by gas shells, while infantry carried out numerous raids and patrols” (Nicholson, 1962: 382). The War Diaries highlight the Canadians’ awareness of their weak position, noting on 9 April that, “retaliation is not strong enough. Our artillery now firing 3 rounds per minute per gun” (LAC, *War Diary April 1918*).

Despite this pretence of superior strength, cracks began to appear in Canadian defences. During this time, according to the War Diaries, Chandler’s Seventh Battalion had been on the front line of fighting on three separate occasions: 5-11 April, 16- 21 April and 2 - 4 May, before being sent into reserve and replaced by five divisions of British infantry on 7 May 1918 (LAC, *War Diary April 1918*). This respite, conceived to take the Canadians out of the potential range of the German heavy artillery,

was, however, short-lived. The Canadian divisions were ordered to reorganise in preparation for relocation further south, in Amienens, for a final assault against the Germans that would eventually overwhelm German positions and end the war. By the time this assault took place, however, Chandler had been transferred back to England for a commission with the RAF on 11 June 1918 (LAC, *Battalion Orders 12 June 1918*).

As a result of what many writers had witnessed during the conflict, “The literary reaction to war revealed a pervasive fixation on the crisis of what humanity had made and what it could make, with the failed promises of human creation at all its sites” (Dawes 75). Reading ‘modernist texts’ alongside ‘war writing’ therefore causes the boundaries between the two to dissolve during this period. Trudi Tate states that: “modernism after 1914 begins to look like a peculiar but significant form of war writing” (12). In Chandler’s writing, the same is true. Jay Winter suggests that the Great War was commemorated in numerous ways, but most importantly, that “soldier-writers brought the ‘aesthetics of direct experience’ to bear on imagining the war...” (2). In this sense, as Tate furthers, literature “actively engages with other acts of commemoration, memory, and analysis of the war” (12) because they highlight the social “anxiety” and “narrative” (14, 15) prevalent in inter-war society. Chandler’s works not only highlights inter-war angst, it also applies itself to keeping alive the image of the Great War veteran.

In the immediate aftermath of war, Vincent Trott notes that “the reading public... was less likely to want to revisit the experience” (13). Samuel Hynes suggests that temporal distance was needed in order for literature to adequately address the war’s horror, and that fears of a future conflict, particularly the potential for a second war in Europe, may have encouraged writers to tackle their prior war experiences as late as the 1930s (Trott, 13). This reluctance would certainly explain Chandler’s late arrival to his craft, publishing his short stories in the early 1930s before moving on to publishing novels by 1939. It would also explain his desire to distance himself from traditional ‘war writing’; after all, his only known attempt to write about the war, an unfinished 352-word piece titled ‘Trench Raid’, written in late 1918, appears to have been as close to the subject matter as Chandler cared to go. Instead, he committed himself to the hard-boiled style, a style shaped by war,<sup>4</sup> in which he could create a fictional character that suffered the psychological injuries of war without explicitly mentioning the conflict in his work.

Joanna Bourke argues that war stories in the traditional sense can present a version of events whereby the ‘memory of war’ becomes identifiable only to those that have experienced combat, thereby making certain sections of literary memory “exclusive and exclusionary...” (477). Additionally, the difficulty of interpreting what constitutes a ‘war story’ is compounded by one particular emotion with relation to war experience: guilt (Bourke 477). In an environment that requires survival to ensure victory, survivor guilt is the psychological consequence of vanquishing an enemy: “Naturally the winning side

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<sup>4</sup> The term “hard-boiled” has two important meanings: firstly, was initially applied to drill sergeants who were tasked with toughening up men for combat, and secondly it was used to describe the cynical behavior of those that had been molded by their war experiences.

suffers more severely from this unconscious reaction... The mere fact that the defeated have endured irreparable military disaster represents to the unconscious a measure of punishment that goes far to liquidate unconscious guilt” (Glover 251-2). Being rewarded for achieving victory through killing (or committing “bloody murder” [Bourke 478] as some veterans referred to it), contradicted the valiant ideals that had encouraged many to join the war effort. This would certainly correspond to Chandler’s own belief that there was a much more profound and psychological reason for the public’s fascination with the murder/crime novel during that period. In a 1948 letter to his friend and correspondent James Sandoe, a reviewer of crime fiction and librarian at the University of Colorado, Chandler suggested that,

The psychological foundation for the immense popularity with all sorts of people of the novel about murder or crime or mystery hasn’t been scratched. A few superficial and a few frivolous attempts, but nothing careful and cool and leisurely. There is a lot more to this subject than most people realize, even those who are interested in it. The subject has usually been treated lightly because it seems to have been taken for granted, quite wrongly, that because murder novels are easy reading they are also light reading. [...] a very large proportion of the surviving literature of the world has been concerned with violent death in some form. And if you have to have significance... it is just possible that the *tensions* in a novel of murder are the simplest and yet most complete pattern of the tensions in which we live in *this generation*. (UCLA, emphasis added)

In *this generation*, as Chandler identifies it, the “shared perceptions” and “collective understanding” of what Vincent Trott labels an “irreversible rupture with the past” (10, 10, 3) are represented clearly in Chandler’s works. The novels, for example, include a number of characters who are characterised as veterans. From their tone and intimations, General Sternwood, Eddie Mars, Bill Chess, Terry Lennox, Roger Wade (and a number of secondary characters) can each be construed as veterans, which allude to Chandler’s acknowledgement of history’s traumatic impact upon a generation of American men. We see countless symptoms of what can be construed as the traumatic effect of war, including Marlowe’s borderline alcoholism, his disillusionment and cynicism, his physical symptoms (including two allusions to trench foot), his hyperarousal in certain circumstances, and his battle between loneliness and craving company, all suggest a troubled persona.<sup>5</sup> The detective even uses time to display his nostalgia for pre-war Los Angeles, suggesting that the city has been irreparably changed by the experience.

Anthony Storr has observed that understanding a biographical subject’s *psychiatric* experiences, particularly harrowing or traumatic events, make it possible to understand the individual “better than... without such knowledge” (qtd in Batchelor, 84). He continues that for writers with depression, which is

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<sup>5</sup> These are discussed in detail in Sarah Trott’s *War Noir*.

a key symptom of a post-traumatic disorder, “writing is particularly likely to appeal to sufferers who are gifted enough to make it an important part of life” (84). Psychiatry, and the study of trauma in particular, has “provided biographical insights into literary figures which are invaluable and often underappreciated” (qtd in Batchelor, 73). Therefore in order to truly understand Chandler’s writing, using a traumatic framework is central to reconfiguring the character of his detective. Putting aside prior theories of Chandler as a knightly figure, we can recognise Chandler’s ‘inner consistency’ by mapping an accurate version of his war and understanding the implications for studies of his work.

Joanna Bourke notes, “Memory of violence refused to be silenced, but erupted in painful memories, nightmares, or compulsive, repetitive behaviours. But its most common manifestation was melancholia, a mourning process... creating an undefined, freefloating anxiety” (479). This melancholy extends to Marlowe’s consistent and cynical impression that despite his best efforts all of his endeavours for justice have been in vain. The majority of Chandler’s novels end with Marlowe pessimistically considering the purpose of his case, and usually concluding that his role is devoid of meaning in such a meaningless existence. It is unlikely a coincidence, therefore, that Chandler began re-drafting his stories, which would become his famous Marlowe novels, at the very time when tensions were escalating again in Europe. Marlowe’s disillusionment at the outcome of his cases can be interpreted as a proxy for the broader retrospective (and introspective) hostility towards Woodrow Wilson’s grandiose declaration that American intervention in the Great War would ensure that the world “be made safe for democracy” (Cooper 265). When notions of democracy and equality are fundamentally absent in American society, replaced instead by corruption and dishonesty, Marlowe’s response is to question not only the society around him but also his own existence. James Dawes notes that, “The nightmare of World War I, as expressed in Anglo-American modernism, was not that the world was spiraling into indiscriminate butchery and thus to a final end, but rather that the world was spiraling into indiscriminate butchery and that humanity could live with it...” (76). Marlowe’s famed quote at the end of *The Big Sleep* (1939) – itself a euphemism for death - demonstrates this fundamental existential crisis:

What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep, you were not bothered by things like that. Oil and water were the same as wind and air to you. You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell. Me, I was part of that nastiness now” (220).

By the time Chandler published *The Big Sleep*, in February 1939, Europe was on a collision course towards a second war. Tensions created by Nazi ideologies and the dissatisfaction of its post-First World War conditions as laid out in the Versailles Treaty had created a tinder box in Europe by the mid 1930s. Germany flouted the Treaty by beginning re-armament and reintroducing conscription by 1935, remilitarizing the Rhineland in 1936, annexing Austria in March 1938, and the Sudetenland in

October 1938. These aggressive moves were met with only appeasement policies from other nations, but by summer 1939 war was on the horizon. This period of tension likely triggered traumatizing memories of Chandler's own experiences less than twenty years previously. Robert Jay Lifton notes that a "death imprint" (171) can "*call forth prior imagery* either of actual death or of death equivalents" (171 emphasis added). It is possible that the European build-up to World War Two, and the prospect of American intervention by 1941, called forth the imagery of Chandler's prior wartime experiences. As he explained in August 1939 to Blanch Knopf, the wife of his publisher Alfred Knopf: "The effort to keep my mind off the war has reduced me to the mental age of seven" (MacShane, *Letters* 9). It is unclear which 'war' Chandler is referring to here as war would not be declared in Europe until September 1939. It is quite possible that Chandler is actually referring to his own experiences during the Great War.

During the inter-war period writers developed a "pervasive fixation on the crisis of what humanity had made and what it could make, with the failed promises of human creation at all its sites" (Dawes 75). Chandler's fixation on 'war' pervades his correspondence in the late 1930s-1950s, and while much of this must be read with discretion, numerous psychological fragments can be garnered. While the Gartrell letters should be read with caution and their context fully considered, the correspondence in which Chandler discusses his emotional state is surprisingly candid, and what we see is, as Dawes notes, "melancholia". Chandler demonstrates "mourning that lacks an object present to consciousness, mourning that, in other words, remains outside the process of familiar and coherent articulation. [...It] remains 'an open wound'" (Dawes 44-45). Chandler consistently refers to himself as having a "tired mind" (MacShane, *Letters* 124) or being a "tired character" (Bodleian), and on one occasion asks his correspondent "I suppose you wonder whether I am still alive. So do I, at times" (MacShane, *Letters* 55). Questioning his own sanity, Chandler noted in 1949 that "If I wrote a non-fiction book, it would probably turn out to be the autobiography of a split personality", because "Deep inside of us we must realize what fragile bonds hold us to sanity..." (MacShane, *Letters* 175, 184). By 1949, Chandler admitted to James Sandoe that he felt "dull and depressed" (UCLA), and to Hamish Hamilton, his English publisher, he confessed, "I am very uneasy in mind. I seem to have lost ambition and have no ideas any more. I don't really want to do anything, or rather one part of me does and the other doesn't" (Bodleian). In other correspondence during the same year he also refers to his 1941 short story 'No Crime in the Mountains' (which would later be 'cannibalized' for the 1943 novel *The Lady in the Lake*), which "has a Nazi element in it which is of no importance to the plot...", but for the fact that Chandler "didn't like the Germans very much..." (MacShane, *Letters* 187, 250).

While Chandler's correspondence has proven problematic in creating an accurate account of his war experiences, between the late 1930s and his death in 1959 it reveals a multitude of psychological symptoms and frailties that cannot be masked. This raises an important question in relation to Chandler's work, not simply in terms of his extraordinary mastery of the hard-boiled style, but also how a particular writer and genre can offer a vehicle for navigating the trauma of war. As Margaret R. Higonnet

questions: “To what extent should the canon of war writings be revised in light of the evidence that experimental techniques offered a repertoire upon which soldiers and other witnesses of the war could draw to compose their memories?” (93). She indicates that “the story of trauma is suspended between life and death” (101), and involves “the continuous confrontation with death... and an unresolvable conflict between fear and duty...” (95). This mirrors Cathy Caruth’s suggestion that trauma literally exists “between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (Caruth 7). But at the core of the argument, as Zsolt Komaromy notes: “Memory is integral to the process of mediation in which the mind is capable of reshaping the significance of what it has observed... [This] grants memory functions closely resembling those of the creative imagination. Its deepening the understanding of the external world is due to its power to create meaning...” (29) Accordingly, memory is a significant agent of imagination.

Trudi Tate offers us a partial response to Higonnet’s question of how readers should revise their understanding of trauma and the canon by broadly suggesting that “who has seen what,” how is one “positioned in relation to war’s trauma,” and “who has the right to speak” (19) are important factors to consider when interpreting war trauma and literature. By taking into account Chandler’s experience with the Canadian army on the front line of Allied defence during World War One, we can position the writer at the centre of Tate’s observations: Chandler is a veteran of the Great War expressing what Higonnet refers to as “symptomatic writing” (101). Instead of considering trauma writing as the emergence of a narrative that generates ‘knowing’, whereby the “imperative relationship between the teller and the imagined audience becomes salient” (101), we should regard ‘symptomatic writing’ as a means that allows for the writer’s witnessed experiences and traumatic memories to emerge obliquely, and yet still generate artistry. History and memory, after all, “are not detached narrative structures; at no time in the past was memory ‘spontaneous’ or ‘organic’; at no time has history been able to repudiate its debt to memory and its function in moulding that memory” (Bourke 485). And instead of creating a self-aware text that ‘knows’ the trauma it is representing, Higonnet proposes that we “consider the relationship between an obstructed, specific consciousness of violence in its ungraspable details and a more philosophic knowledge about the causes and consequences of violence.” In essence, because history and memory co-exist and inform each other, she maintains that creativity – no matter its genre or location in the literary canon – “is essential to the healing and constructive role of narration at a time when trauma and memory shape the modern subject” (104).

It is here that Chandler’s novels reveal their significance. By being aware of a biographically accurate account of his war experience we can see the ‘symptomatic writing’ at the heart of his work. Chandler’s novels are not self-aware, exclusionary ‘war writings’ in the traditional sense, they are creative representations of the violence of war. As Dawes notes: “Sentimental remembrance and tired equanimity provide a semblance of closure to the still open wound of past trauma” (49). The creation of plots, stories, and narratives, no matter the style or genre, is “a means of restoring understanding and thereby alleviating the damage of confusion” (Dawes 45). Chandler’s writing and sympathetic detective

are ideal vehicles for transferring the impact of the World War(s): not only does Chandler allow us to penetrate the divided regions of the city (isolated by both race and class), his sympathy for his fellow Americans allows us, as Dawes notes, “to enter into the experience of another” and “to step into [a] position... of recognition” (46). Like Ernest Hemingway’s renowned ‘iceberg style’, a mode of writing that relied upon a reader’s level of ‘understanding’ as opposed to the writer’s over-use of words, Chandler utilised a modernist style of writing to infer meaning upon traumatic memory.

Herein lies the importance of biography: striking an objective and investigative balance “can alter our fundamental assumptions about what lives have been significant, and why”, mainly with regards to the “complicated and subtle question of empathy” (qtd in Batchelor, 19). These are important considerations because as readers we do not know “what elements of suppressed biography is involved,” and how “this affect[s] the possibilities of an ‘objectively’ truthful account” (qtd in Batchelor, 19). Anthony Storr contents that, “ideas derived from psychoanalysis have provided a new an inescapable dimension to biography” (77), without which biographers cannot generate a rounded version of events. As we have seen, because biographies tend to hold a “mirror” up to each future generation of biographers, the mistake can be to place too much emphasis upon personal correspondence without offering historical evidence or context. By offering a more objective and composed version of Chandler’s war experience it is possible to offer a fresh lens through which to view the writer and his work. This perspective, which seeks to locate Chandler’s hard-boiled fiction at the intersection of war, memory, literature, and society, unlocks potentially new avenues of reading his work at the juncture point between the individual acts of violence, for which crime fiction is known, and the collective violence of war.

Chandler’s quote that “Once you have led a platoon of men into direct machine-gun fire, nothing is ever the same again” (Bodleian) therefore offers a useful vantage point from which to interpret and critically re-evaluate Chandler’s crime fiction in the context of war. While the broader impact of war upon culture and society is recognized and understood, it is the impact upon the individual which is central to understanding how characters and their environments are created and how traumatic memory is (re)interpreted. Chandler’s war experience highlights a far more brutal experience than previously acknowledged, which will have a major bearing on the directions we can now take studies of the author and his work. Accordingly, we are presented with a more complex but profoundly realistic explanation for Chandler’s motivations in creating his troubled detective, Philip Marlowe.



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