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RESEARCH TITLE

Women and Madness in American Hardboiled Crime Fiction

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Abstract

This paper investigates the connections between women and madness and aims to examine the medical discourses on madness in relation to the representations of women in hardboiled crime fiction. It highlights the link between psychiatric and medical discourses and societal and cultural constructs that govern the representations of femininity and mental illness. By exploring the complex interplay between women and madness and surveying the theories and views on this subject, this paper underlines the broader social anxieties regarding gender roles and mental health. As such, this paper examines the depiction of the "madwoman" in one of the key texts in hardboiled crime fiction, Raymand Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), and explores how the maintenance of the myths surrounding the link between women and madness are interlocked with concepts such as crime, law, control, and social and legal conventions— a connection which ultimately portrays the anxieties about women's roles and agency in American society at that time.

Key Words: Women and Madness, Hardboiled Crime Fiction, Psychiatric Discourses, Gender Roles, Mental Health Anxiety.

عنوان البحث

النساء والجنون في روايات الجريمة الصعبة الأمريكية

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية العلاقة بين النساء والجنون وتهدف إلى فحص الخطابات الطبية حول الجنون فيما يتعلق بتمثيلات النساء في روايات الجريمة الصعبة. تبرز الورقة الرابط بين الخطابات النفسية والطبية والبُنى الاجتماعية والثقافية التي تحكم تمثيلات الأنوثة والمرض العقلي. من خلال استكشاف التداخل المعقد بين النساء والجنون ومسح النظريات والآراء حول هذا الموضوع، تؤكد الورقة على القلق الاجتماعي الأوسع المتعلق بالأدوار الجندرية والصحة النفسية. وبالتالي، تفحص هذه الورقة تمثيل "المرأة المجنونة" في أحد النصوص الرئيسية في روايات الجريمة الصعبة، رواية "النوم الكبير" لريموند تشاندلر (1939)، وتستكشف كيف أن الحفاظ على الأساطير المحيطة بالرابط بين النساء والجنون متشابك مع مفاهيم مثل الجريمة، والقانون، والسيطرة، والتقاليد الاجتماعية والقانونية— وهو ارتباط يعكس في النهاية القلق بشأن أدوار النساء ووكالتهن في المجتمع الأمريكي في ذلك الوقت.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النساء والجنون، روايات الجريمة الصعبة، الخطابات النفسية، الأدوار الجندرية، قلق الصحة النفسية.

Introduction

The emergence of psychiatry as a discipline concerned with mental illness and mental disorders can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, but during that time the knowledge possessed by medical practitioners was predominantly unscientific and dependent on prevailing social ideations about mental state and behavior. Madness during the nineteenth century was attached to women and the explanations offered were related to women's hormones and biology (Ussher 1991). Moreover, there existed societal expectations for women to merely fulfill the roles of spouses and mothers; they were perceived as innately gentle, emotional, and dependent, thereby women were considered as more vulnerable to psychological afflictions. Women at that time were also mostly reliant on males in their families— hence lacked autonomy in decision-making, which contributed to the prevalence of women being labelled as "mad" when they transgressed their strictly defined social roles.

Any conduct that deviated from established social norms and expectations was deemed to be indicative of "madness." As such, the mid nineteenth century witnessed an increase in state-run asylums, largely predicated on the belief among physicians that altering a patient's environment could facilitate their recovery. Asylums evolved into institutions for the segregation of undesirable members from society, wherein female patients in particular were usually mandated to engage in tasks deemed suitable for their gender, such as sewing and cooking. According to Hunter, Shannon, and Sambrook (1986, p.1033), the dimensions of asylums perpetually expanded during the mid-nineteenth century, accommodating an increasing number of patients, until certain asylums transitioned into custodial facilities rather than therapeutic environments, thereby demonstrating that patients were deprived of the requisite medical care. The patriarchal nature of psychiatric hospitals has been documented by many philosophers and writers, for instance, M. Foucault (1967) and T. Szasz (1961). Journalists and novelists have also explored and reimagined the presence of mental hospitals in America and the brutality of patients' experiences there, which have been compared to experiences in prisons (Chesler, 1994, p.269).

During the twentieth century, there has been an evolvement in the concept of madness. New theories and approaches that attempted to explain madness and explored the myriad aspects of its manifestations and symptoms began to flourish especially at the first half of the twentieth century. Rogers and Pilgrim (2021) present a comprehensive review of the theories and frameworks that examine and analyze mental illness including the disciplines that study mental illness such as psychiatry, psychology, sociology, law and psychoanalysis. As far as women are concerned, a feminist approach started to develop towards the latter half of the twentieth century with the goal of researching the dynamics and connections between gender and mental illness, and highlighting the "lived experiences of mentally ill women" and "women's voices rather than purely the views of the researcher; women are talked to, rather than talked about" (Wright and Owen 2001, p.144). According to Wright and Owen (2001), there are two camps when it comes to feminist approaches to the understanding of madness: the historical camp exemplified by Showalter (1987), who uses the historical context of the birth of asylums to argue that madness is used to control women. The second camp is represented by Chesler (1972) who uses the work of anti-psychiatrists such as Szasz (1961) to show that "female role itself is devalued and how women who are both close to, and depart from, female roles are liable to attract diagnoses of mental illness" (Wright and Owen, 2001, p. 144), a stance which will be the focus of the theoretical farmwork on women and madness in this paper.

Madness refers to "the meaning attached to the perception of illness or dysfunction in the psychological domain—the stigma attached—and to avoid entering into the discourse of

experts wherein these different classificatory systems are deemed to exist as entities in themselves, as illnesses which cause the disturbance in function in the first place" (Ussher1991, p. 11). Thus, the definition of madness is not a straightforward concept that simply consists of a set of symptoms and treatments. Instead, there are many complex social, cultural and psychological factors along with the clinical ones to be considered when approaching a deeper understanding of madness. Taking this into account, critics of psychiatry— for example, the well-known philosopher Michel Foucault, Erving Goffman and medical doctor Ronald David Laing—label psychiatry as a "form of social control, one of the state institutions of oppression" (Polianskii, 2023, p. 1). Psychiatry according to this view, tends to "isolate and 'stigmatise' the carriers of non-normative rationality, individuals with different states of mind and patterns of behaviour" (Polianskii, 2023, p. 1). As such, madness or what is known today as mental illness, is an "evaluative concept" (Busfield 1994, p. 260). That is, madness categorizes the mental state of individuals, and labels their behavior, ideas "as abnormal, defective or disordered - that is, as undesirable" (Busfield 1994, p. 260). However, there is also a "social regulation involved in definitions of madness and the place of social expectations in governing the behaviour of the sick or mad person" (Busfield 1994, p. 260). This conceptualization blurs the distinctions between thought and action – between madness and "badness" (Busfield 1994, p.260), and what emerges from this is the emphasis on irrationality which, to Foucault (1967), is directly interrelated with madness as he argues that madness stands in contrast to reason whilst irrationality is the key component to when a person is labelled "mad."

Therefore, madness stands in opposition to two concepts. Firstly, madness stands in contrast to illness, and in this case, what is at stake is **"**physical functioning." Madness on the other hand, also opposes wrong-doing or "badness" where the perception and understanding of behavior are the key. But the lines of distinction between madness and badness are often blurred (Busfield 1994, p.261). This aptly applies to the social positioning of women in relation to madness particularly in light to Phyllis Chesler's work in this regard, as the discussion in the next section will illustrate.

This paper will explore the representations of women as "mad," with a focus on how hardboiled crime fiction (a crime genre that started in the interwar period and flourished during and after the Second World War in America) represents the connection between women and madness. This paper will provide a perspective and a framework for the portrayal of madness in hardboiled crime fiction by analyzing female criminality in relation to madness, hence highlighting how this genre ultimately reflects and reinforces societal ideations on gender roles, control and law and order. By investigating the depiction of the "madwoman" in one of the key texts of this genre, Raymand Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), this paper will question the portrayal of women in this genre and the expectations and perceptions inherent to the representations of women and madness. It will also explore how women's subjugation and the maintenance of the myths surrounding the link between women and madness are interlocked with concepts such as law, control, and social and legal conventions— a connection that ultimately portrays the anxieties about gender roles and women's agency in America at that time.

A Theoretical Framework on Women and Madness

> Women are impaled on the cross of self-sacrifice. Unlike men, they are categorically denied the experience of cultural supremacy, humanity and renewal based on sexual identity and on the blood sacrifice, in some way, of a member of the opposite sex. In different ways, some women are driven mad by this fact. Such madness is essentially an intense experience of female biological, sexual and cultural castration, and a doomed search for potency (Chesler, 1989, p.31).

In her prominent work *Women and Madness: The Female Malady,* Phyllis Chesler examines women's difficult and complex experiences within the medical and psychiatric system. Through both objective data and women's voices via interviews with female patients in mental institutions, Chesler studies the "female psychology" within the patriarchal culture of the medical system. Her work delves into the treatment of women by medical institutions and the reasons why women are regarded "crazier" than men. Chesler highlights the disparity between male and female treatment as far as mental illness is concerned, pointing out that "Women more than men, and in greater numbers than their existence in the general population would predict, are involved in 'careers' as psychiatric patients" (1989, p. xxxvi). Throughout her writing, Chesler emphasizes this disparity indicating that that 60% mental hospitals and clinics residents are females, and two thirds of those who receive mental health services and psychotherapy are females (Chesler, 1989, p.321). Regarding the explanations to this gap between male and female psychopathology, Chesler writes that what is considered "madness" "is either the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one's sex role stereotype" (Chesler, 1989, p56).

Chesler's book also stresses how the sociocultural norms have historically shaped the perception and treatment of women deemed "mad" or "mentally ill." That is, women's experiences with madness are often rooted in societal and cultural hierarchy that denies women their agency and power as well as their mental culpability. The importance of Chesler's project is that it takes madness out of the exclusive medical (the biological, genetic, and clinical frameworks) and situates it, instead, in a sociocultural context where there are contradictions and discrepancies engendered by dominant normative roles where women's voices are often dismissed or neglected. For Chesler, it is evident that "for a woman to be healthy she must 'adjust' to and accept the behavioral norms for her sex even though these kinds of behavior are generally regarded as less socially desirable [...] The ethic of mental health is masculine in our culture" (1989, pp. 68-69). Hence, Chesler's work transforms the understanding and perception of the concept of madness "so that the very topic of *women and madness* now means something entirely different from the connotations it had before she took it up" in order to see how madness "was put upon women, and why it was false to simply' see women as manifesting madness" (Spender, 1994, p.281).

The term madness is socially interchange with many labels: hysteria, insanity, irrationality, lunacy, among others. All these terms have been used not only in association with women, but they have also been used in a reductive way to invalidate women. The label "madwoman" has become linked with psychological and sociocultural connotations that define the female experience. It has become part of the literature, folklore, and social and cultural discourses about women. As Ussher opines,

> to understand women's madness, we need to deconstruct the concept of madness itself, and look to these discursive practices which are associated with madness, recognizing the connections between discourses of madness and other discourses such as that [*sic*] of misogyny, power, sexuality or badness. (Ussher 1991, p.12)

Madness, thus, is a construct that is not identical to mental illness, although both terms are used interchangeably. Madness serves various objectives extending beyond the medical arena to have social and cultural dimensions and implications. In the same vein, Showalter in her work *The Female Malady* states that when both men and women exhibit the same symptoms, there is a clear distinction between what she calls "English malady" which is connected to men, and the "female malady" which is "associated with the sexuality and essential nature of women" (Showalter, 1987, p.7). Emphasizing the link between femininity and madness,

Showalter shows that the sympotoms and manifestaions of madness are related to the biological nature of women, hence her sexuality is at the heart of this discourse. Overall, there are two approaches when considering mental disorders in women, according to Tasca and others: "magic-demonological" and "scientific" views— and a woman is regarded not only vulnerable to mental illness but she is also "weak" and "easily influenced (by the "supernatural" or by organic degeneration), and she is somehow "guilty" (of sinning or not procreating)" (Tasca et al., 2012, p.110).

It is also noteworthy to mention the "madwoman" label is closely related to criminal women. Feminist scholars critique the treatment of criminal women in the criminal justice system as women are often found unfit by reason of insanity and easily dismissed as "mad" (Allen 1987, p.xi). Medical discourses, especially regarding women, are usually employed by the criminal and legal systems to dismiss any crime a woman commits and force her instead to undergo medical/psychiatric treatment. As such the criminal justice system uses medicalized women to take away their culpability and agency. Dorothy E. Chunn and Robert J. Menzies point to how feminists agree that those who work in the criminal justice system often "describe female offenders in terms of pathology compared with their male counterpart" (1990, p. 37), and the question at the heart of this discourse, as Smart notes, becomes: is mental illness in women "the functional equivalent" of crime in men? (1976, 149). In this regard, Chunn and Menzies also remark:

> forensic decision-makers routinely reduce or eliminate the legal guilt of violent female offenders by transforming them into pitiful victims who lack moral guilt and, on the other hand, find their male counterparts doubly culpable. Consequently, men who are described as mentally disordered by clinicians may still end up in prison, while women who are not can actually be returned home to the scene and victim(s) of their offence. (1990, p.37)

However, there are other feminist scholars who studied female criminality (for example and Worrall, 1987; Daly, 1987) who suggest that the treatment of women in the criminal justice system depends on "ideologies and practices" at a certain point of time "in a particular form of political and social organization" (Chunn and Menzies 1990, p.37). Thus, the social and cultural factors in play in the dichotomy of women and madness are crucial to the assessment and perception of women and to the label of the "madwoman" especially when they commit crimes. Indeed, this image/stereotype of the "madwoman" is a recurrent one in literature including crime fiction, as the next section will illustrate.

Women, Madness, and Crime Fiction

In literature, madness is a theme that has consistently been used in works throughout historical periods. Lilian Feder examines madness as a motif in literature referring to "the nature of madness itself as an incorporation of the very values and prohibitions it challenges" (Feder, 1983, p.4). From Greek mythology to Renaissance literature as well as in modern and contemporray literaray works, madness is a constant theme that interrogatres human psychology, provides commentary on the social ills and human nature, and challenges social norms. Women have long been linked to madness in literature; they are depicted as emotional and irrational who are driven to madness by the patriarchal societies. There are numerous examples of the "madwomen" in literature, including Jane **Eyre by Charlotte Brontë**, **"The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath, to name only a few.** Indeed, the depiction of women and madness have long been intertwined especially in the genre of crime fiction, which explores in complex and nuanced ways the deviant and dark side of human behavior and the desires and motivation behind criminal acts.

In crime fiction, the female protagonist is frequently subjected to suspicion, with her mental state and behavior being called into question by the male-dominated of institutional structures such as detectives and the police.

Feminist scholarship on crime fiction examined the role of females and the containment and punishments these protagonists usually face at the end of narratives. American hardboiled crime fiction is a genre that started in the 1920s with authors such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymand Chandler and James Cain. With narratives that depict urban cities in America with a "tough-guy" detective and a recurrent presence of a femme fatale who is blamed and punished, it is a genre that focuses on policing, control and clearly portrays the anxieties regarding gender roles before and after the Second World War. There is a body of feminist criticism that delved into questions of female representation, misogyny, female objectification and female agency. For example, critics like Frank Krutnik, Jopi Nyman and Jack Boozer describe hardboiled crime fiction as a "masculine" genre which conforms and affirms "disturbed masculine social order" (Nyman 1997, p.3). With this, women's roles are considered in terms of stereotyped representations where the female protagonist is perceived as a threat to the male characters, the detective mostly – a threat that must be contained. This masculine agenda of crime narratives extends to the cultural context of American society in the first half of the twentieth century. As Nyman argues, "the focus is now on the different constructions of gender and their relationship to culture and history rather than on an individual writer's intentions" (1997: 39), and hardboiled crime fiction, in Krutnik's words, is seen as an "empathic process of masculinisation" (1991, p.42),

Therefore, in hardboiled crime fiction, female characters have ambiguous roles that blur the lines between the victim and the perpetrator. That is, even though female protagonists in hardboiled crime narratives are dangerous, they are sometimes medicalized and controlled. Madness in hardboiled stories is shown in different forms: female characters who are driven by psychological instability, revealing warped motives, or are trapped in an immoral and corrupt world of gangsters and criminals. As such women in this genre are presented as complex creations, both manipulative and charming who can also be criminals. Yet, they are also victims to the male-dominated world in which they live.

Thus, the trope of the "madwoman" in crime fiction serves to showcase the deeper societal and structural issues that shape the representations of women. Indeed, the "madwoman" is an expression of the anxieties that ravaged American society especially during and after the Second World War. The sexualized female body is a consistent presence in the narratives of this genre, for example in the novels of James M. Cain, that serves to objectify women. The female body is "where the contestation over notions of 'womanhood' takes place." It speaks of "her femininity and is an object of desire, yet it also operates as a means for the woman to express agency through using bodily charms to perform acts of transgression" (Jaber, 2016, 26). In other words, the female body in the narratives "has a double function; it is the center of the male gaze and it is also a means through which the woman gains power." But the "medicalized female characters" in the genre represent "a facet of the social control exercised against women" although these female protagonists also show resistance to be controlled and contained (Jaber, 2016, p.26). Therefore, the women in hardboiled crime fiction are both victims and agents; they are not simply victims of the violence that surrounds them, but they are an integral part of it. There is a moral ambiguity that involves female characters, especially the femme fatale, and "madness" is the site where this ambiguity resides.

Madness is thus tied to the social, cultural and psychological dimensions in which these women operate in this genre. Their presumed "madness" is part of the gender

constraints and limitations especially around and after the War. The narratives of this genre deliberately confuse the lines between madness and reason, between madness and badness, and showcase female characters with obsessions and struggles (such as Cora in *The Postman Always Rings* Twice, Brigit in *The Maltese Falcon* and Carmen in *The Big Sleep*), who are victims of violence around them but at the same time are perpetuators of crimes. Madness is also sometimes used as a justification for criminal behavior, yet these representations of "mad" women offer a poignant critique of gender roles in the US, as demonstrated in Ramond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, which will be discussed in the following section.

The "Madwoman" in Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*

Raymond Chandler's first novel *The Big Sleep* (1939) depicts Philip Marlowe, the solitary cynic private eye, investigating a blackmailing case in the Sternwood family. He is called by General Sternwood to "take care of" Arthur Gwynn Geiger, a pornographer working under the guise of a rare bookstore, who has been blackmailing the General with IOUs signed by his younger daughter, Carmen who is shown to struggle with epilepsy and mental illness. The case is complicated when Marlowe is implicated in the corrupt world of crime that involves both of the General's daughters, Vivian and Carmen. It turns out Carmen is a murderess who killed her brother-in-law, Regan, Vivian's husband, and the story ends with Carmen being "sent away" as a cover-up for her crimes.

Chandler wrote *The Big Sleep* during the Great Depression and just before the Second World War. The "urban blight, corrupt political machines and de facto disenfranchisement of significant sections of the population through graft and influence-peddling" (Porter, 2003, p.96) set the background for the stories of the emerging genre of American hardboiled crime fiction. Marlowe's world, in Jerry Speir's words, is "a mixed bag of corrupt cops, smug aristocrats, penny-ante grifters, rackets bosses, conceited parents, rebellious children, naïve lovers, and related narcissists- all set amidst the blasé decadence of Hollywood and California" (Speir, 1981, p.136). In this world, evil, is not imposed by forces of nature or fate, rather it is the outcome of actions done by reckless crooked people. It is also the product of the social ills and tensions of a disordered society.

From the beginning of the story, the conflict between Marlowe and the two sisters, Carmen and Vivian, is shown through Marlowe's rejection of the sexual games both sisters seem to play with him. It is made clear that Marlowe is caught not only with Carmen, but he also becomes part of the Sternwood's world. The General describes his own daughters in words that reveal much about the whole family: "Vivian is spoiled, exacting, smart and quite ruthless. Carmen is a child who likes to pull wings off flies. Neither of them has anymore moral sense than a cat. Neither have I. No Sternwood ever had" (Chandler, 2000, p.10). When Marlowe asks the General if he talked to Carmen about the IOUs, the General replies, "she would suck her thumb and look coy" (Chandler, 2000, p.9). The obvious impression that could be made from the General's words about the female characters is not a positive one, and his portrayal of the two women establishes the context and dynamics of corruption and crimes with which this family is involved, as well as painting a picture of the roles of the two sisters and their characterization in the novel.

Carmen is presented as unstable, immature "madwoman" from her first appearance in the novel. She, at the first meeting with Marlowe, throws herself into his arms and 'giggles' in a way which would characterize her throughout the novel, "When her head was against my chest she screwed it around and giggled at me. 'You're cute,' she giggled. 'I'm cute, too'" (Chandler, 2000, p.5). In his article "Translating Irony in Popular Fiction: Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep," Daniel Linder argues that Carmen's speech is colored with the motif of childishness in what Linder calls an "infantile vocabulary and very simple syntax"

(2001, pp. 97-108). Her "infantile vocabulary" is presented as a symptom of her mental illness. For example, the word 'cute' seems one of Carmen's favorites, and it shows the limitations in her vocabulary and her personality.

Yet, the repetition of the words 'cute' and 'giggle' proves to be deliberately employed by Chandler who uses irony as a device to illustrate a complicated relationship between Marlowe and Carmen and to point to Carmen's mental health challenges. We find that Marlowe, for instance, addresses Carmen as a child in a serious situation when he finds her drugged and posing naked to the camera with the dead body of Geiger next to her, "Let's be nice. Let's get dressed" and "Let's take a nice little walk" (Chandler, 2000, p.27). The "familial corruption" to use John Irwin's words, is the key to understand the family dynamics and Carmen's motivation to commit murder (2001, p.226). So even though Carmen is presented as a childish immature woman, she is also dangerous. Chandler confirms the connection between mental illness, femininity and criminality as it relates to Caremn. She kills Regan, shoots at Joe Broody only to graze his shoulder, and later attempts to kill Marlowe. She tries to seduce men, but she cannot tolerate the fact that her sexuality could be resisted. As Marlowe says during his encounter with Carmen at his apartment, "It's so hard for women- even nice women- to realize that their bodies are not irresistible" (Chandler, 2000, p.112). Carmen is also shown as seductive and alluring from the beginning of the book; she is a "naked damsel in distress" (Speir, 1981, p.30). But Marlowe rejects her and uses one of his best weapons, irony, telling her sarcastically that he is "the guy that keeps finding" her "without any clothes on" (Chandler, 2000, p.111). When rejected, she seeks revenge, and violence is the answer to men's rejection, which renders her as a determined but "mad" murderess.

Part of the image of the "madwoman" is established via the infantile references of Carmen. She always appears sucking her thumb, "You're just a big tease," Carmen tells Marlowe. "She put a thumb up and bit it. […] She bit it and sucked it slowly, turning it around in her mouth like a baby with a comforter" (Chandler, 2000, p.5). Thumb-sucking is symbolic both of an infantile regression and an invitation to sexual play, which Marlowe seems to ignore in both cases. Here the reader is obviously reminded not to view Carmen as a reasonable or mature woman and perhaps expect the worst of her. Such oral and digital references, which *The Big Sleep* is full of, "often suggest some disorder, decay, degeneration" (Simpson, 1991, pp. 87). In addition to the erotic connotation of thumb-sucking, Carmen is presented as 'childish' in a very negative and distorted sense; she is shown to be selfish and ignorant.

Carmen is also epileptic. Her epilepsy is presented as a symptom of her mental illness. She is shown to have epileptic seizures and the question here is: Is epilepsy the reason behind her murderous tendencies? As Plain argues, women's condition "on the verge of breakdown makes it an unsuitable site for erotic interest within the text" (Plain, 2001, p.62). However, the judgment that Carmen kills because of her epilepsy involves questions of her medicalization, culpability, and agency. Epilepsy, Peter Wolf notes, is unconvincingly incorporated in the novel. There seems to be a temptation to hang a murder on an epileptic character that would act irresponsibly during a seizure, and Chandler seems to fall for this temptation. Yet Carmen's seizure descriptions reveal that Chandler's treatment of epilepsy "in a problematic way [has been] influenced by preconceived ideas rather than facts" (Wolf 1995, p.14). In this regard, Alice Myers and Sarah Wright in their introduction to *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*, give a comprehensive account about the dichotomy of madness and badness:

> When a woman transgresses the bounds of her prescribed gender role, her actions are translated in less threatening terms. The 'abnormality" of her 'unwomanly' behaviour is explained away: she is either mad (hysterical, suffering from pre-menstrual tension or Battered Woman Syndrome) or bad (the inadequate mother, the lesbian, the just plain evil). These 'justifications' recur in the representations of women who commit violence. (1996)

In fact, the question of mad and/or bad woman has been always part of the discourse on female criminality and its close connection to madness. The question of how the 'life-giver' turns into a 'life-taker' lies in the midst of the challenge of the stereotypes of the female as submissive and non-violent. This brings about the notion of the "standards by which femininity is judged"—how the portrayal of the female murderer "unhinges our assumptions about women" (Brich, 1996, p. 61) and interrogates the linkages between criminality, madness and women.

The representation of how an aggressive and sexually threatening woman is "separated from the human norm by her association with images of animality and madness" applies well to Carmen. She is both "mad" and a "snake" (Horsley 2001, p. 132). The description of her transformation into a "not nice animal" is vivid when she tries to kill Marlowe towards the end of the book, her "hissing sound grew louder and her face had the scraped bone look. Aged, deteriorated, become animal" (Chandler, 2000, p.156). According to William Marling, Carmen unites the two stereotypes of popular fiction. She is "the blonde, a favorite sexual provocateur of American melodrama" and the "succubus" from the medieval lore who is "marked by physical deformity and limited mentality" (Marling, 1986, p. 86-87). As Lee Horsley suggests:

> It is an explicitly sexual iconography, and the threat by represented by the dangerous woman is sometimes simply that of the sexual predator dawning in a male protagonist who suffers loss of control and destabilisation of identity. Such anxieties are also, however, generated by the much more direct imitation of male aggression and appropriation of male power. (Horsley, 2001, p.130)

As such *The Big Sleep* illustrates a case of affinity between sexuality, criminality and mental illness. The representation of female criminality in Chandler's book can been linked to the image of the devious, promiscuous woman, but sexuality is not only the motive behind Carmen's murders, it also sets the whole layout of her image as a mentally ill woman. She is flirtatious but for whom "thinking was always going to be a bother", and above all a murderess who does not hesitate to pull the trigger. This portrayal might reflect an anxiety in a masculine dominated society about the roles of women. It is an anxiety that is best demonstrated in the light of a comparison between the representation of the gangsters and women in the book. Gangsters, especially Eddie Mars, are shown to be friendly and even respectable, thus, "[i]n this topsy-turvy world, there is honor among thieves and deceit and greed within families" (Speir, 1981, p.136). Women, on the other hand, are presented as a threat throughout the book. Reflecting on Carmen's personality, one could see that her depiction as mentally unstable and childish renders her in a position where her threat creates less anxiety in the 'tough guy' society. Marlowe's insistence to Vivian "to take her away" at the end of the book reflects the need not to admit her criminality and thus her agency (Chandler, 2000, p.162). In this manner, the socio-cultural constructions of femininity, mental illness and sexuality in the novel are delineated within the larger context of a rich corrupt American family in the 1930s. Chandler's females, however, are not simply objects of desire. Plain makes the case that:

> Although outwardly attractive, they inwardly disappoint on the grounds of either psychosis or neurosis. Chandler is a skilled deployer of both femme fatale and the deadly innocent, but the depiction of these women is devoid of sensuality. Rather these representations of the feminine are harsh and unforgiving, delineated female sexuality that is perceived as threatening even as it attracts. (Plain, 2001, p.61)

Hence the question of Marlowe's repulsive attitude towards both Carmen and Vivian comes to bear a considerable significance in relation to Chandler's treatment of gender and mental illness in the novel. When Marlowe finds Carmen naked in his bed and asks her to get dressed and leave his apartment, she calls him a filthy name. Marlowe then forces her to leave, and when she does, he clearly shows an aggressive reaction, the "imprint of her head was still in the pillow, of her small corrupt body still on the sheets. I put my empty glass down and tore the bed to pieces savagely" (Chandler, 2000, p.113). This kind of behavior could be described as misogynistic and places him in a position of "woman-hater," as Marlowe himself points out his revulsion for women, "You can have a hangover from other things than alcohol. I had one from women. Women made me sick" (Chandler, 2000, p.113). The moral scheme of Chandler's world, furthermore, could be described as "pathologically harsh on women and pathologically lenient towards men" (Mason, 1977, p.95). But as Speir suggests, the context is a key factor for the understanding of these quotations pointing out to what he calls "woman-on-a-pedestal syndrome which is historically associated with Marlowe's kind of knight-errantry" (Speir, 1981, p.113-4). Marlowe, for example, just before his meeting with Carmen at his apartment when he tears the bed "savagely," has come out of another confrontation with her sister, Vivian, who also tried to use her sexuality to get information about Marlowe's mission.

Marlowe's decision at the end not to report Carmen to the police, and his insistence to "take her away" when he talks to Vivian is noteworthy. He explains that Carmen should be taken somewhere "far off from here where they can handle her type, where they keep guns and knives and fancy drinks away from her? She might get herself cured, you know, It's been done" (Chandler, 2000, p.162). This might be interpreted as an attempt on the part of Marlowe to protect Carmen through keeping her from killing somebody else or getting killed, in addition to protecting her from all the legal consequences for her actions. More convincingly however, Marlowe's silence to Carmen's murders may be considered as a symptom of the masculine anxiety that hesitates to admit the role of the woman as a capable murderer. Thus, he tries to view Carmen in the image of the mentally unstable who needs help. He, as an icon of the 'tough guy' in the hardboiled narrative, refuses to acknowledge Carmen's power and her ability to kill, and in this way, he might be afraid of Carmen despite the confidence he shows. The isolated knightly superiority of Marlow is nothing but a "hedge against his own neurotic unease. His inner-directed, intellectualizing defensiveness in such a reading acts as a compensation for paranoid fear and inadequacy" (Horsley, 2001, p.39). Medicalizing Carmen and dismissing her as a "madwoman" can be regarded more about control and containment than about her mental state. As such, *The Big Sleep* provides an example of the attempts to contain women when they are silenced and sent away, but at the same time the novel showcases that the female protagonist constantly try to escape and resist these constraints.

Conclusion

The bond between women and madness mirrors social views not only regarding mental illness and gender but also power, control and agency. This association between women and madness is a trope in literature, which has been used to examine a variety of themes including oppression and patriarchy, women's roles and power, and their resistance and subversion. The

examination of madness in literature, and crime fiction in particular, permits the exploration of the complex and nuanced female experiences and the "female psychology," which makes room for a further investigation into the social and cultural dimensions of the portrayal of the "madwoman."

Criminal women, especially the murderess, adds another dimension to the close association between women and madness. The medicalization of women is a recurrent tool used to discredit women and take away their agency. The image of a woman with a gun disturbs the gender positions and perceptions and threatens male-dominated structures. Additionally, female criminality has always been interpreted in terms of the pathological and the irrational. To attribute a murder committed by a woman to insanity or loss of control diminishes responsibility and culpability of the woman and makes the act motiveless— hence, this kind of representation of the violent female as "mad" could be seen as part of the patriarchal structure in a society that fears the over-independence and agency of women. In this fashion, it seems that Raymond Chandler in his book *The Big Sleep* establishes Carmen as an epileptic, childish "madwoman", who showcases the anxieties about gender roles and the emphasis on masculinity in American society, and simultaneously reveals the power and threat women pose as they face the label of the "madwoman." Chandler's novel presents an example of a complex female character who embodies the dual characteristics of being a dangerous murderess but an unstable and childish woman at the same time. The duality in her representation mirrors the "masculine" genre and the criminal space of the book in which there is an insistent need for male dominance and order. However, the portrayal of Carmen also underlines the attempts of women to undercut the male protagonist's role and her efforts in asserting her agency. By confirming the connection between female criminality and madness, this genre ultimately reflects yet subverts societal ideations on gender roles, control and law and order.

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