

Rhode Island College

Digital Commons @ RIC

Honors Projects Overview

Honors Projects

2016

Manifestations of Masculinity in Crisis: The Noir Films of Humphrey Bogart

Jason Marzini

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/honors_projects



Part of the [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

ABSTRACT

This Honors thesis discusses the direct connection of America's cultural ideology surrounding the time of the second World War and Humphrey Bogart's noir films and their depiction of masculinity. Through an analysis of Bogart's performances in three pinnacle noir films: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *The Big Sleep* (1946), and *In a Lonely Place* (1950), the author proved that after World War II there was a clear shift in the paradigm of gendered expectations, particularly those identified under the umbrella of masculinity. Shifts in American mores regarding masculinity can be charted through Bogart's archetypal chain as he represents the masculine iconic image. As time progressed, the expected responsibilities of the dominant male figurehead were transferred to the female domestic due to the war effort. This ultimately caused a rift in patriarchal codes that uprooted the strong dominant masculine ideal into a new world order. Bogart's films noir present a visual and narrative look upon these changes, as both his character and his personal image become unraveled with the changing times. Each film provides a unique look into the damaged masculine ego, from the phallus-power struggle to remain atop the food chain above women and homosexuals in *The Maltese Falcon*, to the changing of the guard from male to female dominance in *The Big Sleep*, and lastly to the fall of the pre-war image of masculinity in *In a Lonely Place*.

MANIFESTATIONS OF MASCULINITY IN CRISIS:

THE NOIR FILMS OF HUMPHREY BOGART

The dominant ideologies of American society are predicated upon and informed by a patriarchal world order in which male desires and ambitions are privileged and maintained. Cultural apparatuses, such as films, deliver narratives through which the conscious and unconscious manifestations of patriarchy can be reinforced, examined, and challenged. Film noir provides an especially rich area of investigation for representations of masculinity because the period in which this cycle of films flourished, roughly 1941 to 1958, was a period of shifting paradigms of gender roles in response to the changing contexts of American society. World War II and its aftermath prompted fundamental changes in the traditional economic and social arrangements within the United States. The large-scale mobilization of men into the military created a vacuum in the workplace and the family. Women successfully filled the positions of the absent men. After the war, millions of men returned from the battlefields abroad to find themselves displaced in a new American landscape. The newly ordered social arrangement raised fundamental questions regarding gender roles and their functions within American society. Masculinity and the traditional American male identity seemed to be in the throes of crisis. The crisis, however, was not restricted to the male's awareness about himself, but was also projected onto the female subjects to which he compared himself. The male anxiety produced through this transitional period in American history can be analyzed through a series of noir films which seem to directly and explicitly address the instability

and imbalance that the American male experienced during the war, and his uneasy readjustment to a new postwar paradigm of masculinity.

My investigation into masculinity will focus on the noir films of Humphrey Bogart. Since Bogart was viewed as the iconographic prototype of noir masculinity, he serves as an ideal site of examination. The ultimate “tough guy,” Bogart represented what most men wish they could be: strong, phlegmatic, resolute, and in control of himself and his destiny at all times. Bogart embodied, according to Steven Cohan, “the male fantasy of impeccable virility – ‘the toughie, the roughie, the kind of guy who’s incapable of being eloquent about it’ – structuring the heterosexual masculinity of the average American man.”¹ He was immensely popular on and off screen. Bogart’s star status and off-screen persona informed his performances and helped to define the language and structure of the postwar masculinities. Although there have been many books and articles written about Humphrey Bogart as a performer and a star, and even about the masculinity he embodied, little has been penned regarding the trajectory of masculinity across his noir films. I am interested in charting the course of Bogart’s noir representations of masculinity in three key films, from his earliest noir performance in the *Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941) through his definitive noir performance in *The Big Sleep* (Hawks, 1945), until his final noir performance in *In a Lonely Place* (Ray, 1950).

Principal questions will frame my investigation. What are the characteristics that define Bogart’s masculinity in film noir? How consistent are these characteristics across these three films? If they evolve, how do they evolve? How are the concepts of male-centric authority and control enacted through the narratives and through Bogart’s

performances? What do the protagonists' relationships with the women in these films indicate about their masculinity and how might these women function within the construction of the male identity?

The period between 1941 and 1950 represents a time in American history when major shifts in social and political institutions signaled a change in ideology on many fronts. The very definition of what it meant to be a man in America was in question – leaving the normative constructs of masculinity straddling the threshold between traditional values and modern sensibilities. What is the relationship between Bogart's protagonists and their performances of masculinity to this changing social terrain?

In order to conduct this analysis, I will organize my investigation through the framework of masculinity studies in film. Although psychoanalysis will, at times, serve as an underlying reference point, it is the cultural studies branch of masculinity studies that interests me the most. Masculinity is still an underrepresented area of study in film and this period that I am taking under consideration is a pivotal time in the construction of modern American masculinity. Masculinity studies is the most direct route to understanding the construction of the male persona through film, as it is a theory and practice devised to deconstruct the male paradigms of behavior and unravel the way they are reinforced through filmic representations. This particular period of American history is one in which attempts were being made to rigidly define the characteristic of masculinity. The analysis of the selected films will seek to uncover the conscious and unconscious signifiers of that masculinity, while seeking to determine their relationship to the postwar identity crisis within American masculinity. I will argue that the three noir

films of Humphrey Bogart represent a changing course of American masculinity from absolute control in terms of the dominant ideologies of America prior to World War II, to a loosening grasp of and eventual loss of control post-war. These films, which serve as points along the continuum of social expectations, demonstrate the extent to which masculinity was in flux. Bogart's male protagonists become increasingly anxious and disoriented, desperately attempting to assert control, while demonstrating an increasing loss of self-control.

SURVEY OF MASCULINITY STUDIES

Masculinity as an area of study is still in the process of becoming a fully engaged voice within academic discourses regarding gender and its representations. Its origins lie in the work of feminist scholars and has evolved as a result of the conceptual arguments posed through feminist methodologies and arguments. Masculinity studies functions, alongside feminist studies, as a complementary yet sometimes oppositional body of investigation into the constructed gender roles into which male members of society are interpolated and indoctrinated. First-generation feminist positions theorized masculinity as an uncontested, hegemonic site, ignoring the forces of patriarchy that constructed it. In their book, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin explain that “[m]ales are conditioned by ideology and cultural standards just as much as females are, and typed into socially learned gender roles. American society teaches and fosters certain types of behavior in men – the ones commonly thought of as masculine (aggression, strength, leadership, lack of emotion) – in order to maintain and reinforce patriarchal privilege.”² Masculinity

studies developed from the position that for there to exist a fair and balanced interpretation of gender roles in relation to apparatuses through which they are presented and enforced, it must be considered that both male and female roles are constructions of ideological rules, behavior, and performance. The unconscious acceptance of these rules is detrimental to both genders in a mutually interdependent dynamic which both informs the cultural landscape and presents binary divisions through which the social order is maintained and enacted.

Feminist studies found its seminal voice in Laura Mulvey's 1974 landmark essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Her article forms the foundation upon which most investigations into gender roles and their constructed performances have been founded. Mulvey argues, through a psychoanalytical framework, that women are the objects within which male castration fears and anxieties reside. She argues that "[w]omen then stand in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by the symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."³ She develops a methodology through which gender can be examined as an "unconscious" construct which operates as ubiquitously and furtively as language itself. However, by overvaluing male complicity in the performance of female objectification, Mulvey fails to recognize how male roles are also constructed, thereby naturalizing masculinity through the process of identification with archetypal male role models. Mulvey suggests that the female body functions as the site of "otherness" and that because of its difference is put on display and investigated through a

process which aims to demystify its power and force it into submission at the hands of the male's will and desire. This process is executed through representational modes of oppression that deny the female form an active role of participation in most narratives while positioning the male in the role of the causal agent through which the patriarchal ideologies are performed. To suggest, however, that gender roles are only constructed for the feminine suggests that gender construction is inoperable at a fundamental level. If hegemonic expectations are embedded in the cultural artifacts that inform our notion of gender, then they must function to interpolate both genders and not simply operate as a means of oppressing the female. Understanding the means by which men are also controlled through ideology is the first step to expanding the discourse to include the function of all gender patterns.

Masculinity entered the conversation of gender studies in 1981 when Paul Willemen, in his essay, "Looking at the Male," analyzed the films of Anthony Mann and suggested that the "viewer's experience," while watching a film, "is predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male exist."⁴ Although Willemen barely scratches the surface of masculinity studies, his reference to men as spectacles in film is a direct reference to Mulvey's notion that women are there "to be looked at."⁵ Steve Neale, on the other hand, responded directly to Mulvey's essay in 1983 by stating, "[e]very film ... tends to specify identification in accordance with the socially defined and constructed categories of male and female."⁶ Neale's essay, "Masculinity as Spectacle," examines the process through which the male spectator is interpolated into his performances of "aggression, power, and control"⁷ through "narcissistic identification"⁸ with male protagonists that reinforce

“phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery, and control”⁹ through their representations on the screen. Neale’s most important contribution to the discussion of gender in film was his assertion that male roles, as well as female roles, are fluid constructs which fluctuate in accordance with the social and cultural needs of a specific time and place in history. He writes, “[i]dentifications are multiple, fluid, at points even contradictory. Moreover, there are different forms of identification.”¹⁰ Despite the naturalization of masculinity through its representations in cultural texts, the “structuring norm” is constantly being questioned and threatened within transgressive models of representation and the language used to express them.

Building upon the idea that male identity undergoes the same processes of construction as female identities, Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, in the introduction to *Screening the Male* (an anthology focused on representations of masculinity in film, which they co-edited), expressed an urgent need to examine the consequences of ignoring the “cultural fiction that masculinity is not a social construction.”¹¹ The argue that “[t]he scant attention paid to the spectacle of man ends up reinforcing the apparent effacement of the masculine as a social construction in American culture.”¹² In other words, continuing to assert that masculinity is not a structured norm suggests that masculinity is a set and unchanging biological expression of natural behavior and not a social construct instilled by perpetuating a mythological concept of what it means to be a “man.” In fact, according to the model of masculinity that is presented by Cohan and Hark, the roles performed by men in society are actually dictated by the changing demands of society’s political and economic needs. By placing the male figurehead atop the apparatus of

culture, the expectation for him to perform becomes a matter of life and death; the social order and continuation of patriarchal hegemony depending upon his unconscious execution of masculine behavior.

The study of masculinity in film and culture may have originated as a response to feminist studies, but the suggestion that it stands in opposition to feminism is an argument that rejects the fluidity of gender in favor of a more rigid natural order of oppression. Simultaneously with Cohan and Hark, feminist scholars Constance Penley and Sharron Willis approached the subject of masculinity in their introduction to *Male Trouble*, an anthology of essays on the subject of masculinity: “This assumption easily lends itself to an oversimplified gender polarization, where all women are victims and all men are unimpeded agents of patriarchy.”¹³ The more complex questions that challenge the legitimacy of patriarchal order lie at the root of the male’s performance of constructed roles. Through identification with role models, the male imitates dominant behavior patterns and perpetuates the legacy of oppression and domination. By studying this process, it is possible to understand the fears associated with transgressing away from the structured norms and how they are implanted into the male psyche. Once the process is exposed and the formula of indoctrination is realized, it is then possible to defy the expectations imposed upon the male by the dominant ideology, thereby narrowing the gap in gender inequality.

The dominant ideology is itself a fluid construct that is constantly modified to reflect the social norms of a given culture. The ideology is given its own language and terms with which it communicates its demands upon the individual. The collected

acceptance of an ideology gives it a legitimacy that is often unquestioned. As Kaja Silverman states in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, a groundbreaking book that places masculinity studies in equal footing with feminist studies and operates simultaneously with Penley and Willis, Cohan and Hark: “Within every society, hegemony is keyed to certain privileged terms, around which there is a kind of doubling up of belief. Since everything that successfully passes for ‘reality’ within a given social formation is articulated in relation to these terms, they represent ideological stress points.”¹⁴

Silverman uses the term “dominant fiction” to describe the process by which a culture willingly accepts an ideological narrative and is thereby interpolated into roles which are constructed through the apparatuses of the ruling class. It is within this dominant fiction that the male and female binaries locate themselves. American culture has always been predicated upon a system of male control and power. This power structure utilizes the language of its culture to maintain control. Silverman writes, “[o]ur ‘dominant fiction’ or ideological ‘reality’ solicits our faith above all else in the unity of the family, and the adequacy of the male subject.”¹⁵ But what if the male subject finds himself in conflict with the “dominant fiction?” What if there is a crisis at the center of masculinity and the male subject crosses the gender line and transgresses the expected behavior patterns that have been naturalized through the fiction? The fractures that exist at the seams of constructed gender roles are often played out through cultural representations, and the penalties for transgressing these roles are strictly enforced within their narratives. Silverman, through her analysis of masculinity in films, exposes the fractures and gaps that are inherent within their representation, and by doing so, offers a new vehicle

through which to apply ideological subjectivity in terms of gender.

Masculinity studies, although not as prevalent as feminist studies in most academic curriculums, has an important piece to add to the puzzling dynamics of gender roles and cultural expectations. The very language of patriarchy that informs the female role within a culture, also functions to perpetuate the behaviors and attitudes of the men within that culture. By investigating this language as it is translated through filmic representation, it is possible to unravel the structure of patriarchy and strip it bare, exposing the frayed ends of its ideology which allow for interpretation and adaptation. Understanding how men are indoctrinated into this ideology allows for an adjustment or shift in the language that facilitates the messages and opens a dialogue that may lead to parity in gender relations and roles.

DEFINING FILM NOIR

Film scholars all seem to agree that there is a group of films that can, by one standard or another, be classified as “film noir.” Frank Krutnik asserts that “[h]owever, despite the increasingly familiar use of the term among film critics and historians, film noir remains a hotly-debated area. Especially problematic is its very status as a unified group of films.”¹⁶ Many critics would classify a noir film by its visual style – specifically its use of chiaroscuro lighting – while others would argue that a noir film is constituted through a specific set of narrative patterns and themes, and yet still others would claim that noir relies on an atmosphere of fatalistic attitudes and moral ambiguity which leaves the viewer in a state of anxiety. Despite their best effort to define noir, there doesn’t seem to be an exact formula for doing so. Many of the so-called noir traits are not exclusive or

specific to noir films and can often be seen outside the noir canon. As Krutnik explained in his book, *In a Lonely Street*:

Descriptive accounts of the “noir style” tend to be highly generalised – highlighting sets of features which are by no means specific to film noir. It is doubtful that one could convincingly show that noir is actually characterised by a unified body of stylistics – rather, it seems to be the case that what is referred to as the “noir style” tends to be a more disparate series of stylistic markings which can be seen as noir when they occur in conjunction with sets of narrative and thematic conventions and narrational processes.¹⁷

To make matters worse, there are many films that are generally considered by scholars to be noir that actually fall into a gray area because they do not exhibit some of the traits that critics deem necessary to constitute a film noir. Definitions and classifications of noir film seem as abundant and varied as the number of films that may or may not fit into the category. Whether it is a movement, a genre, cycle of films, or even a phenomenon within the corpus of film history, there is undoubtedly a group of films called, film noir.

My definition of film noir combines atmosphere and mood, along with the convergence of stylistic and narrative influences that represent a specific social context within a specific time and place. I agree with Paul Schrader, who demarcated that time frame from 1941 to 1958 in his classic essay, “Notes on Noir.”¹⁸ The use of German expatriates as cinematographers on many of these films ensured the use low-key, chiaroscuro lighting as it had become popularized in German Expressionism. The source material for these films, often pulp-fiction detective novels, provided both the moral ambiguity of its characters and the sordid urban settings in which the narratives unfolded, often by means of an investigation. The plots are fraught with uncertainty and the characters are filled with anxiety. The hero and heroine exist in the liminal spaces

between good and evil, virtue and depravity, certainty and doubt, and light and dark.

The noir world is a space in which all things are investigated and questioned, but rarely fully resolved, especially when considering the duplicity of the femme fatale and her role as the deceiver and the obstruction that prevents the male protagonist from knowing the truth. Thus, the ambiguity experienced through the plot devices is also established within the gender identities of the characters. Many of the characters within the noir world serve as projections and representations of the protagonists' repressed identity: his fears, desires, and inner transgressions. As Deborah Thomas points out, "[c]riminals and women of a certain type, by their aggressiveness and (extramarital) sexuality respectively, represent antisocial (or at least 'anti-normal') aspects of the protagonist himself."¹⁹ It is within this space of projection and uncertainty that the question of masculinity arises and finds its representations through crisis.

MASCULINITY AND FILM NOIR

As masculinity studies developed into a theoretical and critical paradigm, film scholars started to study film noir through its lens. Several key studies laid the groundwork for an analysis of masculinity in film noir. Janey Place was one of the first scholars to look at noir as a vehicle for gender representations, in her 1978 article, *Women in Film Noir*. Although her study was mainly directed at the roles of the female characters and the meaning ascribed to them through the narrative, Place could not avoid performing an inspection of the male protagonist. The woman in film noir, according to Place, functions as a normalizing medium for the men who find themselves in a crisis of identity and morality. The sexual woman serves as the site from which the male's anxiety

arises, his loss of control and weaknesses are enacted through his relationship with her, and she must be defeated or conquered if he is to find redemption. As Place explains, “[t]he lesson is obvious: only in a controlled, impotent, powerless form, powerless to move or act, is the sexual woman no threat to the film noir man.”²⁰ She also asserts, “film noir is a male fantasy,”²¹ in which the protagonist explores transgressive options to replace the familiar conventional norms.

The most comprehensive and focused study of masculinities and male performativity in film noir comes from Frank Krutnik in 1991. In his book, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, he investigates the driving social and cultural forces that led to the reexamination of masculinity in 1940s and ‘50s America. Krutnik identifies the world of noir as a proving ground for the postwar American male. It is a place where the male protagonists struggle with their identity, and must either conform to or reject the traditional expectations of patriarchal society. He writes, “[t]he hero proves his worthiness to take up his place as a man, by accomplishing a series of directed tests; a process which will often culminate, in self-contained narratives, with the integration into cultural order through marriage.”²² Krutnik sees the female characters of film noir as not only the site of hostility, but also the reflection of male fears – projections of the qualities that men find lacking in themselves. Krutnik states that “[t]he hostility towards women in the ‘tough’ thrillers [noir] testifies in a very acute manner to problems within men – for these feared, but fascinating women tend to represent conflicting currents within male identity. The incoherence which marks the aims and motivations of the femme fatale arises from the conflicting desires which the hero projects onto her.”²³

Looking further into the confusion and anxiety of the noir protagonist and his conflicting worldview, Deborah Thomas sees noir as a means of catharsis that allows the male to explore his fantasy, but ultimately reinforces a return to the status quo. Thomas's essay from 1993, "How Hollywood Deals with the Deviant Male," sees the noir protagonist as an intermediary between two worlds, one of conformity to the traditional social values and one that rejects those values in favor of satisfying his baser urges. She argues that "[h]e is caught between his conscience [which can be seen as an internalized version of American society's expectations of its men] and those desires which violate such norms and find expression, to a greater or lesser extent, in the films."²⁴ The institutions of marriage and capitalism, which are seen as repressive, are the very institutions that posit the male roles into positions of authority and dominance. The deliberate act of rejecting these roles will ultimately result in feelings of guilt, alienation, powerlessness, and castigation. As Thomas explains, "[t]he very 'normality' which oppresses the male also privileges him and is not to be discarded lightly nor rebelled against too openly."²⁵

Women, as Thomas explains, "represent not only the projected dangers of rejecting 'normality' but the oppressiveness of embracing it as well. Generally, the two functions are assigned to separate women, but more than one femme fatale turns out to be a would-be wife."²⁶ The internal struggle of the protagonist produces an almost mental breakdown of character. But as Thomas explains, there are a number of ways through which this psychological dilemma might be resolved in the world of noir:

- a) The protagonist's death.
- b) The death of one half of the dichotomous pair (e.g. the buddy or the dame, the femme fatale or the domesticated woman).
- c) The

transformation of the femme fatale into the domesticating woman (she was really good all along and can be married, though life won't be dull with such a wife) or vice versa (she was really bad and can be rejected or killed, her guilt letting the hero off the hook). d) The exorcism of the past (e.g.) by avenging the war buddy or living through of the consequences of a temporary lapse into deviance. In both cases, the imminent domesticity may beckon just the other side of the film's final frame.²⁷

Despite being a "male fantasy" as Place suggests, noir is ultimately a lesson in morality and conformity according to Thomas. Transgressions are vehemently punished in order to restore the men back to positions of repressed sexuality within the domestic realm.

Megan Abbott explores the correlation between the male's loss of control and his loss of masculinity in her book *The Street Was Mine: White Male Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir*. Abbott suggests that "where masculinity reveals itself as a hysterical structure, [it is] displacing its own anxieties onto the undefined empty femininity."²⁸ As the male transforms himself into the hysterical female construct, he becomes enigmatic and unpredictable, he lacks order and reason. He must reassume control, usually through violence, or be punished for failing to assert his masculinity. According to Abbott, the male's loss of agency is a recurring theme throughout the noir canon. As men become entranced by the femme fatale's web of deception, they also become disoriented and rely more upon their intuition than the logical functions which constitute the ideal male persona. Abbott asserts that "[t]o listen to his body would mean he would have to acknowledge the darkness of his desire for that which so clearly threatens his very manhood, not to mention his life."²⁹ Thus, film noir is essentially a journey through the underworld of masculine insecurities, a testing ground of the dominant ideologies that inform male roles, and a moral lesson that explores the

consequences of betraying the patriarchal order.

The most recent scholar to delve into masculinity and film noir is Mike Chopra-Gant, whose 2006 book, *Hollywood Genres and Post-war America: Masculinity, Family and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir*, surveys the field of masculinity studies in film noir, bringing together many of the concepts previously discussed in the above sections. Chopra-Gant's compendium to noir masculinities organizes the area of study into one concise volume, unifying the work of the key scholars in this area. Chopra-Gant reiterates the social context of noir, the contentious claims of defining noir as a body of films, and the cultural significance of the noir protagonist in reference to the dominant ideologies of its time. He argues that "[s]ome of these have clear connections to the particular exigencies of the historical moment, while others register, in a more general sense, the myths that structure American identity."³⁰ Chopra-Gant suggests that these films represent a shift in the very nature of what it means to be an American, but more specifically an American man. By redefining the American hero, by modernizing him to fit within the cultural context, noir attempts to usurp the traditional western hero's role by complicating the male's identity, behavior patterns, and moral code. History, according to Chopra-Gant, like the noir protagonist, has become unpredictable and fraught with deviant possibilities.

The examination of masculinity through film noir representations serves as an area of study in which the structural ideologies of gender and patriarchal hegemony become the subject of scrutiny. The idyllic vision of domestic conformity that rests at the very heart of the American dream is questioned and often rejected in noir films. Chopra-

Gant points out that:

The disruptions to family life brought about by America's involvement in the Second World War were a cause of considerable anxieties that came to a head after the end of the war, when American society began the difficult process of adjusting to lasting changes to social structures and institutions that had been effected by the exigencies of wartime living.³¹

Attempts to restructure the traditional norms, in which the American male had become privileged and empowered, were fraught with crises of identity and moral ambiguity. Film noir projected the male's anxieties directly onto liminal representations of their fears, such as women, homosexuals, criminals, and immigrants. It is only through violence of domestic conformity that the noir protagonist is capable of being rehabilitated.

Steven Cohan has written that, "no actor has typified the callous product of the American underworld – prison-bound, in-prison, just-out-of, and between-trips – as thoroughly as has Mr. Humphrey Bogart."³² Cohan uses Bogart as a prime example of the ways in which masculinity is renegotiated through performance. By charting the trajectory of Bogart's noir films, I will argue, it is possible to observe the shifting gender role expectations of men in wartime and postwar America. There is a clear delineation between Bogart's calm and calculated portrayal of Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* in 1941, and his portrayal of the dangerously unhinged Dix Steele from *In a Lonely Place* in 1950. The films that will be analyzed in this study will be restricted to Bogart's key noir films, as I have defined the term. Thus, the following films will serve as the primary body of investigation into Bogart's transformative representations of noir masculinity, and will

be considered in order of their chronological release: *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941), *The Big Sleep* (Hawks, 1946), and *In a Lonely Place* (Ray, 1950).

THE MALTESE FALCON (1941)

Despite there being some debate amongst noir scholars as to whether or not the release of John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* in 1941 truly marks the inception of film noir, most would agree that the film serves as the exemplar through which subsequent films noir found their identity. More importantly, for the sake of this analysis, Humphrey Bogart's portrayal of Sam Spade served, as stated by Philippia Gates, "as the epitome of the hard-boiled detective, [and] would become a model for American masculinity during World War II."³³ Bogart's Spade is a man who, on the surface, rejects emotional attachments in favor of quick resolute decisions that are established through a logical process and are restricted to personal moral code. He maintains control at all times, whether he is facing death at the end of another man's gun, being threatened with incarceration by the inept authorities, or avoiding being captured by the entanglements of the women in the plot. Gates claims, "[f]ilm noir, beginning with Huston's *The Maltese Falcon*, offered a darker image of urban life – one in which the hero had to be independent, tough, and streetwise to outwit the villains and escape the web spun by the femme fatale."³⁴ Bogart's noir hero seems, on the surface, to maintain control of himself and the circumstances in which he finds himself. However, a closer analysis of his prototypical portrayal of the noir tough-guy reveals that there are seams between the ideologically enforced constructs of masculinity and real world pressures that were closing in on the American male in 1941. These seams will serve as the site through

which the conflicting representations reveal a fluid and potentially transgressive model of wartime masculinity.

The Maltese Falcon establishes the prototype against which further variations of noir masculinity can be compared. Produced within the pre-war, post-Depression era, the film presents an austere and resolute version of the American male, one that utilizes rational assessments to maintain control of his circumstances and to dictate his terms to others. Coming out of “the 1930’s as an era of a belief in the collective and the community,” as Megan Abbott explains, “the tough guy is, in contrast, constituted in large part through his isolation, his refusal to be part of the community, society, family, or nation.”³⁵ Throughout the majority of the film, Bogart’s Spade presents an almost clairvoyant distrust toward everyone. He seems able to predict their motives and see through their deceptions. Gates observes, “[t]he rise of film noir ... coincided with a new need to Americanize the onscreen hero in a response to the changing international climate with America’s entry into World War II.”³⁶ Post-Depression era Americans were still haunted by economic uncertainty, as well as underlying distrust of the systems of capitalism which have so devastatingly failed them. A new sense of individualism was emerging, but the American male was caught unwittingly between two catastrophes, trying to regain his footing before the ground fell out from under him once again. Joel Dinerstein suggests that, “[n]oir depends upon a cognitive tension between public memory of prewar experience – urban life, distrust of authority, economic uncertainty, class hostility, an aura of desperation – and the tentatively secure economic footing of the second half of the 1940s.”³⁷

The initial frames featuring Bogart as Sam Spade present him as a dispassionate, phlegmatic private detective, sitting at the helm of his agency, while negotiating the perfect phallus in the form of his hand-rolled cigarette.³⁸ Throughout classic Hollywood narratives, especially noir, cigarettes function as icons of masculinity, often transferring to women as an indication of their sexual deviance. Spade is so absorbed in the process of rolling his cigarette that he denies Effie (Lee Patrick), his secretary, the privilege of his gaze while keeping it focused on the phallus. A brief conversation between the two introduces the catalyst, Miss Wonderly (Mary Astor), who sets the plot and the protagonist in motion. When they meet, Spade seems only slightly interested in her as a woman, yet a bit more intrigued by the case that she presents. However, his true interest seems to rest with the money involved in accepting and solving the case. The monetary motivation serves as a reminder that the film is concerned with the need to reassert traditional capitalist values in a post-Depression economy.

The narrative is set in motion by a series of deceptions, lies, and performances. Miss Wonderly, which is an alias intended to elicit intrigue, hires Sam Spade and his partner, Miles Archer (Jerome Cowan), to find her sister Corrine, who as it turns out is a fictional, nonexistent character being used as a proxy for the true object of her desire and the investigation – the Maltese Falcon. Wonderly states that her sister, who is an under-aged menaced female, has run away with a dangerously violent older man, who also happens to be married with three children. The men do not give the impression that they are emotionally involved in the details of Wonderly's story, but each appear to have their own motives for accepting the case. Archer, who the subtext suggests is a philandering

adulterer, is overtly interested in acquiring Miss Wonderly as a sexual conquest, while Spade is seemingly motivated by potential financial rewards which are being offered. The meeting between Wonderly, Spade, and Archer sets the spider woman's trap and entangles the men in a web of deception that must be unraveled before the truth can be revealed. The artifice serves as a menace, threatening the lives of the men, as well as their masculinity. It is only through absolute control of the circumstances that the protagonist is able to perform his masculinity thoroughly; when lies stand between him and his knowledge of the truth, he lacks control and faces the greatest threat. Archer, who is the victim of his own unfettered libido, a hysterical man being guided by his bodily sensations rather than his will and rationality, walks directly into Wonderly's web and is subsequently punished for his transgression. Krutnik elaborates by stating, "There is, then, a significant ambivalence attached to the 'erotic woman': she is fascinating yet at the same time feared. There is an emphatic strain of male sexual paranoia that runs through the 1940's tough thrillers...."³⁹

Archer's murder underscores the dangers of an unchecked sexual drive, while illustrating the threat posed by the mystery of all women, but especially those who transgress the lines of gender and take an active, masculine role in narratives and in society. According to Frank Tomasulo, even the location of Archer's death connotes the treachery of female ambition and the dangers it imposes on the male: "Archer is killed 'at the place where the three roads meet' -- in short, where the two legs and torso of the female conjoin: Bush Street (obscene connotations probably intended)."⁴⁰ Archer was so invested in his sexual quest for Wonderly that his overcoat remained buttoned and his

gun remained on his hip. He was vulnerable and exposed, traits associated not with masculinity, but with the female stereotypes of the patriarchal lexicon. He is shot by Wonderly, who is represented by a subjective point of view, hidden from the camera throughout the scene. The gun and Archer's stunned reaction as he is murdered are the only details allowed by the camera. As Place suggests, "[t]he lesson is obvious: only in a controlled, impotent powerless form, powerless to move or act, is the sexual woman no threat to the film noir man."⁴¹ Thus the task of understanding and neutralizing Wonderly becomes one of Spade's main objectives toward maintaining control of his masculinity.

There are several interesting indexical points that connect the scene to the film's treatment of masculinity and the threat of women, despite it being the shortest scene in the film at only seventeen seconds. First, the gun that is used by Wonderly is the largest, most powerful gun in the film. As an object of phallic replacement, it is a woman who possesses the most power throughout the majority of the narrative. Second, the murder of Spade's partner would seemingly become the center of his investigation, yet it remains secondary to the search for the Falcon is merely a stand-in for Spade's masculinity and identity, for which he is really searching until the resolution. As noted by Tomasulo, "[a]s the investigation scenario proceeds, the quest for the phallic Maltese Falcon becomes intimately linked to Spade's masculine identity. Ultimately, 'the stuff dreams are made of', the symbolic phallus turns out to be fake."⁴² The Falcon is the central obsession around which the plot evolves. Its ability to endow the possessor with power and control makes it a highly sought object, especially by those who most need its properties. Tomasulo argues that "[t]he characters who pursue the Phallcon most obsessively (to the

point of object-cathexis) are people who cannot have a true phallus: two gay men, a boyish youth, and a woman. Like all fetish objects, the missing Phallic measures an absence, a lack, that all the characters share.”⁴³ Third, Spade’s disavowal of the murder and his repression of its meaning are intricately linked to his own absence from the scene of the crime. Bogart’s presence in every other scene of the film functions as a means of asserting the male protagonist’s dominance through his physical presence, as well as serving as an indicator of his omnipotent knowledge of all the events as they unfold. Thus, Spade’s absence from the scene of the murder serves to keep him internally disoriented as he outwardly performs various iterations of control that are essential to defining his masculinity.

Bogart is the ultimate tough-guy and paragon of masculine identity. As Gates points out, Bogart’s interpretation of Spade was that of the “tough, working-class detective who would come to symbolize American manhood in the 1940’s.”⁴⁴ Bogart’s performance is one of consummate physical and psychological mastery. Spade’s control of every situation in the film is so overpowering that he considers it unnecessary to carry a gun, despite his line of work and the dangerous personalities he encounters on a regular basis. He physically disarms men, on five separate occasions by taking away their guns with minimal effort. On one occasion, he disarms the overtly feminized homosexual Joel Cairo (Peter Lorre), by slapping him in the face with his own hand while still smoking a cigarette. Later, he again disarms Cairo by slapping him in the face. When Cairo protests to the manner in which he is being treated, Spade replies, “When you’re slapped you’ll take it and like it.” His dismissive attitude toward Cairo is reflective of his attitude toward

women, indicating that like women, homosexuals will find no place in patriarchal order and will be subjected to lesser more submissive roles in society.

Aside from his dominating physical strength, Bogart's Spade possesses a verbal agility that is capable of neutralizing and manipulating both men and women. He uses language as his weapon, a sort of blunt poetry that stakes a claim while at the same time stunning its recipient. Spade's mastery of language is noted by Gutman (Sydney Greenstreet), an educated sophisticate who also functions as a representational warning against homosexuality, when he states, "By Gad, sir, you are a character. There's never any telling what you'll say or do next, except that it's bound to be something astonishing." Bogart's performance helps to define the hard-boiled tradition, which Schrader defines as an expression of "a cynical way of acting and thinking that separated one from the world of everyday emotions – romanticism with a protective shell."⁴⁵

In fact, Spade's performed masculinities are so convincing that the gaps and flaws within its construction go practically unnoticed by everyone except his secretary, Effie, who attempts to warn him at the start of the investigation by stating, "You worry me. You think you know what you're doing, but you're too slick for your own good. Someday you're going to find it out." Effie adores Spade and is unconditionally dedicated to serving his every need. She functions as a surrogate wife, but her love and devotion are dismissed and unreturned by Spade. Spade must reject Effie because she represents the domestication of his masculinity. As a man's man, Spade is independent and free. He cannot be restrained by the conventional expectations of the family. He rejects all sexual attachments that may potentially lead to the castrating emasculation of marriage. As

Deborah Thomas explains, “[w]omen function within film noir as agents both of prescriptive normality and its transgression, oppressive in the former role and dangerous in the latter.”⁴⁶ The film’s view of marriage is rather bleak from the start – Archer is presented as a lecher, Thursby abandoned his wife and children for Wonderly, Spade is having an affair with Archer’s wife Iva (Gladys George), and the three men Gutman, Cairo, and Wilmer (Elisha Cook Jr.) are involved in a dysfunctional, homoerotic love triangle that ends in a symbolic act of filicide. There is a distrust of women typical to noir throughout the film, and it is best illustrated by the multiplicity of Miss Wonderly, who presents herself with three different faces: the menaced woman (as Miss Wonderly), the redeeming woman (as Miss Leblanc), and finally as the femme fatale (as Brigid O’Shaughnessy). As Krutnik points out, “[i]n these narratives, the sexual woman becomes one of the principle vehicles for the hero’s own self-definition.”⁴⁷ By solving the mystery of Brigid, Spade solves the mystery of himself. He gains knowledge of his boundaries and limitations by mastering politics of his sexual prowess. Spade wants Brigid sexually only after she admits that she has “been bad.” He seems excited by her confession, yet attempts to stabilize her with a strong embrace and a passionate kiss. He uses his own sexuality as a weapon against her, which had worked in the past with Iva. However, Brigid is more cunning and devious than Iva. She has transgressed too far over the line and will need to be controlled by the institutionalized patriarchy later in the film.

Just as Bogart is performing a role in the film, so too is Spade performing a role in the narrative. His tough guy act is merely a mask he wears, a protective coating that shields him from the possibility of being seen as vulnerable and exposed, either sexually,

emotionally, or physically. His speech and movements are structured, predetermined operations; they are learned and developed responses to a noir world that is riddled with unseen threats. The performance is so perfect that even Spade believes it to be the truth, until the end of the film.

There are several telltale moments in the film, however, that reveal the gaps between performance and character, moments at which the nexus of control is temporarily surrendered to an underlying weakness. The first moment is represented in a scene that parallels Spade's initial meeting with Wonderly. Just as he was rolling a cigarette when Wonderly enters his office, so too, is he rolling a cigarette when Cairo enters. However, he seems more anxious about meeting Cairo than he did Wonderly. His interest is piqued when Effie hands him a gardenia-scented card, which he smells and then exclaims, "Gardenia! Quick, darling, in with him." The scene suggests a latent homosexuality that must be tamped back down in order to maintain his masculinity, which is why he violently manhandles Cairo later. Cairo represents what Gates describes as, "the double threat of being foreign and homosexual."⁴⁸ The second and most telling gap in control comes after Bogart performs an angry tirade for Gutman and Wilmer. He threatens them both with violence if they do not come clean and provide the facts. But as he exits the apartment, there appears a noticeable smile on Bogart's face, indicating that he was acting out a role, a prescribed representation of his virility. However, the gap comes when Bogart notices his shaking hand prior to entering the elevator. The moment suggests a loss of control – the performance of his own masculinity got away from him and was threatening to his identity. The third and most obvious gap comes at the hands of

the three homosexuals in the film. Gutman, Cairo, and Wilmer drug Spade, rendering him unconscious. This is his most physically vulnerable point in the film, and Wilmer takes advantage of the moment to exact revenge. He kicks him in the face as revenge for all the abuses that he had to suffer at Spade's whim.

The protagonist's redemption and final assertion of his masculinity allows him to become fully reformed within the homosocial, patriarchal order. He determines that Brigid was responsible for killing Archer, avenges his partner's murder, and consequently turns her over to the police, while at the same time rejecting her as a mate. As Thomas notes, "the 'spider woman' is submitted to male containment and control, and the male reinstated to his 'right' and 'proper' place."⁴⁹ Despite the allure of her sexuality and the possible pleasures she may be capable of providing, the patriarchal code dictates that, "[w]hen a man's partner is killed, he's supposed to do something. It makes no difference what you thought of him. He was your partner, and you're supposed to do something about it." Spade also turns all three homosexuals over to the police, providing details of their crimes, and thereby removing them from society. According to Gates, he "chooses to side with the law in the end: his reward is to evade punishment for any of his social, legal, or sexual transgressions."⁵⁰ By solving the crimes and restoring order, Spade has also made peace with the authorities, the guardians of the patriarchal order, as represented by the D.A. and the police.

The Maltese Falcon defined many of the narrative conventions employed by noir, especially its preoccupation with sexual politics and the negotiations of power. The representations of masculinity performed by Bogart in the film serve as a reference point

from which variations may be noted. In the prewar era, masculinity was a performance of absolute control. The few gaps that appear through the film's close examination are ultimately undermined by the carefully constructed mise-en-scene and execution of dialogue. Despite several glimpses into the character's flaws, Bogart's portrayal of Spade is marked by an infrangible composure that is exhibited through his command of the dialogue, his meticulous attire and his deliberately executed mannerisms. There is no point in the film at which Bogart's appearance betrays his assumption of control and calculation. He never appears disheveled or confounded. The maintenance of control is tantamount to the performance of his masculinity, and that includes the deliberate construction of his appearance. As Bogart moves into the war and postwar eras, a loosening of his appearance in all his roles functions as an indication that the gaps in performance are widening and the seams holding performance and the ideology together are unraveling.

THE BIG SLEEP (1946)

Bogart's second noir film, *The Big Sleep* (Hawks, 1946), is perhaps his most memorable and iconic noir performance. Starring alongside his then future wife, Lauren Bacall, Bogart's portrayal of Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe is infused with the dynamic "Bogie/Bacall" chemistry that would become legendary. Bogart's Marlowe is slightly softened in comparison to the hard-edged, dispassionate style that he affected as Sam Spade. The romantic subplot draws directly from his success as the romantic heavy, Rick Blaine, in *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942). In fact, Bogart's performance as Marlowe can be seen as an amalgam of traits borrowed from several of his previous roles. As Megan

Abbott explains, “Bogart’s iconographic status seems to emerge from a bleeding together of his actually quite distinct portrayals as a hard and intermittently cruel Sam Spade (*The Maltese Falcon*), a tough and honorable Harry Morgan (*To Have and Have Not*), a savvy Rick whose conscience rises to the exigencies of the time (*Casablanca*), and a sardonic, knightly Philip Marlowe (*The Big Sleep*) moving through the mean streets to weed out corruption and save damsels in distress.⁵¹ Bogart’s portrayal as Marlowe assumes a sense of uncertainty and distrust that betrays the cool, calculated manner with which he attempts to maintain control. The film is obsessed with liminal spaces as a means of questioning identity and even reality, and Bogart’s Marlowe is far from immune to this inflection of doubt. The film intends to produce a character who is constantly in control of “himself and the situation in which he finds himself,”⁵² but in reality, there are several moments in which control is beyond his grasp. These moments reveal cracks in his performance of masculinity which directly indicate the changing ideology of the time.

Filmed during World War II, *The Big Sleep* reflects many of the anxieties faced by men returning home from the front. These anxieties were a direct result of the assumed threat to their masculinity as presented by the new roles that women were taking in society and the workplace. Brian Gallagher elaborates by stating, “[t]o the extent that the film contained a covert message for returning servicemen (and those to whom they returned), the message was essentially unsentimental: do not expect domestic life to be as it was (or as, ideally, you envisioned it), but rather accept the deprivations, lapses and compromises of the war years and make do despite.”⁵³ The shifting roles of women during the war years represented a threat to the patriarchal order and signified a possible

destabilization in the absolute power and control that American men had become accustomed to enjoying. The bedrock institutions forged within the ideological construct of male dominance seemed vulnerable and exposed. *The Big Sleep* looks in depth at these issues and Bogart's performance suggests the need for a representative ideal through which further assertions of masculinity can be informed. The film's landscape and characters exist in a liminal space between prewar and postwar social norms, a space in which sexuality, gender, and institutional identities are questioned and induced to deviate from those norms.

The film's opening credits play against the silhouetted Bogart and Bacall, smoking cigarettes and placing them beside one another in the ashtray – a clear sexual innuendo. Interestingly, Bogart lights Bacall's cigarette before his own, subsuming the subtextual notion that women have obtained a phallus – the symbol of power previously reserved for male characters. The sequence, as a parallel to the opening scene of *The Maltese Falcon*, identifies the shift that has taken place during the war years. Annette Kuhn asserts, “[t]he trouble, the disturbance, at the heart of *The Big Sleep* is its symptomatic articulation of the threat posed to the law of patriarchy by the feminine. The text's response is to recuperate pleasure and reassurance through closure, but at the same time to hint at obsession and violence where closure threatens to fail.”⁵⁴ The threat of the feminine is presented in various configurations throughout the film, but the opening credits hint at the complexities of sexual economics and gender confusion that will be presented within the plot and performances.

The narrative moves through a series of enigmas and investigations which are initiated through the artifice of a blackmail threat. Marlowe is hired by General Sternwood (Charles Waldron) to end the extortion threats against his daughter, Carmen (Martha Vickers). The investigation assumes its own identity and Marlowe, having quickly resolved the blackmail case, becomes obsessed with finding the missing Sean Regan, General Sternwood's previous investigator and close friend. It is important to note that, in terms of masculinity, Sternwood presents a problematic example. Confined to a wheelchair because he can no longer stand on his own legs (a symbol of impotence), Sternwood (ironic nomenclature) becomes a voyeur – he admits to taking pleasure in watching other men drink and smoke, activities in which he is no longer capable of engaging. He also admits that he took particular pleasure in watching Regan drink. Marlowe becomes obsessed with the concept of Regan. He is a character that is never seen in the film: he has no body; he is pure myth. Marlowe's search for Regan is actually a search for himself, an attempt to find his own identity. As Michael Walker observes, "Regan is like Marlowe's doppelganger ... typical noir motif, relating for example to films noir in which the hero, usually unwittingly, is seeking himself."⁵⁵ The entire film provides obstacles and challenges to this quest. The most imposing obstacle to Marlowe's discovery of the truth exists in the form of a woman – Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall).

Vivian represents the enigma at the heart of the case and the nexus of control through which all truth flows. Her duplicitous behaviors and misleading explanations function as the obstacles that Marlowe must resolve, before he is able to solve the mystery of himself. Marlowe's challenge is to wrangle control from Vivian in order to

conclude the investigation and ascertain the facts. Walker suggests that the film lacks a “full-fledged femme fatale” and that because Vivian is “played by Bacall [she is] guaranteed to be ‘redeemed’ for Bogart in the end.”⁵⁶ However, it can be observed that all the women in the film’s noir world – Vivian, Carmen, and Agnes (Sonia Darrin) – take turns assuming the role of femme fatale, luring Marlowe closer and closer to doom with each turn of their deception. Despite his obvious attraction to Vivian, Marlowe attempts to maintain an emotional and psychological distance from Vivian. This is often connoted in the sharp dialogue exchanged between the pair. Marlowe attempts to masculinize Vivian – to “fix” her femininity and, by doing so, minimize her threat as a woman. According to Abbott, Marlowe reforms Vivian by turning her into “a type of citizen-soldier’s ideal mate, containing a complementary degree of toughness, realism, and unabashed sexuality, without being, like [her] psychotic [sister] Carmen, naturally treacherous or murderous.”⁵⁷ Marlowe can only solve the case, and therefore his own identity, after he has solved the problem of Vivian. Having saved her from a subversive past, she becomes the codified exemplar of the redeemed woman. Unlike Miss Wonderly in *The Maltese Falcon*, Vivian can be fixed, reformed, and made to fit within the narrow confines of the male’s expectations. The final lines of the film exploit this archetype when Marlowe asks, “What’s wrong with you?” Vivian replies, “Nothing you can’t fix.” However, the implied redemption is troubled by the fact that the characters are trapped in the heart of the noir world and their fate remains uncertain, as the shot of them kissing fades out to the sounds of sirens approaching hopefully to rescue them. It is worth noting that Marlowe and Vivian, the only possibly “traditional” heterosexual relationship in the

film, are trapped in the noir world, leaving the fate of their relationship unresolved.

Bogart's masculinity is also left in a liminal state as he teeters between redemption and the deviant realm of Geiger's house. The uncertainty associated with the film's ending is reflective of the uncertainty surrounding the state of civilian masculinity during the war.

As Krutnik points out, one of the most fundamental results of the war [was] the dislocation of men from their former sense of being the prime movers of the culture."⁵⁸ Bogart is trapped here, in need of rescue and uncertain of his destiny – a clear indication that masculinity is beginning to doubt its own agency.

The heart of the noir world is represented by Geiger's (Theodore von Eltz) house. The subtext of the film implies that Geiger, who is blackmailing the Sternwoods, is a sexual deviant, a homosexual, and a pornographer. Geiger's house is the scene of a drug-induced, erotic photo session with Carmen and a murder; it serves as the main focus of Marlowe's intrigue. He becomes preoccupied with the house and returns there several times throughout the film. The house represents deviant sexuality and criminality, the loosening of social mores and a loss of control that enacts the primal through sex and violence. As Kuhn observes, "Geiger's house, cut off from the daylight world of the familiar, is the classic 'other scene' – the site exactly of mystery and enigma. It is shadowy, closed-in, cluttered and messy – the *mise-en-scene* of the Unconscious, of Freud's Uncanny, at once both familiar and alien, reassuring and threatening."⁵⁹ The house is a symbol of Marlowe's loosening grasp on the truth, his fascination for the subversive, and his wavering loss of self-control. Hence, the house is the necessary location for an ambiguous resolution and the site of Marlowe's confession. As he awaits

the arrival of Eddie Mars (John Ridgely), the kingpin gangster responsible for Regan's murder, his hand shakes while loading his gun and he drops the bullets (an obvious metaphor of his failing grasp on his own masculinity). Vivian notices his actions and notes, "You're the one who's shaking now." He replies, "I'm scared, Angel." This moment is a mirrored image of the scene in *The Maltese Falcon* in which Bogart's hand shakes briefly, yet not uncontrollably, after a histrionic performance before Gutman. However, in *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe is no longer performing. He is genuinely scared and is losing control of himself, a fact that is also indicated by the mise-en-scene, as Marlowe's attire and appearances become increasingly more disheveled as the narrative progresses.

Marlowe's response is candid and represents a departure from the self-contained, forced masculinity possessed previously by both Marlowe and Bogart's Sam Spade. To admit fear is to admit a loss of one's bearings and lack of control over a situation. Despite there having been several occasions when both Marlowe and Spade had lost control, particularly the scenes in which both characters are rendered unconscious by criminal antagonists, the confession marks a moment of doubt concerning one's own masculinity. It is acceptable if this doubt is masked by performance, as when Marlowe affects stereotypical homosexual mannerisms in order to investigate Geiger's bookstore, but an open confession is a rejection of the dominant fiction or patriarchal rules for constructing a narrative. It exposes the cracks in the tough-guy mask and suggests a departure in the representation of a male persona that had been very carefully constructed.

These cracks present a fissure between substance and performance. The male persona and man himself seem separated at the seams. A division of identity is suggested and the protagonist has revealed a lack that he is incapable of seeing within himself. As Thomas suggests, “[t]he hero’s dividedness and his lack of self-knowledge are staples of the genre, played upon in the swing between the presentation of the protagonist as a controlling presence on the one hand, and his doomed or even explicitly acquiescent surrender to narrative loss of control, on the other, a loss ferociously denied through violent self-assertion....”⁶⁰ The ambiguity and uncertainty that permeates the text is an indicator of Marlowe’s failing equilibrium, which moreover represents the disorientation of the male in American society during the war years. Bogart’s Marlowe fails to maintain the same level of control and calculation as did his Spade. The text and the cultural context of *The Big Sleep* cannot prevent the appearance of signifiers that mark the anxieties and stresses within the male identity. Bogart’s performance indicates a shift, in just four years of war, from absolute certainty and privilege to cause doubts and fears within the American male’s understanding of himself and his place within American society.

IN A LONELY PLACE (1950)

Bogart’s final noir film tears the mask of masculinity from the face of the hero and truly explores the consequences of war and violence upon the male psyche. Returning soldiers, traumatized by the horrors of war and commended for their acts of violence, found themselves morally and culturally displaced after returning home from the frontlines. Chopra-Gant describes the returning veteran as an “aimless wandering

character, unable to find a productive place in civilian society [who] can be understood as the distillation of anxieties about the consequences that would follow should America fail to settle veterans into productive postwar roles reflecting the expectations of status that had been raised by men's military experiences."⁶¹ *In a Lonely Place* (Ray, 1950) expresses these anxieties through the story of a struggling screenwriter who hasn't produced a hit since before the war. Bogart's character, Dix Steele (again the name is being used as an ironic indicator of failing masculinity), is a war veteran with an extensive police record, which includes drunken violence and physical attacks against women.

The film, a product of Bogart's own production company, explores the pitfalls of traditional masculinity and the consequences of violence, especially the violence of war and its impact upon the male psyche. Steele becomes the prime suspect in the murder investigation of a young hatcheck girl with whom he had spent some time on the night of the murder. Steele is not guilty, but he is stigmatized by his reputation for violence. It is a woman, Laurel Gray (Gloria Grahame), who attempts to redeem Steele – a reversal of the traditional noir gender roles. Also, Steele is the subject of the investigation, a place usually reserved for the femme fatale in the noir film. As Cohan notes, the film "places the film noir tough guy in the position more commonly occupied by the femme fatale."⁶² Steele is the enigma, the source of investigation, and the projection of his own denials. He refuses to recognize his own violence as a problem; he is not only dissociated from himself, but with the culture in which he exists. Locating the enigma within the protagonist serves as an indicator that the male identity is no longer capable of

recognizing itself. *In a Lonely Place* presents a clear departure from both *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep* in the sense that its examination of violence and the subjugation of women through masculine assertion are openly rejecting the traditional clauses of masculine culture, while placing the male at the site of investigation. The film suggests that, while violence is acceptable during wartime, there is no place for the unrestrained male temperament in a civilized society. Dana Polan suggests that Steele's behavior indicates an "explanation in the mythology of the returned soldier as psychotic, a common image in popular film and literature of the postwar period."⁶³ Although this position offers an explanation for the behavior, the film's position is one of critical examination. A male who lacks self-control is likened to a hysterical female; he cannot be trusted and must be investigated in order to be contained. As Abbott explains, "[h]ysteria is a bodily revolt of the socially powerless."⁶⁴ Steele has lost the tools of his masculinity, his words, and now must express himself through violence.

Steele exists in a purely homosocial world. He surrounds himself with male counterparts who are delighted by his exploits and who marvel at his masculinity. He uses women for sexual relief and denies them even the slightest attention once he is through with them. This is clearly expressed when he meets up with an old flame, Fran (Alex Talton), at the nightclub he frequently visits. Fran tells Steele that she has been trying to call him, but he never answers. She asks, "Don't you like to talk anymore?" Steele responds, "Not to people who have my number." The suggestion is that he prefers anonymous one-night stands to the emotional complications of a relationship. It is less complicated in the world of men, so he avoids entanglements with women. All signs of

traditionally healthy masculinity are placed within the general context of a homosocial culture – which exists to enable antisocial masculine behavior and condone its expressions through violence. However, as the film progresses, it becomes clear that this token behavior is criticizing, rather than praising those traditional male markers. Despite the normalization of Steele’s violence through the encouragement of his male friends who believe it is merely a product of his genius, the film refutes these claims by suggesting that Steele is beyond redemption. As Polan points out, the film’s move from a noir/thriller “toward a domestic melodrama suggests an origin of male violence in a personal failure that the man refuses to admit.”⁶⁵ But might this denial by the protagonist and his supporting male characters suggest an acute denial within American culture – a refusal to acknowledge the psychological scars suffered by returning war veterans and an unwillingness to admit to abuse-suffered women in the domestic shadows?

After being questioned for Mildred Atkinson’s (Martha Stewart) murder, Steele meets Laurel, who has also been called in for questioning. Laurel becomes enamored with Steele and immediately begins helping him write his screenplay. She attempts to redeem him through the normalizing process of heterosexual rehabilitation. They “play house,” performing normative gender functions within the domestic realm. All seems to be going well, until the intense scrutiny placed on Steele begins to unravel the already loosely tied moorings that have barely managed to anchor him behind a relatively calm facade of homeostasis. After he realizes that Laurel has spoken to the police behind his back, Steele loses control of his anger and nearly kills a man because of road rage. He is about to smash the man’s head open with a large rock when Laurel screams and shakes

him out of his rage. The incident frightens Laurel and she begins to realize what she was previously unable to see: Steele is not in control of his body or his mind. He is a hysterical male. His masculinity has lost control of itself and is no longer viewed as an admirable quality.

Aside from the homosocial veneration of Steele's character, which as Polan states, "excuse[s] his violence because they regard him as a special and privileged being,"⁶⁶ the film rejects the ideological tenets of violence as a means of justified conflict resolution. In fact, Polan declares, "[Steele] is not a special being, if his talent isn't proven, even this curious defense of the violent male becomes hard to sustain."⁶⁷ *In a Lonely Place* is a self-reflexive indictment against uncontrolled masculinity, but it offers no remedy for the ailing male psyche. In fact, it attempts to repair itself by prescribing marriage as a last resort for redemption, but it proves to be futile. The violence has been unleashed, the damage is done, and Laurel will never see Steele the same way again. He gives her ten seconds to respond to his proposal. He says, "A simple yes or no will do very well." Krutnik discusses the meaning of marriage in noir films by stating, "[m]arital and familial relations play a crucial part in legitimising and ordering the conventional frameworks of sexual identity and sexual role, and there was an attempt to restructure these after the 'discursive confusion' of the war years."⁶⁸ Steele is using marriage here as a cure all, a magic elixir to solve all his problems and, in turn, solve all the woes suffered by society in the postwar aftermath. He seems to be intimidating her into accepting. Laurel agrees to marry him, but only as a ruse, as a means of escape. She plans to run away from him as soon as she has the opportunity. When she explains this to Mel (Art

Smith), Steele's agent, she confesses her fears by stating, "I'm scared, I don't trust him." Mel's response is a rationalization which attempts to renormalize Steele's violence. He tells Laurel, "You knew he was dynamite. He has to explode sometimes... Always violent. Why it's as much a part of him as the color of his eyes... He's Dix Steele, and if you want him, you gotta take it all." Despite the fact that neither of them seem certain as to whether or not Steele is actually innocent of Mildred's murder, Mel seems determined to convince Laurel to stay with him. Laurel remains resolved to leave Steele. Her parting bid to the relationship is to give Mel the script that she and Steele had been working on together.

When Steele discovers the script is missing, he acts as though Laurel has betrayed his love and committed an unforgivable crime. V.F. Perkins describes the weight of this moment: "[t]he script is what she and Dix have made together out of their love – Dix as writer, Laurel as inspiration and typist – and using it to hurt Dix is poignantly shown to be like giving her baby away."⁶⁹ The act infuriates Steele to such an extent that he begins frantically questioning Laurel's loyalty. The scene and film culminate with Steele discovering the truth – Laurel is trying to leave him. He becomes so enraged he imposes himself physically upon her. She begs him to stop, pleading that she will "always love him," but Steele is no longer able to restrain his anger; he strangles her in a trance-like state possessed by the demons of his masculine insecurities. The ringing phone is what breaks him from his trance. When he answers, the police inform him that they have received a confession from Martha's boyfriend and Steele is no longer the subject of an investigation. He gives the phone to Laurel, so that she can hear it directly from the

police. Her response is a chilling indictment against the oppressive will of patriarchy against women in the postwar years. She tells the police, “Yesterday this would have meant so much to us. Now it doesn’t matter at all.” The suggestion is that somehow, she could have fixed him before his violence spiraled out of control and was directed at her, but now, it is too late; she knows better, and not even love can save them now. Perkins sums up the film's troubled conclusion by stating:

The film’s depth and its modesty are both manifest in an ending which is sad and oddly unresolved rather than tragic. Dix and Laurel are left more or less where we found them at the start; only their relationship has reached a conclusion. Even here, inflation is avoided: what has come to an end is not the finest of romances but a briefly creative respite from looking at the world with anger and receiving its glance with shame.⁷⁰

In a Lonely Place serves as an illustration of the changes that had taken place in American culture, from the prewar to the post war periods. A stark contrast to the self-contained, morally righteous Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*, Dix Steele is the degenerative product of uncontrolled anger and feckless anxieties as performed within the ideological fiction of assumed male dominance. The seams and fissures between identity and ideology reveal a failed system of repression that could not remain hidden past the horrors of the war. The aggressive masculinities that had been contained within the polished veneer of idyllic cultural representations were put out on display and examined, investigated, and criticized. Cohan describes the shift in representation through Bogart’s performances, by stating:

The shift in tone and temperament from Bogart’s quintessential performance as street-smart Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* to street-brawler Dix Steele in *Lonely Place* shows how quickly (just ten years) this reevaluation of tough masculinity took hold, at least within the contours of the popular actor’s persona. It suggests, moreover, how thoroughly middle-class America had reconceived its standard of hegemonic masculinity following the war.⁷¹

Bogart's representations indicate a crisis in the male construct which is attempting to redefine itself within a modernized social and cultural context. The continued escalation of violence as a means of resolution in these films, only serves to reinforce the notion that men were losing control of themselves and were desperate to securely reassert themselves atop the hierarchical social order through whatever means necessary. Within complexities of the noir world and the characters who inhabit its shadowy landscape, all serve as projections of the male persona and his simultaneous fears toward both conformity and transgression. Noir is an allegorical state of transgression where the male loses possession of himself and is punished for doing so. However, despite the treacherous influence of sexuality and the perilous consequences of his actions, there is always embedded within the plot, a possible road back to redemption through conformity to a moral lifestyle.

Noir films, by their very nature, are an exploration of the male identity in crisis. The films explore the paranoia and confusion of the wartime and postwar time American male, who believed that his identity and social status had been threatened by the new roles assumed by women during his absence. It should also be noted that these fears and uncertainties were the product of white male hysteria and the projection of those fears were placed mainly upon the feminine threat. As Abbott reveals, "[m]asculinity is situated as weak, changeable, even hysterical, with the feminine characterized as potentially lethal in strength and amoral will."⁷² Anything that presented a threat to the ideological construct of traditional masculinity was to be feared, distrusted, and either destroyed or reformed.

Bogart's persona and various representations of masculinity remains iconic. His performances still function to inform contemporary ideations of male behavior in film and television. The trajectory of his noir films offer an insight into the social conditions which find a voice in cultural representations. Bogart's performances of masculinity are especially interesting in that they may serve as a barometer, gauging the pressures placed at any given time upon the patriarchal order. By delineating the degrees of transformation through modes of control and loss of control, Bogart's films function as vehicles of representation through which the unconscious anxieties of the American male during the wartime and postwar eras were revealed as increasingly transgressive and desperate.

¹ Steven Cohan, *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), 80.

² Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, "Masculinity in Classical Hollywood Filmmaking," in *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 257.

³ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 834.

⁴ Paul Willemsen, "Anthony Mann Looking at the Male," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema & Media* 81, no. 15-17 (1981), 16.

⁵ Mulvey, 838.

⁶ Steven Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema," *Screen* 24, no. 6 (1983), 11.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹ Steven Cohan, Introduction of *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), 3.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Constance Penley and Sharron Willis, Introduction of *Male Trouble*, ed. Constance Penley and Sharron Willis (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xviii.

¹⁴ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992), 16.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15-6.

¹⁶ Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1991), 16.

¹⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁸ Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," *Film Comment* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 11.

¹⁹ Deborah Thomas, "How Hollywood Deal with the Deviant Male," in *The Book of Film Noir*, ed. Ian Cameron (New York: Continuum, 1993), 63.

²⁰ Janey Place, "Women in film noir," in *Women in film noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 50.

²¹ Ibid., 35.

²² Krutnik, 67.

²³ Ibid., 63.

²⁴ Thomas, 59.

²⁵ Ibid., 63.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 68.

²⁸ Megan E. Abbott, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 29.

29 Ibid., 31.

30 Mike Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Post-war America: Masculinity, Family and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2006), 149.

31 Ibid., 93.

32 Steven Cohan, *Masked Men Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 79.

33 Philippa Gates, "The Three Sam Spades: The Shifting Model of American Masculinity in the Three Films of *The Maltese Falcon*," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 49, no. 1 (2008): 7.

34 Ibid., 21.

35 Abbott, 26.

36 Gates, 16.

37 Joel Dinerstein, "Emergent Noir: Film Noir and the Great Depression in *High Sierra* (1941) and *This Gun for Fire* (1942)," *Journal of American Studies* 42, no. 3 (2008): 424.

38 Associations between male virility and cigarettes had been firmly embedded in American society by this point, so much so that Edward Bernays used the connection to encourage women to smoke in a 1929 propaganda campaign which he named "Torches of Freedom."

39 Krutnik, 63.

40 Frank K. Tomasulo, "The Maltese Phallcon: The Oedipal Trajectory of Classical Hollywood Cinema," in *Authority and Transgression in Literature and Film*, ed. Bonnie and Hans Braendlin (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996), 80.

41 Place, 50.

42 Tomasulo, 79.

43 Ibid., 83-4.

44 Gates, 7.

45 Schrader, 10.

46 Thomas, 64.

47 Krutnik, 64.

48 Gates, 18.

49 Thomas, 59.

50 Gates, 20.

51 Megan E. Abbott, "'Nothing You Can't Fix': Screening Marlowe's Masculinity," *Studies in the Novel* 35, no. 3 (2003): 306.

52 Ibid.

53 Brian Gallagher, "Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep*: A Paradigm for the Postwar American Family," in *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, ed. J.K. Van Dover (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 152-3.

54 Annette Kuhn, "*The Big Sleep*: Censorship, Film text, and Sexuality," in *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1985), 95.

55 Michael Walker, "*The Big Sleep*: Howard Hawks and Film Noir," in *The Book of Film Noir*, ed. Ian Cameron (New York: Continuum, 1993), 201.

56 Ibid., 197.

57 Abbott, *The Street*. . . , 142.

58 Krutnik, 64.

59 Kuhn, 91.

60 Thomas, 66.

61 Chopra-Gant, 151.

62 Cohan, *Masked Men*. . . , 101.

63 Dana Polan, *In a Lonely Place* (London: British Film Institute Press, 1993), 36.

64 Abbott, *The Street*. . . , 35.

65 Polan, 38.

66 Ibid, 37.

67 Ibid, 39.

68 Krutnik, 61.

69 V.F. Perkins, "In a Lonely Place," in *The Book of Film Noir*, ed. Ian Cameron (New York: Continuum, 1993), 230.

70 Ibid., 231.

71 Cohan, *Masked Men*. . . , 106.

72 Abbott, *The Street*. . . , 27.