

Generic Innovation and Social Change: The American Thriller in the 1970s

by

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CHAPTER 6

The Blockbusters of the 1970s

I think the tactics the Don used aren't much different from those General Motors used against Ralph Nader. I mean, if the Cosa Nostra had been black or Socialist, Corleone would have been dead or in jail. But because the Mafia patterned itself so closely on the corporation, and dealt in a hard-nosed way with money and with politics, it prospered. The Mafia is so . . . American (Marlon Brando quoted in Biskind 1990 p. 41)

KARRAS: I think it might be helpful if I gave you some background on the different personalities that Regan has manifested. So far, I'd say there seem to be three. She's convinced that she's -

MERRIN: There is only one.

Scene from *The Exorcist* (1973).

JAWS is a middle-class *Moby Dick* (Biskind 1975 p. 1).

On the television a ship was sinking/ It seemed so real but it was just a movie/ Made by Irwin Allen (boy, what a relief)/ And on this ship was Ernest Borgnine, brave in the face of certain death/ He played a cop on a pleasure cruise, along with his wife: an ex-prostitute/ Of course, Shelley Winters, she was on the ship - she was good, too, but she died/ As did Gene Hackman, a preacher who gave his life so that others could live/ He died shouting: 'How many more lives?'

On the screen the city crumbled/ So realistic but yet another film/ by the master of realism, Mr. Irwin Allen/ No less a man than Lorne Greene/ And Mr. George Kennedy risked their lives to save the lives of strangers/ Their selflessness was moving/ Chuck Heston was in the movie, too, but he was just a ham.

On the TV a building in flames/ It was *Towering Inferno* by Irwin Allen/ O.J. Simpson led the cast/ In a man against nature fight for survival/ It was awesome, and then it blew me away.

Killdozer, 'Man vs Nature' (1989).¹

¹ *Earthquake* was made at Universal Studios and Irwin Allen had no direct part in its production.

Introduction

The 1970s saw the growth of a particular phenomenon with regard to the commercial production of narrative. This was not so much the bestseller, which had been around for some time, so much as the *massively popular* text which existed in a number of media and was subject to huge publicity. Such texts were not necessarily just bestsellers; instead, they were bestsellers which outsold their nearest rivals by some considerable distance, and which, through advance publicity, subsequent circulation and marketing in areas outside the general remit of publishing became part of the cultural fabric of America and other countries, for short, or sometimes extended periods. Many of these texts are discussed by Sutherland (1981), who also adopts the term 'blockbuster' to refer to those superselling texts which comprise high profile films as well as books (p. 9). If we consider the first five from his list of the top ten fiction bestsellers of the 1970s, it is notable that three of them can be considered to have a great deal in common with the thriller genre in general. The list is as follows: 1. *The Godfather* (1969) 2. *The Exorcist* (1971) 3. *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* (1970) 4. *Love Story* (1970) 5. *Jaws* (1974). *The Godfather*, *The Exorcist* and *Jaws* all have things in common with the thriller in a general sense, whether by virtue of the centrality of suspense to their narratives or by concentration on the world of crime in *The Godfather*, for example. Not only did these texts exist in such massive-selling form as books, but they also gained a high profile in the 1970s as films, appearing very soon after the book version of their texts. If we look at the top grossing films of the seventies in terms of rentals in North America we find that *Star Wars* (1977) is at the top with \$185.1m worth of rentals, followed by *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) with \$134.2m (these, and subsequent rental statistics are taken from Finler 1992 pp. 479-481). Both are regularly categorized as science fiction/fantasy, but never as thrillers. In third place is *Jaws* (1975) with \$133.4m, fourth is *Grease* (1978), then come *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Godfather* (1972). Clearly, the three texts which achieved such massive sales in book form have gained the same high profile in the cinematic medium. Enough, in

fact, to posit their permeation of many levels of culture. Although there are many other thriller texts which achieved such box office status in terms of sales, there is only one set of texts which bore great resemblance to the thriller while establishing a historically specific genre for themselves in the cinema. This is the 'disaster movie' which flourished for a short time in the early 1970s. The prime examples of this phenomenon were *The Towering Inferno* (1974), *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) and *Earthquake* (1974) which are at positions 22, 27, and 39 respectively in the table of high grossers. Taken collectively, their gross rental figures would amount to \$128.3m, placing them above *Grease* - this is without taking into account such other disaster movies as *Airport 1975* (1974) (at 55 in the table, with \$25.8m worth of rentals). As a representative genre of the period, then, the disaster movie is of considerable importance.

There are a number of factors which bind all these high profile texts together. In the case of the first three - *The Godfather*, *The Exorcist* and *Jaws* - they all existed as bestselling written texts before becoming films. However, as we will see, there emerged a pattern amongst these texts in that they were all considered in terms of their adaptability for cinema either while in the galley stage or before. The production of the written texts therefore proceeded with this in mind. In the case of the disaster movies this was no less true: *The Poseidon Adventure* was based on the preliminary work of Paul Gallico which led to his novel of the same name (1971); *Earthquake* was derived from an original screenplay by Mario Puzo and George Fox, the former of whom was, of course, the novelist responsible for *The Godfather*; and *The Towering Inferno* was the result of an extraordinary collaboration to produce a screenplay based on the galleys of two almost identical novels (see below). All of these texts, possibly sometimes enhanced by their existence in more than one medium, became so well known that they passed into culture as by-words to designate aspects of social life. For instance, *The Godfather* and particularly its dialogue would become a frame of reference for discourse about the Mafia; similarly, shark attacks for many years were reported with some reference to *Jaws*. Other kinds of long- and short-term effects developed from

such texts. All of these texts were also subject to new strategies of advance publicity designed to saturate the public with some kind of knowledge of the texts' contents. These strategies were often based on some aspect of the text which was not specifically to do with the narrative, and occasionally involved marketing of products such as toys which had some reference to the narratives of the texts. Sutherland (1981 pp. 88 ff) identifies this last phenomenon with regard to *Star Wars* and devotes some pages to a substantial discussion of it. However, the process really began in earnest a few years earlier with the marketing of *Jaws* which elevated small-scale versions of this strategy to new heights. Finally, amongst other features which these texts hold in common, the important one for our purposes is that their extraordinarily high profile in American culture of the period entailed that these texts were perceived as the arenas for debate over the meaning of the contemporary social formation. Each of these texts was regarded in some way as saying something profound about American life in the 1970s; the responses of millions of readers suggested to commentators that these fictional narratives were more akin to social phenomena that galvanized a nation rather than mere pieces of commercially produced entertainment. In this way, commentators worked (often unwittingly) with publicity machines to assist readers in deriving meaning from these texts and to place the texts in a position of great influence as representatives of the American social formation in the 1970s.

The Godfather

The Godfather was one of a number of texts in the 1970s which took as their theme the merging of the old traditions of Sicilian or Italian families with the exigencies of the American way of life. These range from the memoirs written in Teresa (1973), Talese (1971), and Maas (1970) to fictional crime pot-boilers such as Quarry (1972) which was made into the film, *The Don is Dead* (1973) directed by Richard Fleischer. In fact,

it is more than likely that one or two of these texts were direct attempts to cash in on the success of *The Godfather*. This would be understandable given the incredible financial success of the latter text. The book spent sixty-seven weeks on the bestseller lists after it was published in 1969, selling one million copies in hardback and twelve million in paperback before the film was released (Biskind 1990 p. 4). The film built upon publicity derived from the fame of the book and generated its own before it was even released. For example, it was widely reported that Italian-American actors were picketing the Hollywood set where the production was in progress in protest at what they considered to be WASPish casting on the part of the film's producers. Too few Italian actors, they claimed, were involved in the production (Setlowe 1971). At the same time, press reports played on other features of the Italian-American community's reaction to the film, including the views and possible recriminations of real-life Mafiosi with regard to the forthcoming film (see, for instance, Pileggi 1972). Part of the advance publicity for the film was centred around its main star who, by this time, was considered a legend in American cinema. Although he only worked on the film for six weeks (Biskind 1990 p. 6), Marlon Brando was the focus of much of the film's advance publicity in articles such as those describing how the living legend still had to take a screen test for the part of Don Corleone (see, for example, *Variety* 8 March 1972). The scale of such publicity elicited the following response from one prominent reviewer of the film:

Brando, Brando, Brando and more Brando (Sarris 1972).

The fame of Brando was counterposed in the publicity to the lowly origins and part-time jobs held prior to the making of the film by some of the newer actors in the cast, especially Pacino and Cazale (Cocks 1972b p. 37). On this facile level, the film represented a social mix and the American dream of rags-to-riches or anonymity-to-stardom. On a more businesslike level, the recently appointed Paramount chief, Frank Yablans was responsible for a 'Barnumesque' publicity strategy which involved, on the film's opening in New York, multiple staggered showings of the film in various cinemas and raised ticket prices (Biskind 1990 pp. 66-68). The press also reported

various scams that were employed by queue-jumpers and ticket touts as well as a stick-up at a cinema showing *The Godfather* in New York which netted its perpetrators \$13,000 (Cocks 1972b p. 37). Biskind reports a plethora of spin-off products from the renaming of a recent Jean-Pierre Melville film to *The Godson*, to the creation of *Godfather* pizzas (p. 68). The publicity, it seems, paid off; the title of a *Variety* article of 9 May 1973 explains the situation: 'With All Else, "Godfather" Into Perch As All-Time Rental No. 1, U.S.-Canada' (see also the figures in Green 1972a, 1972b). More important, though, is that the success of the film became part of the film's overall meaning as it was formulated by reviewers and critics. So, in *Time*, for instance, the publicity surrounding the film becomes part of what the film represents as a whole:

In its first week of simultaneous release at five theaters in New York City, *The Godfather* pulled down close to half a million dollars. The lines at box offices are so long that some Broadway sharpies sell their places up front for \$20 a shot. After openings in 34 other U.S. cities last week, Paramount expects to have \$14 million stashed in the corporate kitty by the middle of next month. Says Paramount President Frank Yablans: 'The picture is nothing less than an annuity' (Cocks 1972b p. 37).

In this way, then, the narrative of the text contributes only partly to the production of meaning. Blockbusters such as *The Godfather* are thoroughly constituted by the extra-textual cues which surround them. This does not necessarily reduce the importance of the narrative to which such cues refer; however, it does influence the possible readings of the narratives.

In order to establish that the marketing strategies of the film's producers are not the only forms of extra-textual cues working upon the narrative, it is worth considering the texts of *The Godfather* briefly. The story concerns Vito Corleone, an Italian immigrant to America who has built a business empire based on crime and who has trodden a path from penniless worker to exalted elder of the 1940s Italian-American community.

Corleone has a number of sons, the youngest of whom is Michael, a college-educated war-hero who wishes to build a life outside the family business. When his father is shot by a rival family, Michael is inexorably drawn into the family's concerns, eventually assuming his father's mantle after the latter's death. In the very early pages of Puzo's novel, the Godfather is introduced in the following way:

Don Vito Corleone was a man to whom everybody came for help, and never were they disappointed. He made no empty promises, nor the craven excuse that his hands were tied by more powerful forces in the world than himself. It was not necessary that he be your friend, it was not even important that you had no means by which to repay him. Only one thing was required. That you, *you yourself*, proclaim your friendship. And then, no matter how poor or how powerless the suppliant, Don Corleone would take that man's troubles to his heart. And he would let nothing stand in the way to a solution of that man's woe. His reward? Friendship, the respectful title of 'Don', and sometimes the more affectionate salutation of 'Godfather'. And perhaps, to show respect only, never for profit, some humble gift - a gallon of homemade wine or a basket of peppered *taralles* specially baked to grace his Christmas table. It was understood, it was mere good manners to proclaim that you were in his debt and that he had the right to call upon you at any time to redeem your debt by some small service (pp. 11-12).

If we consider this crucial passage in the novel in terms of how it may be read by its original historically located audience it is possible to make some very preliminary assumptions. In its barest outline the passage is about a relationship in which one member of the relationship is in an already established position of power and the theoretical other in this relationship is constituted in terms of the power of the established one. In very general terms, then, one could say that what is dramatized here is the first development of the subject-hood of individual humans in society. So it is possible that a reading of this passage could be made along the lines of some allegory of the individual in his/her relationship to the state. At a time when many individuals within the contemporary American social formation were challenging the basis of their relationship with the state and a vast number still retained feelings of loyalty to it despite its crises, such a reading might have very specific resonances. This is to say that the potential indeterminacies of this passage, the points where the text's details are padded out by readings of it which are constituted before the text is actually read, are filled in this case by experience of being an individual in relation to the contemporary state. However, this is only one tiny fraction of the way in which such potential indeterminacies in this passage may be filled. We will return to further determinants of a reading of this passage in a moment. Let us continue to look at a few brief passages which might be read with reference to the contemporary social formation in a similar, preliminary fashion. Following his father's death, Michael Corleone turns to the assembled mourners made up of many who have received favours from Don Corleone. He says

I just want to tell everybody here that I understand how they feel. I know you respected my father, but now you have to worry about yourselves and your families. Some of you wonder how what happened

is going to affect the planning we've done and the promises I made. Well, the answer to that is: nothing. Everything goes on as before (p. 415).

Such a statement is characteristic of many parts of the narrative. Clearly, there can exist readings of *The Godfather* which revolve around all the references to family values of loyalty and duty. This passage is a strong example of this; but it is also coupled with continuity. The book can also be read as a treatise on how loyalty and duty are the foundations of a dynasty and how outside influences cannot ultimately dissolve the solidarity that is a result of such values. There is a strong emphasis on the durability of family life in this passage, and as we have seen, there were voices in the period in which *The Godfather* became so famous that proclaimed the need for analogous values in the face of threats to the family as an institution. This is not to say that *The Godfather* is an allegory of the work of Bronfenbrenner et al. (see Chapter 3); however, it is likely that a reading of the family aspects of the text might be made in reference to competing concepts of the family as they existed in the contemporary period. Once again, these are only very preliminary grounds for possible contemporary readings. In terms of the narrative, a possible link between the above two passages comes at a later stage in the novel.

When Michael discovers the duplicity of his brother-in-law, Rizzi, which has ultimately caused the death of Sonny Corleone, he meets him in order to discuss it.

Understandably, Rizzi is a little worried and Michael says:

Don't be so frightened. Do you think I'd make my sister a widow? Do you think I'd make my nephews fatherless? After all I'm Godfather to one of your kids (p. 438).

Rizzi is dismissed from the family but on entering a car for the airport is garotted to death by Clemenza (p. 439). Following this, and some time later, Connie - Michael's sister and Rizzi's wife - screams abuse at Michael in the presence of his wife, Kay. The level of Connie's distress prompts Kay to demand from Michael whether Connie's accusation of murder is true. Michael tells her never to demand knowledge of family business and then relents, and denies that it is true; Michael then receives the homage of Neri, Clemenza and Rocco Lampone:

In that moment Kay knew that everything Connie had accused Michael of was true (p. 441).

In view of the previous passages, Michael's speech to Rizzi concerns the institution of the family in a very special way. Is Michael sincere? The narrative suggests that his belief in the sanctity of family life is flexible. He is more prepared to make his sister a widow than he suggests to Rizzi. Yet, this is not to say that he still does not believe in certain virtues of family and dynasty. The Machiavellian nature of the business therefore permeates the most personal of institutions, the Corleones as a family unit in the regular - and not the Mafia - sense of the concept. Clearly, this dramatizes the fact that there are numbers of moral imperatives which may co-exist without being compatible. Such a reading, it would seem, is eminently possible in this period. One has only to think of the sanctity of family life as it was painted with regard to abortion and divorce in American life in the 1970s and the way it was conveniently forgotten with regard to the systematic destruction of Vietnamese hamlets. As we have seen, *Dog Day Afternoon* contains this observation in part of its dialogue (see Chapter 5).

Continuing on these small points, if we turn to the film of *The Godfather* we see that there are some slight differences in the depiction of the same sequences in the novel. The description of Don Corleone which appears at the beginning of the narrative is transformed in a very specific way by the technology of film. Both film and novel begin with Bonasera asking a favour of the Don on the day of his daughter's wedding. The film has no recourse to the narrative prose device of describing Vito Corleone in the third person, as the written text does. Instead, the very start of the film begins with a close-up of Bonasera as he effusively, and at great length, praises the Don and carefully outlines the reasons why he requires his assistance. All the time, the camera is pulling back very slowly from Bonasera until it is behind the Don, presenting an over-the-shoulder shot of Bonasera as he is on the point of pleading with Vito Corleone. Bonasera's monologue and the initial anonymity of his interlocutor offer the possible reading of the scene as that of an individual attempting to define himself in relation to an established figure of considerable power. These scenes are almost identical in their

provision for possible readings in both book and film. The passage which we have noted from the novel which involves Michael addressing the mourners is not included in the film, and continuity is suggested in other ways. The last passage, however, is of considerable importance for a reading of the novel and is retained in the film. The main difference between the two lies in the visual effect of the scene where Rizzi is garrotted by Clemenza. The fact that this form of killing is used rather than the firearms that are used throughout nearly all of the rest of the film is crucial. The exception to the firearm rule has occurred during an early high-point in the film: Vito Corleone's brutal, but fanatically loyal, henchman Luca Brasi has been murdered by Tattaglia and Sollozo plus a third man who uses a garotte on Brasi from behind, thus enabling the camera to linger on Brasi's agonized face as he expires. This event begins the war against the Corleones, followed closely by an attempt on the Don's life. This is balanced by the scene involving Rizzi. After the other families have been eradicated towards the end of the narrative, the garotting of Rizzi marks a conclusion to the war. Luca Brasi's intense loyalty is contrasted to the intense *disloyalty* of Carlo Rizzi; until his last breath, the audience sees the face of Brasi while only Rizzi's foot crashing through the window of the car is visible as Clemenza murders him.. The film at this point, therefore, offers the possibility of a reading based on unity and some kind of justice. In the ensuing scenes with Connie and Kay the course of events is identical to those in the book until the final moment. No epilogue follows Kay's witnessing of the salutations of Clemenza et al., and no explicit realisation of Michael's lies is narrated. I have deliberately presented such shallow readings of these small aspects of the text to suggest the way in which the narrative and a knowledge of the social formation are not alone in generating meaning from a text. In addition to the publicity that surrounded *The Godfather*, there are significant cues from other sources which might create specific readings of the text.

In his book on bestsellers, John Sutherland sees fit to emphasize that the author of *The Godfather* novel, Mario Puzo, confesses to transforming himself from a literary author to a hack (1981 p. 38). Hence Sutherland believes that *The Godfather*, having been

written solely for money, has little or no serious intent. While a lack of serious intent need not necessarily entail a lack of serious content, it is worth taking into account Puzo's views on *The Godfather* that Sutherland dismisses, in case they have any bearing on possible readings of the text. Puzo's key statement on the text is that it was characterized by an ironic tone, that he had utilized on other occasions. In an essay from 1966 entitled 'How Crime Keeps America Healthy, Wealthy, Cleaner and More Beautiful', Puzo wrote

Is it not the duty of every American to live as selfishly and dishonestly as possible? What else will make the wheels of industry hum? The maligned businessman, fighting as ferociously for profit as sharks fight for a man overboard, was he on the right track all the time? Could it really be true that what is good for General Motors is good for America? Is the road to the happy life paved with lying, cheating and stealing? In our society the answer must be yes. And so 'crime' is good for America (Puzo 1973 p. 74).

In the context of the rest of the article it is difficult to see in this passage anything but heavy irony. Puzo comments on this:

in this piece I used all the obvious ironies and when I came to the writing of *The Godfather*, I was much more oblique. So oblique in fact that most of the critics missed the irony in the novel and attacked me for glorifying the Mafia. This piece should prove that I was on the side of the good guys even in the beginning (Puzo 1973 p. 65).

Sutherland points out that the novel could have a number of readings including that of a *roman à clef* but he also points out that

Irony, especially anti-American irony, never sold 15m novels, and Puzo was wise to keep it so oblique as to be invisible to most critics and virtually all the lay readers, for whom it would fatally have interrupted the pleasures of the quick read (p. 43).

Sutherland is definitely over-stating the matter. If we return to the introductory passage concerning Don Corleone, above, it is difficult to imagine a reading of this text which did not recognize the irony in it except a reading which was totally unprepared by any extra-textual cues whatsoever. It is unlikely that readers of the novel come to it without any knowledge that it concerns the Mafia, especially in the period when it was first so famous. In this way, such suggestions as that the Don's hands were not "tied by more powerful forces in the world than himself" are always already suffused with meaning. These "forces" will be the Mafia's occasional adversaries, the police and the government, for example; few readings in this period could validly suggest that the "forces" referred to here are meteorological ones. Similarly, the beginning of the

passage states that only one repayment of the favour is required - friendship. But this is then contradicted when it becomes respect and debt, the latter of which will, of course, imply assistance in some business activity of a legal or illegal kind. In short, these are small scale examples of *potential indeterminacies*; it is possible that there *are* other available readings, but even the ones that I presented initially were bound by reference to the contemporary social formation. Even the title 'godfather' takes on Mafia connotations in this context when, in fact, it is usually a title used in baptism ceremonies. The film plays with this usage of the term quite explicitly towards the end of the film. Although Vito Corleone is the baptismal godfather of Johnny Fontane, the Mafia-controlled singer, the film explores the ironies of the title later in the narrative when Michael becomes godfather to Connie's child. At the baptism ceremony Michael performs his duties, but this is intercut with the simultaneously occurring scenes which involve his henchmen. At various stages of the ceremony a scene of execution is interposed: so, the priest asks Michael if he renounces Satan, and as he says yes there is a cut to an assassin shooting Barzini under Michael's orders. The entirety of *The Godfather* texts are built on an irony which results from the very fact that it is a story of what underlies certain statements. The most famous of these, of course, is the statement which occurs four times in the film:

I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse.

The inevitable prior knowledge of the text that occurs before the reading of it exists at the most fundamental level within the frame of reference provided by the quote which appears, thus, at the beginning of the novel:

Behind every great fortune
there is a crime
- Balzac

The tension between knowledge of the Mafia in the real world, prior knowledge of what *The Godfather* is about and the content of the texts almost guarantees that irony will dominate potential readings of the texts.

Despite the fact that *The Godfather* narratives can be posited to work within a framework of irony, there is no reason why different readings cannot exist within this schema. In fact, the possibility of a number of different readings within this framework means that the narrative is manifestly an arena of contest, especially to those intimately involved with its production. Puzo, for instance, claims contra those critics who gave a greater value to the social criticism contained within the film than the novel, that the Vietnam and big business parallels were built into the novel (Puzo 1973 p. 240).

If he is correct about the general irony of the narration of the novel, then there is every reason to suggest that readings of the novel might be arranged around a wry acceptance of the surface appearances and the acknowledgement of a deeper truth, a process of scepticism and cynicism that could be said to have been growing in the contemporary period with regard to Vietnam. It is worth pointing out that the logo for the film of *The Godfather* which subsequently appeared on the cover of the book was composed of the printed title joined by six strings to a puppet frame which is held by a hand. This ties in with the Balzac quote, the irony and a possible interpretation of *The Godfather* story as the American dream with the criminal element made manifest. In fact, reviewers were quick to point out the very American theme of a movie which featured so much Italian in its narrative. So, *Time* among others christened the film

an Italian-American *Gone with the Wind* ('The Making of *The Godfather*' *Time* 13 March 1972; c.f. William F. Buckley in Biskind 1990 p. 65).

This seemed to fuse the Americanness of the story with the saga aspect of the narrative. Francis Ford Coppola, the director of the film, takes the matter further, imbuing the movie with a sense of importance over the book:

I saw important ideas in this book that had to do with dynasty and power. Puzo's screenplay had turned into a strict contemporary gangster picture of no importance. It wasn't Puzo's fault. He just did what they told him to do ('The Making of *The Godfather*').

Such statements about the film, it seems, were almost designed to lend it a complexity that, because of its combined thriller/family saga origins, critics might not be inclined to grant it. Coppola therefore adds that the film is also an examination of Italian-American life:

It was my intention to make this an authentic piece of film about gangsters, how they lived, how they behaved, the way they treated their families, celebrated their rituals ('The Making of *The Godfather*').

Despite the lowly generic origins of the text, a fact which 'serious' critics would putatively hold against a film, the movie was soon being discussed in terms of its vision. One article went so far as to ask 'What Is *The Godfather* Saying?' One of the first answers it offered in response to the question was that

No American film before *The Godfather* has ever caught so truly the texture of an ethnic subculture . . .

Coppola gets it all down and gets it right: the Don dancing proudly with his daughter on her wedding day; the informal ritual of family dinner, and the whole preoccupation with food ('What Is *The Godfather* Saying?' p. 39).

The same article continues by showing how the accuracy of the portrayal of Italian-American family life offers the possibility of readings based on interpretations of what is integral to such life. For example,

In this world, 'business' becomes the ultimate morality, the final and irrefutable excuse for the most insidious disloyalty and the most brutal slaughter ('What Is *The Godfather* Saying?' p. 39).

Once this step has been made, it is not difficult to assume that the narrative uses

the Mafia as a metaphor not only for corruption in business, but for corruption in all centers of power, emphatically including government ('What Is *The Godfather* Saying?' p. 39).

It is clear that such extra-textual cues often attributed complexity to *The Godfather* narrative in its cinematic version usually to the detriment of the novel.

One possible reason for the emphasis on the complexity of *The Godfather* is that its status as a genre text, albeit a generic hybrid, does not disqualify it from being a more ambiguous narrative than it seems. A statement such as the following displays an unwillingness to give up the film's generic status while positing its complexity:

a movie that - despite the mayhem and the gallons of gore - is far more than the soap opera full of raw energy that might have been expected. It is far more than an efficient action melodrama - more, even, than just a good solid movie ('The Making of *The Godfather*').

Clearly, this statement manifests a measure of uncertainty. This does not mean that there were not those who accepted the film as a genre text without hesitation; thus

the picture will attract and be highly recommended by every red-blooded male (this includes all devotees of gangster, action and adventure fare (Levendecker 1972)).

Similarly, Gay Talese claims that much of the film derives from the contention that

The mafia are like urban cowboys ('Behind the Mystique of the Mafia' *Time* 13 March 1972).

As Biskind shows, most reviews were divided along the lines of 'raves' or 'pans' and mostly, the raves praised the film's diversity and richness while the pans classified it in generic terms or as a public relations exercise for organized crime or both (1990 p. 65). For our purposes, the most important thing about such cues is that they simply extended the possibilities of the topics covered in potential readings of the text. Each of these could be made within an ironic framework which was not far removed from social criticism. This is not to say that *The Godfather* necessarily fosters a critical view of the Corleone family or of American capitalism as a whole, although this is not outside its range of possibilities. One example of how this could be tested is by measuring the level of audience tension when Michael (Al Pacino) goes to see his father in the hospital only to find that the place is deserted and that the guards have been sent away. As Michael and a nurse attempt to move Don Corleone's bed into another room while advancing footsteps are heard on the soundtrack, a real socially critical reading of the text would involve little or no suspense at this point, preferring instead that the Don be a victim of his own system. The ironic social criticism that the film encourages would, one assumes, rarely manifest itself in this way. Instead, the mechanisms of suspense remain intact but the moral universe in which the events of the narrative take place has altered. Jack Shadoian puts it this way:

The moral anger of fifties Mafia films and syndicate films is no longer appropriate. There is no way of working out of the condition of them being us and us being them. Gangster and nongangster alike are immobilized in the vacuum left by the untenability of the American dream for a post-Vietnam, post-Watergate society (1977 pp. 328-329).

Whether critics took the view that *The Godfather* was a subtle exploration of the American social system or a glorification of the Mafia they were all agreed on one thing. Moral ambiguity, and in this case the co-existence of traditional family values with organized crime, was now the order of the day. It was not so much that critics felt that moral ambiguity had not existed in previous decades; but moral ambiguity had become such a foregrounded issue amidst the carnage of Vietnam that it pervaded the very fabric of *The Godfather*. Any reading of the text in the period could only be made

within the framework of an understanding that characters say one thing and mean another, make deliberately ambiguous statements or employ euphemisms such as I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse.

Those critics that praised the text's subtlety and those who saw it as a PR job universally acknowledged in this way that crime in American society was a matter which could no longer be simplified except by refusing to accept its existence, an option that only the foolhardy would take. As Marlon Brando attests in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, the Cosa Nostra is so American. Whether by advocating banishment of the topic, emphasizing its complexity or by dismissing the text on formal grounds, the extra-textual cues encouraged a reading of organized crime as the central underpinning structure of American life. Yet, crucially, it was an *underpinning*, not something that manifested itself in a tangible historical form, but below the surface. While it was implied that it was a central part of American life with visible manifestations the *source* of organized crime remained intact in the extra-textual cues as a mysterious entity, hidden from view, and available only in the archetypal form of Marlon Brando.

The Exorcist

As a tale of demonic possession, *The Exorcist* falls loosely within the confines of the horror story. The text involves an old Jesuit, Lankester Merrin, who, during an archaeological excavation in Iraq, confronts manifestations of a demon. Sometime after this, the pubescent daughter of an American actress filming in Georgetown, Washington D.C., begins to act as if possessed. After consulting psychiatrists, the actress turns in desperation to a young priest at the local seminary who is trained in psychiatry but believes he is losing his faith. After examining the daughter, the priest agrees to apply to his superiors for permission to perform an exorcism and, in due

course, Merrin is sent to carry out the task. What ensues constitutes the climax of the text. There are various arguments that could be put forth to suggest that the text has elements of detective fiction; for example, there is a sub-plot involving the quest of Lieutenant Kinderman (played by Lee J. Cobb in the film) for the truth about the church desecrations in the area and their relation to the death of an English film director. Similarly one could argue that the exorcism resembles the denouement of a thriller when all is revealed and resolved. Both of these are possible, but the main point for our purposes, however, is that *The Exorcist* is not simply an irreducible text, that it does have some thriller elements in common with elements from other genres and, also, that it was a blockbuster which had a significant effect on the reading of contemporary texts.

Like *The Godfather*, *The Exorcist* was a text whose film rights had been bought prior its publication as a novel (see Bowles 1976 p. 196 n1). The novel, by William Peter Blatty, was published in 1971; the film version directed by William Friedkin, and which contained a great deal of input from Blatty (see Blatty 1974), was released in the first weeks of 1974. The novel went on to sell nine million copies and, as *Newsweek* pointed out, the film version accelerated the book's sales to the extent that

3,775,000 of them [were sold] since the movie opened only five weeks ago ('The Exorcism Frenzy' *Newsweek* 11 February 1974 p. 29).

Clearly, the film and the novel were massive sellers creating an extraordinary flow of money through their publicity machine and through receipts (see Cocks 1974a). In this sphere *The Exorcist* was to surpass *The Godfather*, and this became part of its publicity; but in the realm of its content it also proved to be as controversial as *The Godfather*. *The Exorcist's* graphic depiction of evil proved as much a talking point before, during and after the production of the film as the depiction of the Mafia in *The Godfather*. It is even conceivable that the publicity given to the two texts might foster the view that the next logical step from the Don was to the Devil. The kinds of social interaction that occurred during public showings of *The Godfather*, with ticket-

procuring scams, stick-ups etc., were muted in comparison to those that ensued when *The Exorcist* was first shown. Consider the following:

'My janitors are going bananas wiping up the vomit' complains Frank Kveton, manager of the United Artists Cinema 150 in Oakbrook (*The Exorcism Frenzy* *Newsweek* p. 29).

Such publicity was characteristic of *The Exorcist* phenomenon and a reputation preceded the film especially in the American provinces and places outside the U.S. At a very early stage in this publicity commentators were quick to offer interpretations. Rev. Arthur Dekruyter suggested that reactions to *The Exorcist* of the kind noted by Frank Kveton constituted a social religious phenomenon (ibid. p. 28).

The clergyman is referring here to the responses of the audience and it is possible that the extreme reactions of some filmgoers can be characterized in two related fashions, based on a belief in the direct effect of the film. This could take the form, on the one hand, of a new perspective on evil. Thus, Chicago psychiatrist Louis Schlan had four patients visit him claiming possession after seeing the film (ibid. p. 28). On the other hand there were forms of parasocial interaction at work; for example, amid the stories of audiences vomiting nationwide at the horror of the film's story and its graphic depiction of evil, it became well known that one cinema customer in Berkeley had jumped at the screen during the film in order to kill the demon (ibid. p. 29). At an early point in the film's history, then, responses such as these were part of the publicity that surrounded it (see Stein 1974 for the best summary of such phenomena).

Where the veracity of *The Godfather* had centred on Puzo's knowledge of the world of real gangsters as we saw at the very beginning of this chapter, publicity for *The Exorcist* was similarly orientated towards its veracity in the depiction of demonic possession. The first thing to note is that the film was based on an actual case of demonic possession that had occurred over twenty years before the book was published. The possession and the subsequent exorcism performed by a Jesuit priest involved a young boy from Mount Rainier, Maryland and was reported in the

Washington Post of 20 August 1949 (see also Blatty 1974 pp. 4 ff). This, of course, was reported in the special *Newsweek* feature (above) and also in other articles on the film. This was not the only isolated case that the text could have made reference to in order to establish its veracity on one level. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* in the same year that the book was published discussed in depth the increasing loss in faith of the sixties generation and the subsequent dramatic rise in Satanic infestation (Nieder Korn 1971). Weeks before the film was due to be released, the *Wall Street Journal* reported a case of 'mass hysteria' in an Alabama school which it attributed to multiple possession (Kramer 1973). Such articles appeared before the film became such a talking point; when the film began to gain an unprecedented high profile such articles proliferated. True life versions of the text's content were regularly paraded in the press with reference to *The Exorcist*. In Britain, for example, various true-life cases of possession were reported alongside comments on the film (see Anderson 1974), while the *Evening News* ran a series of reports by occultist Francis King on real stories of black magic and possession in tandem with a serialization of William Peter Blatty's novel, *The Exorcist* (King 1974). This kind of coverage is probably to be expected in Britain given the preparation time allowed by advance reports about the film during the time lag between its release in the United States and its release in Britain. Nevertheless, the most extensive coverage of the phenomena engendered by the film, that of *Newsweek*, also devotes considerable space to comparable true-life stories, not in its movie section but under the heading of 'Religion' ('The Exorcism Frenzy' pp. 60-66). In *Time*, the same kind of coverage is to be found under the heading of 'Behavior' ('Exorcist Fever' *Time* 11 February 1974 p. 53). The publicity for the film therefore drew upon analogous real life stories plus details of some of the more extreme reactions of viewers of it in cinemas. From the outset, then, the film was surrounded by its own particular folklore. The excesses of the horror on screen were matched by the excessive responses of the audience to them, and this in turn became part of the film's public image. As extra-textual cues such factors have an extraordinary influence on potential

readings. Writing almost twenty years after the phenomena sparked by *The Exorcist*, one critic has tried to reconstitute the meaning and intent of the novel. He begins,

Mention *The Exorcist* and what comes to most people's minds? The movie, of course: rotating heads and pea-soup vomit. The visual excesses may have been necessary to convey the horrors of demonic possession, but they have blunted the moral content of the story, and they have completely obscured the spirituality of the source novel.

Over the years it has become fashionable to interpret *The Exorcist* as a paradigm of adolescence. (Right. Just as *The Shining* is an impassioned plea for tighter hotel security). This meretricious view trivialises and cheapens a deeply felt religious novel, strips it completely of its numinous power, and has been kept in vogue by a small pharisaic cadre of writers and critics who dismiss as junk any novel wherein evil has an extrinsic source.

Ignore them. Here's the real dope. (Wilson in Jones and Newman 1992 pp. 205-206).

The writer then goes on to explain his own individual and religiously orientated response to *The Exorcist* in terms of what he believed were Blatty's intentions. This is one more reading and it is valid in that it is an avowedly individual one. However, for our purposes, the publicity surrounding the film, which includes the critics' responses, is almost part of the fabric of the text. This text is a prime example of the notion that there is no text 'in-itself' but, rather, a number of texts which are considered to be 'outside' the text but are actually a part of it, always already filling its potential indeterminacies. All the hype that goes with *The Exorcist* contributes to the reading of it in the contemporary period. This includes, of course, even the most extreme reactions of audiences and critics alike.

It is notable that critical reactions to *The Exorcist*, following all the advance publicity, were overwhelmingly negative. The *New York Times*' review concluded:

'The Exorcist' is claptrap (Canby 1974).

Time pronounced the film

vile and brutalizing (Cocks 1974a).

Other responses of this kind involved criticising the film on the grounds that it was pretending to be something that it was not. This manifested itself along genre lines;

Rolling Stone, for instance, claimed that *The Exorcist* was

nothing more than a religious porn film, the gaudiest piece of big budget schlock this side of Cecil B. DeMille (minus that gentleman's wit and ability to tell a story), and an assault on the sensibility at the most basic levels of shock and surprise (Landau 1974).

The breadth of disdain shown for the film by contemporary reviewers almost suggests that the critical response to the film was more of a reaction to the publicity that had preceded it. Where *The Godfather* had received favourable reviews following its own flood of pre-release hype one might be led to believe that the response to *The Exorcist* constituted a backlash against the new marketing techniques of Hollywood. One writer for a non-mainstream review journal stated this explicitly, saying of the hype

It's the worst sort of capitalism that desensitizes a film this way (Van Wert 1974 p. 3).

With regard to *The Exorcist's* position in the horror genre reviews often incorporated two contradictory standpoints. Reviewing the reviews, *Rolling Stone* summed up the situation:

Oscar or no Oscar, there is an unusually emphatic agreement among serious reviewers (Kael, Sarris, Canby, Cocks, Zimmerman, Byron, Landau) that *The Exorcist* is a lousy movie . . . No claims are made for its performances. It is even said that it is a failure in its genre (Christgau 1974).

On the one hand, *The Exorcist* was simply treading old ground; Andrew Sarris in the *Village Voice* held the opinion that

When Regan shifts into high gear from a kissable darling to a hissable demon, she is merely moving into Lon Chaney territory, though with an updated penchant for hard-core pornography (Sarris 1974).

Once again this is a statement which, when put in theoretical terms, manifests a belief that the change in the horror genre is merely a semantic one (the updated penchant for hard-core pornography) which allows the syntactic dimension (Lon Chaney territory) to remain intact. As we have witnessed on other occasions, the semantic and syntactic dimensions of genre should be envisaged only as theoretically separable entities; in reality, they are connected. Sarris' statement therefore has the advantage of criticising the text for being both old-fashioned and trendy at the same time. In a less problematic vein, Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker* was decrying the prose of the novel:

The book is a manual of lurid crimes, written in an easy-to-read tough-guy style yet with a grating heightening word here and there to tone it up (Kael 1974a).

This is characteristic of the kind of technically-minded criticism that has made Pauline Kael famous. By shifting the obvious argument about the text's controversial themes to the level of an investigation of its craftsmanship, she purports to account for a text's value by reference to something believed to be intrinsic to its existence. This is an

attempt to denature the other extra-textual cues in order to search for the text 'itself'.

The other, related, way of looking at *The Exorcist* is demonstrated by Canby in the *New York Times*. Rather than suggesting, like Sarris, that *The Exorcist* has adopted some elements of pornography into its semantic dimension, he goes further, and claims that the film has almost become pornography. He writes,

The audience watches as if attending a porno film, moving around in their seats, talking, smoking, staring at the ceiling, during the conventional exposition, and then paying attention only to the violence that has been sanctified (Canby 1974).

Clearly, *The Exorcist* does constitute generic innovation and critics were right to predict that a new slew of horror movies might ensue. However, the critics' attempts to deal with this seem to be based on reactions rather than analytical responses to the new industry publicity machine which was now being used to hype large budget movies. One scholar writing only a couple of years after the release of the film sees *The Exorcist* in terms of a traditional man versus demon horror text, yet enhanced by greater technology (Bowles 1976 p. 200). This, of course, is another statement of the semantic/syntactic separation heresy, but it also sets out the grounds for considering the generic innovation which *The Exorcist* embodies. The technology that the film utilizes - and it must not be forgotten that the special effects were one of the main selling points of the film (see, especially, Blatty 1974) - constitutes the most crucial factor in the film's verisimilitude. It is this that the critical reaction actually plays down; it is almost as if the critics are suggesting that "*The Exorcist* is just another horror film", or that it is a slight variation. In contrast to other possible readings, then, it can be said that the contemporary critics performed a reduction of the richness of the text of *The Exorcist*. This is not to say that there is a text 'in-itself' which we can identify and which these critics have missed; it is simply that the critics do not emphasize the multiplicity of possible readings of the text. This is not an unusual critical activity, but it is one that had specific implications with regard to this text.

If we consider more closely some of the extra-textual statements about *The Exorcist* it can be seen that critical reactions beyond those we have discussed could *suggest* or

imply the multiplicity of the text while also limiting it in a crucial way.² One of the most visible examples of the ambiguity of *The Exorcist* came through reports that Catholic clergymen were divide over the text's worth (see, for example, 'The Exorcist Debate' *Time* 21 January 1974). On this particular issue the critics were equally divided: one wrote of the film as

the most spectacular public relations coup for the Jesuits (Sarris 1974)

while another signalled a win for Satan (Fitzgerald 1974). Despite the fact that the film was universally condemned by the 'important' critics there were grounds such as these upon which they differed. In the simplest, but also significant sense, these were centred around the role of the Devil; thus

What the devil was really seeking was to induce self-hatred and hopelessness in the onlookers so that they would feel unloved by God (Sarris 1974).

This view has a basis in what Father Merrin says in the novel (p. 369) and toward the end of the film. This is a point that is presumably missed when Vincent Canby states, sardonically, that

The devil, says the movie, is almost (but not quite) indescribably foul (Canby 1974).

It is at this point that the critics' pronouncements on the quality of the film and the impact of hype become very important. If *The Exorcist* is just another horror film, then it follows that the source of the horror has only one real function in the text.

Interestingly enough, it is in Kael's review that a quote from a Jesuit advisor puts forth the conjecture that the function of the adversary in the film is far from straightforward, and not an intrinsically textual one:

It shows that obscenity is ugly . . . vicious ugly [sic], like the Vietnamese news (in Kael 1974a).

Similar speculation is contained in Van Wert's statement that

² It is interesting to note that Blatty is aware of the role that extra-textual cues play in the moulding of readings of a text. He writes:

Let book people never cast stones at Hollywood. Compare the quotes that were used on the first Curtis edition of *Twinkle, Twinkle, "Killer" Kane* - 'nobody can write funnier lines than Blatty' (Martin Levin, *New York Times*) and 'Wild . . . with the verbal virtuosity of S.J. Perelman' (Richard Armour, *Los Angeles Times*) - with the jacket copy and front matter on the edition published following *The Exorcist*: 'The nerve-twitching chiller from the author of *The Exorcist*' and INVITATION TO EVIL! A grotesque old mansion that once used to belong to a silent horror movie star, and now was home to shrieking terror . . . ' (Blatty 1974 p. 38 n. 35).

I think it is related to the death-of-God philosophy and its impact in the sixties (Van Wert 1974 p. 4). This is quite closely connected to the theme of adolescence that we have already mentioned. A conflation of adolescence and any philosophies that might be recognised as characterising the sixties, would generate a reading of *The Exorcist* as the older generation's view of student protest. Even in 1971, this would not be a new theme: among various other texts which take up the theme, there is, for example, an episode of *Star Trek* broadcast in 1967 which features a young man who has lived in isolation as an orphan on a deserted planet before being picked up by the USS Enterprise. The crew soon find that he has extraordinary psychic powers which he uses during childish rages in the service of an uncontrollable hedonism which prevents him from learning restraint. A reading of this as a conflation of the general theme of the crises of adolescence and the specific theme of such crises with regard to contemporary political unrest among the nation's youth seems eminently possible. Writing on *The Exorcist* in 1981, John Sutherland postulates his belief that the text is, in a quite specific sense, about children of the sixties but adds that

the diabolic possession of children has been a horror-fiction standby since *The Turn of the Screw* at least; and the related idea of the changeling can be pursued as far back as one cares in sub-literary folklore (Sutherland 1981 p. 60).

He also points out that this text is one of a number in this period which gained huge receipts by being aimed at an adults only market (pp. 67 ff). Which is to say that the reading that might result from this will be an adult one unlike, say, the *Star Trek* episode which went out at prime time on TV. Such a reading would be based on the tribulations of child-rearing and family life from a perspective beyond the throes of adolescence. Pauline Kael demonstrates some of the implications of this when she refers to the character of Chris MacNeil, the

mother feeling guilty about her divorce and its effects on Regan; we may not know why the demon picked on Regan, but we're tipped that that broken home - the first step to Hell - gave the Devil his chance (Kael 1974a).

Although our discussion concentrates on the figure of the demon, and although Kael is very negative about the film, it is worth stressing her point here. Apart from the scene in Iraq and those involving Karras, the narrative is very much about family life. In fact,

even the events in the narrative concerning Karras' loss of faith are centred round his relationship with his ailing mother and his guilt following her death. Virtually all of the main action, though, takes place in the house in Georgetown where Chris and Regan MacNeil live. There are a few initial scenes in the text where mother and daughter are seen together in affectionate - if not sugary - encounters. However, there is a crucial scene in almost the exact centre of the film's narrative, before the possession has manifested itself. A medium shot of Chris MacNeil reveals her in her bedroom speaking on the telephone and becoming increasingly exasperated. She is trying to call Regan's father (her ex-husband) in Rome (a town with its own religious connotations) but is unable to get a connection. As she bawls obscenities at the operator, complaining also that the father has let his daughter down by refusing to call her on her birthday, the camera slowly pulls back to reveal Regan, at the other side of the house, listening forlornly to the obscenities that her mother yells. Shortly after this scene Regan begins to show the signs of her possession, a feature of which is repeated use of profane and blasphemous language. This scene is one of the key moments for a reading of the text which focuses on the link between the possession of Regan and her family background. A more extensive analysis than this would include reference to the fact that Regan's early dabbling with the ouija board in the book (p. 42) and in the film leads to her contact with a man (Captain Howdy). In addition, the murder that takes place in the narrative and which entails the involvement of Lieutenant Kinderman is of Burke Dennings, the British film director. It is notable that Regan asks her mother, Chris, whether Dennings is her lover immediately after mother and child have been discussing the ouija board. These features of the text can be read in a number of ways with reference to the theme of an absent father.

We will return to the family theme briefly in a moment. The main point, though, is that once such readings of the text were countenanced by critics they opened out onto more general considerations about the text's meaning, whether it was a tale of psychological ailments or a story of extrinsic evil. Put another way, the critics recognized that

interpretations of the text were to be made between two poles: the Devil versus psychology. Sarris, for example, is even-handed:

Sugmund [sic] and Satan get equal time in diagnosing the ills of the film's victims and protagonists (Sarris 1974).

In fact it is possible to go further than this with regard to the film. One could even say that the manifestations of possession in the text are almost identical to the manifestations of hysteria laid out in Freud's early papers on the subject (see Cobley 1991). In contemporary coverage of the text, Dr. Walter Brown of Mount Sinai Hospital, New York adopted a view of psychotherapy as catharsis in his statement that In a way, all psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are forms of exorcism, of getting rid of demons ('The Exorcism Frenzy' *Newsweek* p. 29).

Dr. Brown's reading of the text invokes not only the 'Devil versus psychology' framework but also Blatty's intentions as auteur. Brown adds,

Blatty was careful to include in his description of Regan's conduct only things like telepathy, psychokinesis (the ability to move objects without touching them) and other forms of ESP for which there are non-supernatural explanations. So you never have to suspend your disbelief in order to follow the story ('The Exorcism Frenzy' *Newsweek* p. 31).

One would imagine that the psychological version of Regan's possession would constitute quite a powerful reading - after all, Blatty himself states that he carried out extensive research into psychiatric cases (1974 pp. 15 ff). In addition, psychoanalysts were quick to denounce the film as, for example,

a menace, the most shocking major movie I have ever seen (Greenson 1974 p. 41).

However, despite the strength of the psychological reading it seems that readings of the disturbances depicted in the text were balanced overwhelmingly in favour of the Devil.

This is true even in the face of ambiguous statements by Blatty; for instance, he asks

But is Satan a single personal intelligence? Or Legion, a horde of evil enemies? Or even, as has been conjectured, the stuff of the universe: matter itself, Lucifer working out his salvation through the process of physical evolution that ends in Teilhard de Chardin's 'omega point'. I surely do not know, nor can I even make a prudent judgment. Whatever my beliefs concerning Satan's existence, however, we have no record of reliable data that would link him to possession. I know that will surprise many readers and reviewers. But, historically, the 'demons' involved in possession and pseudopossession only rarely identify themselves as Satan. And surely the chief of the fallen angels has far worse things that he could be doing. Even in terms of my novel, I have never known the demon's identity. I strongly doubt that he is Satan; and he is certainly none of the spirits of the dead whose identity he sometimes assumes. If I had to guess, I would say he is Pazuzu, the Assyrian demon of the southwest wind. But I'm really not sure. I know only that he's real and powerful and evil and apparently one of many - and aligned with whatever is opposed to love (Blatty 1974 p. 37).

Based on various sources of evidence there are a number of possible answers to these questions. As far as Blatty's intentions are concerned, it is very telling that his own sequel to *The Exorcist* which appeared twelve years after the first novel was entitled *Legion* (1983), which was later made into a film entitled *The Exorcist III* (1990), directed by Blatty. Not only did the book have the title *Legion*, but it was also a serial killer novel featuring the multiple identities of a murderer named Gemini who is stalked by Lieutenant Kinderman, the dogged policeman from *The Exorcist*. On the first page of *Legion* an epigram appears which is taken from gospel according to St. Mark:

*Jesus asked the man his name,
and he answered
'Legion,
for we are many'.
Mark 5.9*

In the novel of *The Exorcist* the same incident involving Jesus in the land of the Gerasenes is related in another epigram, this time from the gospel according to St. Luke (Blatty 1972 vi). This would seem to be a strong hint that the possession in *The Exorcist* is a manifestation of evil in a more general sense rather than in the form of a single demon although, of course, contemporary readers would not have recourse to the sequel. However, at the risk of discussing at too great a length what seems to be a purely academic problem, it is worth pointing out that there is evidence in the text not only that Regan has invited a dead spirit into her life - Captain Howdy (see p. 42-3) - but also that the spirit is aligned with the demon known as Pazuzu. Consider the passage at the beginning that takes place with Merrin in Iraq:

At the palace of Ashurbanipal he paused; then shifted a sidelong glance to a limestone statue hulking in situ: ragged wings; taloned feet; bulbous, jutting, stubby penis and a mouth stretched taut in feral grin. The demon Pazuzu.

Abruptly he sagged.

He knew.

It was coming (Blatty 1972 p. 8).

If the title of the text, plus this passage is not evidence enough of the centrality of Merrin's battle with an old adversary then the words of Chris MacNeil's secretary,

Sharon, provide extra evidence when she reports on the possessed Regan's progress since Merrin has entered the house. Addressing Merrin, Sharon speaks:

It said 'This time, you're going to lose' (Blatty 1972 p. 351).

As soon as Merrin has entered the MacNeil household and prepares to embark on the exorcism he refers to his adversary only as "the demon" in the singular (pp. 354 ff).

The quote at the beginning of this chapter, which is identical in the book and the film, is also supplemented by the following exchange between Karras and Merrin respectively which takes place in both versions of the text:

'Don't you want to hear the background of the case first, Father?'

'Why?' (Blatty 1972 p. 348).

In addition to this, the first part of the film which is set in Iraq and climaxes with the scene that I have quoted from the book just now, visualizes the duel between Merrin and his adversary here by having him face a demonic statue across a precipice. At the climax of the exorcism in Georgetown, the silhouette of the same demonic figure falls across Regan's room. It is such parts of the text that critics drew on for their conclusions on the origins of evil in the film. Jay Cocks in *Time* declared unequivocally that

the daughter is possessed by a raging demon - the Devil himself (Cocks 1974a).

One cannot say that this is a *misreading* of the text; but it is one that elides some of the ambiguities that we have discussed. The most famous article of the time on *The Exorcist* as a phenomenon does likewise. The presentation of the film at the beginning of the Newsweek feature on the text summarizes the plot without making any reference to the importance of the Iraq sequence, without reference to the quest of Lieutenant Kinderman and without any mention of the centrality of Karras' fears that he is losing his faith after the death of his mother. Instead, the plot is represented as just Regan's story ('The Exorcism Frenzy' *Newsweek* p. 29). The article blatantly omits that which does not allow a direct discussion of the theme of possession in the text and in the real world. Deftly, the piece quotes one person involved in the production but manages to put words in his mouth:

'The film', says Jesuit Father Thomas Birmingham [sic], who has a small part in it, 'put repulsive language and repulsive actions in their true context as coming from their authentic source' - the Devil (ibid. *Newsweek* p. 29).

What Father Bermingham says is concluded at the word "source". Whether he was actually referring to the Devil is open to question, but given the way the quote is presented by the article it seems that Bermingham is making the reference as unequivocally as Cocks, above. In fact, to take the naming of the evil as the Devil one step further, it is remarkable that Jon Landau in *Rolling Stone* compares the general merits of *The Exorcist* as film and as novel and concludes

the book is remarkably better at convincing us that Regan's body has indeed been inhabited by the devil (Landau 1974).

His complaint is not that the film has technical deficiencies, but that its verisimilitude is compromised by a failure to make the presence of the Devil unqualified. For Pauline Kael, the film's narrative is clearly concerned with the threat to mankind posed by one entity and mankind's redemption by way of another singular entity. She therefore calls Karras

a modern Christ who dies to save mankind (Kael 1974a).

This has been picked up by Simon (1974b) who compares Karras to Blatty and *The Exorcist* to autobiography and therefore narcissism on a grand scale.

The foregoing discussion of the text in terms of its possible ambiguities, multiplicity or alternative readings has hopefully demonstrated that there was a quite pronounced attempt on the part of critics to reduce the potential range of readings of the text. This is not uncharacteristic of such critical reviewing activity as a whole, but it seems that the extra-textual cues connected to this text are extraordinary in their attempt to foster a belief in a unitary entity - the Devil - which is the source of antagonism in the narrative. Without positing a meaning to the text that transcends the meanings attributed to it by the contemporary audience it is important to question the role of the extra-textual cues. This is not to suggest that we must look for the 'real' extra-textual cues 'in-themselves';

but there are elements to them which are occasionally present while there are others which are conspicuously absent.

Earlier we mentioned the topic of the family with regard to *The Exorcist* and suggested that there could be a significant reading built around the theme of the family in the text. This is not unusual and, in fact, Pauline Kael began such a project in her review of the film. Similarly, we have noted that Kael's review carried a quote from a clergyman who compared the horrors of the film to the horrors contained in television coverage of the Vietnam war. These are two examples of possible frameworks in which the text can be read; they did not go unmentioned but at the same time they did not receive extended discussion in critical commentaries on the film. Moreover, it is not our purpose to launch into such a discussion - it is too late now to change the extra-textual cues of the early 1970s. However, it is worth illuminating briefly the space that some discussions were too tentative to enter. Andrew Britton points out that

William Peter Blatty's novel 'The Exorcist' is preceded by a page of epigraphs - a passage from the story of the man called Legion in St. Luke's Gospel; a transcript of an FBI wiretap of a conversation between two Mafiosi about torture; a Jesuit priest's eyewitness account of Communist atrocities; and three words which Mr. Blatty deems able to speak for themselves - Dachau, Auschwitz, Buchenwald. These heterogeneous texts are all reduced to one essence - the Devil is lord of this world ('there's no other explanation', the priest remarks). Political threats to Christian/capitalist democracy (Communism) and products of it (the Cosa Nostra) become indistinguishably, with Nazism, the powers of darkness, a cosmic force of evil which is, by definition, archetypal (that is, outside historical determination) and implicitly beyond control (Britton p. 16).

What Britton has pointed out in this crucial intra-textual cue for reading the novel is of the utmost importance for understanding the extra-textual cues in their contemporary context. What will immediately stand out for our purposes is the reference to the Cosa Nostra, the subject of the text called *The Godfather*. As Britton shows it is one among a number of sources of evil, but the character of that evil is decisively archetypal. So, evil has its embodiments but there is nothing that the rational world can do about them. The narrative, as we have seen, allows for the possibility of reading the text as a story involving the grandest archetype of evil, a demon. Extra-textual cues take this a step further with the introduction of the Devil. The (temporary embodiment) of evil in the

text is, of course, a pubescent girl, but in the book's epigraphs the archetype is more widespread. One of the epigraphs that Britton mentions appears as follows:

... And there were seven little boys and their teacher. They were praying the Our Father when soldiers came upon them. One soldier whipped out his bayonet and sliced off the teacher's tongue. The other took chopsticks and drove them into the ears of the seven little boys. How do you treat cases like that?

Dr. Tom Dooley

(Blatty 1972 vi)

Eight years after this appeared in published form a very similar story was to be told by Colonel Walter Kurtz (Marlon Brando) towards the climax of the film, *Apocalypse Now* (1979) which took Joseph Conrad's classic parable of evil, *Heart of Darkness* (1901) and grafted it onto a story of Vietnam. As Britton says, the book allows the epigraphs "Dachau, Auschwitz, Buchenwald" to speak for themselves; in this light it seems very strange that there is no mention of My Lai. Blatty reveals that the novel was just finished in the summer of 1970 (Blatty 1974 p. 25); the My Lai story broke as a national affair in November 1969 and the impending trial of William Calley, which was to take place in the following year, was still news. It is almost inconceivable that Blatty was unaware of the whole business and yet, not only is any reference absent from the book's epigraphs, there are no mentions of it by critics. Somehow, the issue seems too thorny to be considered by contemporary commentators, whereas Nazism has reached such mythic proportions that the reality of the atrocities is, by comparison, more available for assimilation into fiction in spite of Adorno's famous statement on art after Auschwitz. That this is the case will be borne out by the discussion of paranoid narratives in Chapter 9. In effect, then, the critics' treatment of *The Exorcist* can be seen as an exercise in containing the breadth and banality of evil. On the one hand, the source of evil in the film is attributed to the Devil; on the other it is omnipresent in the home. In a critical commentary on both *The Exorcist* and *Jaws*, Stephen Bowles states *The Exorcist* takes place in the heart of the nation's capital city and *Jaws* in a popular summer resort town.

Not only do the two films take place in locations not usually identified with abnormal events, but they attack our most vulnerable associations (Bowles 1976 p. 200).

This statement requires some examination. What Bowles is presumably referring to here is that the phenomenon of disruption is not usually associated with the locations of

the two texts. The seaside resort in *Jaws* places the disruption firmly in the realm of the family. However, Bowles implies that the nation's capital, as the seat of government, is unused to disruption or conspiracy. This would seem naïve, especially with regard to the period with which we are dealing. He is obviously correct to state that these locations are very vulnerable spots; however, they are not unexpectedly vulnerable places like the open expanse where Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) is pursued by a crop-dusting aircraft in *North By Northwest* (1959). In *Jaws* and *The Exorcist* the locations emphasize vulnerability because there is a tradition in the thriller of crimes of violence taking place in dark places. In *Jaws* and *The Exorcist*, the vulnerability of the locations is a result of the fact that they are emotionally and ideologically charged; if anything was to go wrong in these place then the consequences would be dire. It is possibly for this reason that the extra-textual cues to *The Exorcist* place great emphasis on the isolated and extrinsic nature of the evil. In one sense, the emphasis on the doings of the Devil denies that evil actually suffuses human existence, even in Washington. It plays down the evil that is done everyday on different scales including that done in the name of the nation while it is at war. The fact that there are little or no references to Vietnam when considering this text is so curious that it draws one to a conclusion such as this. For one psychoanalyst, the stress in readings of *The Exorcist* on the extrinsic nature of evil represented moral corrosion in modern life:

In these unstable times, when the President of the United States shows more concern for Lt. Calley than for the students murdered at Kent State, when we have peace with dishonor in Vietnam, and also Watergate, *The Exorcist* pours acid on our already corroded values and ideals. In the days when we all had more trust in our government, our friends and ourselves, *The Exorcist* would have been a bad joke. Today it is a danger (Greenson 1974 p. 43)

Such a statement suggests that evil is everywhere in contrast to those formulations which hold that it is corporeal. If evil is not located everywhere then, as archetypal evil, it must occasionally have an embodiment. That *The Exorcist* should be set mainly in Washington, where executive decisions are made concerning large numbers of people is, in this light, very telling. It would be fatuous, perhaps, to suggest that archetypal evil is located, in this manner, in government. However, if there is a split between two modes of considering evil it is more likely that to place the source of disruption of daily

life among a few executives is aligned with an archetypal mode of thinking. Those who reject such a mode of considering evil to be all pervasive and characteristic of the nation's doings are almost forced into a view of evil as deriving from the machinations of some beings in executive positions. As a specific description, this is obviously a gross oversimplification; as a very general framework for thinking through the determinants of readings by way of extra-textual cues, however, it would seem to provide preliminary grounds for the discussion of the political character of such texts as *The Exorcist*. Clearly *The Godfather* and *The Exorcist* have in common the fact that they were massive blockbusters and that their texts - meaning the different versions of the narrative plus all the extra-textual cues such as publicity, reviews etc. - contain a tension between readings of which recognize the pervasiveness of conspiracy in American life and readings which emphasize its extrinsicality. This provides a starting point for a discussion of the political dimension of what is inside America at a given moment and what is considered to be outside by various groups. This will become clearer as the number of texts discussed proliferates in the following chapters.

Jaws

Jaws is the story of a great white shark which one summer terrorizes the seaside resort of Amity in the United States. It features three main characters: Brody, the concerned police chief; Hooper, a young marine biologist brought in from outside of the community in order to investigate the shark; and Quint, a grizzled old sea dog who offers his services as a kind of aquatic bounty hunter. A fourth character of subsidiary importance is the mayor of Amity, Larry Vaughan, whose main concern is the loss of business rather than the threat to lives that the shark's presence off the coast entails. This is the general gist of the narrative of *Jaws* although the novel version contains a significant sub-plot concerned with an affair between Hooper and Brody's wife (see Benchley 1975 pp.110 ff). In any case, this outline of the narrative does not constitute the whole of *Jaws*' essence. Like *The Godfather* and *The Exorcist*, *Jaws* was preceded

by a barrage of hype which constituted the very fabric of it as a text. This, in turn, elicited certain reactions on the part of critics, for example the *New Yorker* asserted that *Jaws* is a foolish exercise in special effects (Gilliatt 1975a).

There are further similarities in the text's production: once again, the bestselling novel version of the text preceded the film version. Yet the novel, like that of *The Godfather* and *The Exorcist*, was generated by the film industry. Negotiations to buy the film rights to *Jaws* were underway well before the book was ever published (Gottlieb 1975 p. 11 ff). However, if there is a difference between the hype that accompanied *Jaws* and that which accompanied its predecessors it is a difference of scale and specific strategy. True, *The Godfather*, *The Exorcist* and *Jaws* were all accompanied by an unprecedented scale of pre-release publicity of a particular sort much different from that of other films; but within this sphere *Jaws* surpassed both of its predecessors. *Jaws* became a marketable commodity not just as a film but as a whole range of other products. Some of the flavour of the hype is given in a *Sunday Times* article which itself is an example of the advance publicity for the film in that it appeared long before *Jaws* was released in Britain:

The 'Jaws-consciousness' that helps sell the film is the product of a deliberate £1 million campaign by the studio. Eight months before the film opened, producers and author did the rounds of radio and TV chatshows to sell the book, already an established bestseller. One month before the opening, even Verna Fields, who as editor would usually have no part in any film promotion, was on tour to sell the film. The press coverage, with careful leaks, included a 'Time' magazine cover.

Then in the three days before the film opened, the studio unleashed its TV advertizing - nationwide to cover all 464 cinemas where the film was to open. The three-day blitz was designed to 'knock the nation over the head', according to a studio official, 'and it worked'.

The sheer concentration of firepower is unusual in film marketing. It made the shark a national cliché, and ensured mention of the film every time there were incidents off American coasts (Pye 1975).

In the way that *The Godfather* became the shorthand reference for the cynicism of organized crime and *The Exorcist* became the by-word for occult related phenomena, *Jaws* soon became such a high profile commodity that it stood in for most natural perils related to the sea. Thus,

The makers of *Jaws*, for example, spent more than \$2 million on a nationwide promotion designed to put every American in a *Jaws* T-shirt on a *Jaws* beach towel. That \$2 million doesn't include any number of *Jaws*-related stunts pulled off by people who had nothing to do with the film but simply wanted free publicity. A New Orleans seafood vendor supplied the city's public schools with 25,000 pounds of breaded fillet of shark; the New York *Daily News* sent its fishing columnist out on a Great

White Shark hunt; a Long Island newspaper published a hoax letter from a fictitious police chief asking residents to donate meat to feed the shark and thus reduce swimmer deaths (Rottenburg 1975).

From the outset, then, *Jaws* is not just a novel and film version of a text. Instead, it is a text which is always already in the public domain, reshaped and remoulded even before it can establish an autonomous identity. As we have already noted, the pre-release publicity of the film involved convenient leaks and this allowed speculation to grow over the content of the film. An item in *Time* on the mechanical shark which would play an integral role in the film gave some details about the production but not too many (see 'Introducing Bruce' *Time* 2 September 1974). It became clear that the producers of the film were engaged in a publicity drive which preceded even the pre-release publicity and which created a whole range of expectations. From the galley stages onwards, Richard Zanuck and David Brown, the famous Hollywood partnership, used their names to publicize the book vigorously, gaining it 5,000,000 in sales in the first six months since its issue in paperback in January 1975 (Harwood 1975), while 5.5 million books were still in print in the summer of 1975 ('Summer of the Shark' *Time* 23 June 1975 p. 32). Such hype continued; publications cashed in wherever possible on the *Jaws* phenomenon thus generating more publicity for the film before it was released (see, for example, Cashin 1975) while the products associated with the film grew to include a plethora of toys, garments, ornaments, household goods and so on (see Day 1975). The emblem of the film - the jaws of a shark pointing up towards the surface of water - proved eminently reproducible. It became almost omnipresent as a representation of numerous situations, from coastal worries to political upheaval (see 'A Nation Jawed' *Time* 28 July 1975). In fact, no other simple iconic representation of a text's content had so permeated Western society before, with the possible exception of the cross which is featured in the New Testament.

As with *The Exorcist* and *The Godfather*, the initial critical reactions tried to sum *Jaws* up in as terse a way as possible. Although there were selected leaks from the set, the production was otherwise surrounded by tight security in order to prevent plagiarism, especially in the case of a possible cheap TV movie on the same theme. Despite the

security, plagiarisms such as this still occurred and Zanuck and Brown voiced their displeasure. None of the rip-offs were as successful as *Jaws* and it is possible that this was due to their limitations. *Variety* reported the displeasure of the *Jaws* producers at the situation, and concluded that

If cries of 'plagiarism' are raised against Bourke [an alleged plagiarist] or the others by anyone connected with 'Jaws', maybe it should be borne in mind that 'Jaws' itself bears close resemblances to Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick', the greatest fish story of them all (McBride 1975).

The reference to *Moby Dick*, here, can be read in two ways. Clearly *Moby Dick* has occupied a pivotal place in American literature as an unprecedented monumental allegory (especially following Fiedelson 1953 and Levin 1958). In this way, the quote from *Variety*, above, could be seen to be attributing the same allegorical status to *Jaws*. However, it seems more likely that the quote is actually overlooking the allegorical dimension in *Moby Dick*. What both texts have in common here is that they are both a "fish story" involving attacks at sea. The plagiarisms merely extract this element of *Jaws* narrative and use it for their own devices. Such a reading of the text is a very limited one and, as such, very much suited to critical activity. Other critics commenting on *Jaws* have similarly used the reference to *Moby Dick* in an ambiguous manner so that it is not clear whether they are attributing allegorical status to *Jaws* or whether they are saying it is another fish story. For example, Biskind writes

JAWS is a middle-class *Moby Dick* (Biskind 1975 p. 1).

A British article concurred, claiming that

Jaws is the middle-class remake [of *Moby Dick*] (Heath in Bennett et al. 1981 p. 200).

Somewhat less ambiguously, Molly Haskell in the *Village Voice* berated the macho heroics of the film and declared that the character of Quint (played by Robert Shaw in the film) was nothing more than a dimestore Ahab (Haskell 1975).

Haskell's statement is obviously meant as a reduction of what she sees as an attribution of too much substance to *Jaws*. Like many critics of *The Exorcist* she is simply saying here that "*Jaws* is just . . .", where the ellipsis represents something far less important than anything that the hype has led potential audiences to expect. In a less aggressive

way, other critics partook of the same strategy. In his book on 1970s bestsellers, which was written in the early 1980s, John Sutherland refers to *Jaws* as a disaster film (Sutherland 1981 p. 116). This is not simply a result of Sutherland's relative temporal distance from *Jaws*' initial release; contemporary commentators were apt to use identical classification. A large feature in *Time*, similar to the one on *The Exorcist* in *Newsweek*, devoted a great deal of space to *Jaws* close to its release date, commenting that

Like *Earthquake* it takes a panic-producing disaster and shows how a representative cross-section of humanity responds to it. Like *The Exorcist* it deals with an essentially unknowable, therefore unpredictable and thoroughly spooky symbol of evil ('Summer of the Shark' *Time* 23 June 1975 p. 32).

But, in an almost contradictory fashion, the same article also noted that

Jaws, which opens in 490 theaters this week is part of a bracing revival of high adventure films and thrillers over the past few months (ibid. p. 32).

A different part of the same issue of *Time* also considered a number of recently released films as a group which also contained *Jaws*. The latter was therefore compared with films such as *The Wind and the Lion*, *French Connection II*, *Night Moves*, *The Eiger Sanction*, *Rollerball*, and *Breakout* ('A Rundown of Summer Thrillers' *Time* 23 June 1975 p. 34). It could be said, then, that there was a degree of uncertainty over the generic character of *Jaws*. It was uncertain whether the film was a disaster movie, whether it was a tale of high adventure, whether it was a thriller, whether it was a hybrid of all these or whether such categories were redundant in the face of texts like *Jaws*. A clear generic status for the text had also probably been hindered by the subplot of the book. The article adds

Peter Benchley's novel spent too much time on dry land, plodding around Irving Wallace country, reinvestigating such tired phenomena as the uneasy marriage, the adulterous wife, the snaky seducer. In the movie, most of this lally-gagging is eliminated ('Summer of the Shark' p. 32).

Robert Shaw, a novelist himself, was more succinct about the differences between the book and the film:

Jaws was not a novel, it was a story written by a committee, a piece of shit ('Summer of the Shark' p. 34).

We will return to the differences between the book and the film in a moment. For now, it is worth noting that the critical practice of limiting a film's possible readings and its

magnitude as portrayed in the pre-release hype was tempered by an uncertainty about the film's generic status. Stated in a metaphorical way, the critics' attempt to put the film in a box labelled 'Fish Story' was hampered by its ability to occupy a range of other, generically labelled boxes. As a result, the supposed meanings of *Jaws* elucidated by reviewers also seem contradictory in places. Pauline Kael concurs with this in her 1976 essay, 'Notes on Evolving Heroes, Morals, Audiences':

In *Jaws*, which may be the most cheerfully perverse scare movie ever made, the disasters don't come on schedule the way they do in most disaster pictures, and your guts never settle down to a timetable . . . The other big disaster movies are essentially the same as the pre-Vietnam films, but *Jaws* isn't. It belongs to the pulpiest sci-fi monster tradition, yet it stands some of the old conventions on their head (in Kael 1980 p. 195).

Kael's argument is distinct from those of many other reviewers in that she actually addresses the question of syntactic transformation while most critics would scrutinize semantic elements such as the sea, and proclaim the film high adventure, or the fact that the shark is a natural phenomenon, proclaiming the film a disaster movie. Kael, instead, is keen to stress that the film's existence within a genre has a syntactic basis; what is important, she suggests, is that the film is based around a series of thrills and a feeling of suspense rather than purely the semantic dimension involving the sea. However, if there was a tendency among other critics to over-value the semantic aspects of the film, this occurred for a very good reason. As we have suggested, the film's emblem had permeated American culture so thoroughly at this time that it was almost impossible for critics to distance themselves from the figure of the shark which, after all, had an existence independent of the narrative. The text came readily supplied with the knowledge that Great White sharks actually exist and do some of the things that are depicted in the film. One thing that the *Time* features that we have just discussed do exemplify is something characteristic of much of the coverage of the film as a whole and which the text has in common with *The Godfather* and *The Exorcist*. In addition to the massive pre-release publicity, features also concentrated on the real-life basis for the story of *Jaws*. Pictures of real sharks and real shark hunts would accompany articles about the text and the phenomenon it had spawned. *Time*, for example, had a substantial piece on the topic and the interest in real sharks was so great

that Peter Gimbel's famous documentary, *Blue Water, White Death* (1971) was re-released ('Jaws - The Real Thing' *Time* 23 June 1975 p. 37). Such texts served only to strengthen any claim to verisimilitude that *Jaws* might have made. Like *The Exorcist* and *The Godfather*, *Jaws* was available as a text to be read with all the trimmings of contemporary coverage built into it. This, of course, included all those features on the real Great White sharks in the world which made the text of *Jaws* seem a ready-made verisimilitudinous narrative (c.f. Chapter 4 of Gottlieb 1975 which is suitably entitled, 'Let's Make it Real Compared to What?'). It is perhaps for these reasons that *Jaws* seemed difficult to classify generically; more than anything the text was, for critics, the story of *the shark*.

Jaws was emphatically the product of a massive marketing machine. However, numerous films have been hyped without eliciting the response that *Jaws* did. One needs only to think of a film such as *Cleopatra* (1963). Putting aside some of the publicity considerations one critic suggests that

When the public responds with as much fervor as it has to JAWS, it seems certain that the film is speaking to and possibly answering some very real needs or desires of its audience ('CinemaTexas Looks at JAWS' p.1).

Placing *Jaws* within the disaster genre the critic continues:

The disaster syndrome has emerged at a time when we seldom find clear cut moral conflicts in our more 'serious' films, in which good is tinged with bad, bad shown to be good, and the whole concept of moral right and wrong becomes so blurred that we are left with such distressingly ambiguous protagonists (not heroes) as Popeye Doyle and Little Alex of a *CLOCKWORK ORANGE* ('CinemaTexas Looks at JAWS' p. 1).

In another review, Peter Biskind seems to concur with this. Against the blurring of morality in the present he poses the clearer morality of a past era. He writes,

There used to be a time when the significance of JAWS would have been apparent to all, when we wouldn't have had to cast about for symbolic meanings to hang on the shark. A few years ago, during the Cold War, the shark would have stood for International Communism, pure and simple. But these days, with the detente and the grain sales, that sort of symbolism is frowned upon, and Hollywood is tending toward politically neutral heavies (Biskind 1975 p. 1).

The questions that immediately arise from this are, firstly, whether "International Communism" would necessarily be the interpretation made in past eras and, secondly, whether the shark is actually a politically neutral villain in the contemporary period. One

way in which the same kind of opinion has been posed is in considering the sexually charged nature of many sequences in the film. One example of this which is worth considering in detail because of its role in establishing a precedent for the rest of the film is the opening sequence. The film begins in darkness for a number of seconds until the title music starts, steadily increasing volume and pace. This music will appear on the soundtrack of the film whenever the shark appears in the narrative and is, to some extent, an acoustic icon of the shark's movement before going in for the kill. As the music gains momentum, the first titles appear on the screen: "A Zanuck/Brown Film" is followed by the credits of the three stars. These appear like as follows:

	Robert Shaw	
Roy Scheider		Richard Dreyfuss

If one is to carry the logic of a sexual reading through to its limit, then this caption constitutes a phallus. At the same time it also illustrates the dynamics of the relationships between the characters the three stars portray. If Quint/Robert Shaw is the father then Brody/Roy Scheider and Hooper/Richard Dreyfuss are the rivalrous siblings. The shaky alliance between the siblings is finally cemented at the end of the film when the father has been vanquished from without, by the shark. Following this caption the dark backdrop is replaced by a marine setting with a forward movement through underwater foliage which is a subjective camera shot's mimicking of the shark's vision. The music reaches a crescendo as the editor's credit appears against this aquatic backdrop and there is a sudden cut to a totally different scene. The cut is to a close-up panning shot from left to right of a group of teenagers loosely grouped around a fire on a beach at night. Various members of the group are drinking beer, smoking (marijuana) or playing guitars. The camera focuses on one male youth who stares at a female slightly apart from the group who returns his gaze. A long shot witnesses their moving closer to each other and noises on the soundtrack become less audible. Presently, the female stands and runs along the beach in a medium shot and the boy follows her as the camera tracks their movements. This part of the beach is lined by old

and run-down picket fencing which sticks up from the sand irregularly like giant shark's teeth. As the young woman runs she removes items of clothing until, naked, she runs down the beach and is visible in the moonlight as she dives into the sea. As she swims, a long shot of the water reveals a slightly tilting, but erect, buoy to the left of the frame. Further long shots reveal her arm pointing rigidly into the air as she makes languid strokes in the water. Meanwhile, through various intercuts it is shown that the young man who has followed her is incompetently trying to remove his clothes at the edge of the water whilst complaining that he is drunk. Surfeit of alcohol causes him to fall limply, implying a mirroring of his present sexual impotence in contrast to the rigidity of the tilting buoy. Interspersed with this have been a couple of shots of the young woman from beneath the water, each one getting closer until there is a close-up of her above the water as she screams. Suddenly she is thrashing about in an almost orgasmic fashion, being pulled from one side to the next and at one point holding on to the upright buoy. Soon she is pulled under as she screams and then disappears. There is then a long shot of the sea and the erect buoy in the pale moonlight. An almost imperceptible fade leads to an almost identical shot of the sea in daylight, but this time the buoy is absent from the scene. The camera pulls back slightly to reveal that it is an over-the-shoulder shot and that the head to the right of the screen belongs to Chief Brody. As the camera pulls back further it is clear that he has been watching the sea from the comfort of his bedroom where his wife has been talking to him about the time that they bought their present house. A small dog is perched on the bed and then a child enters the scene. It is clear that this is a very domestic, family setting.

One could assert quite confidently that this passage in the film manifestly toys with sexual imagery and this description does not disguise that. Sex is almost definitely on the minds of the two protagonists of this scene and various shots emphasize this: the phallic nature of the buoy, for example, is contrasted with the lack of phallic power in the young man. Biskind suggests that the initial scene at the beach party represents sexual freedom and general hedonism which he claims the shark then punishes. The

logical conclusion which he draws from this is that the shark in the film absorbs the role of sexual antagonist which is embodied by Hooper in the book during his affair with Brody's wife (Biskind 1975 p. 1). Another critic writing for the same journal is even more damning of the film's sexual project. Rubey offers the opinion that the

juxtaposition of images, the erotic swimming sequence and the shark attack, appeals to a sadism and hatred of women which must be assumed to be part of the consciousness of the film's audience (Rubey 1976 p. 21).

There are a number of difficulties with this statement. Firstly, the crude psychologism of the statement relies on the equation of sadism and hatred of women. Secondly, if sadism is depicted, Rubey implies, then it will necessarily be enjoyed. Not only will it be enjoyed by a few sadists but by the film's audience as a whole. Nowhere does Rubey qualify his statement by suggesting that just a small number of *Jaws*' audience hate women. If this is the case then what are the reactions of the women in the audience? Self-hatred? One could continue to question the dubious logic of Rubey's unqualified assertion but the point for our purposes is that both his and Biskind's analyses of the sequence demonstrate (*malgré lui* in Biskind's case) that even the most "politically neutral" of heavies can have a political dimension. In short, they are implying not that the shark is an insensitive, mindless force with no conception of moral turpitude, but that it represents a reactionary impetus.

The other likely grounds which were delineated for a political reading were to do with the social fabric of Amity, the island that the shark attacks. Part of the narrative's plot involves the mayor's reluctance to close the resort even though Brody virtually pleads with him to do so. Mayor Vaughan seems to want to turn a blind eye to the shark attacks as one more hindrance to the trade of the island during the impending holiday season. On the one hand, then, there is the virtually unstoppable, occult force of the shark and on the other there is the morally corrupt figure of the mayor. Put another way, Police Chief Brody feels morally bound to negotiate on behalf of the people between the immoral (Vaughan) and the amoral (the shark). Significantly, Vaughan's refusal to close the beaches leads to a shark attack on a young boy whose grief-stricken

mother later physically assaults Brody for what she assumes is his negligence (pp. 69-70). Biskind points out that *Jaws*, like other disaster films, takes a very dim view of the authorities: their inability to comprehend the enormity of the threat posed to their existence while making money, leads to disaster (1975 p. 26). We will return to this when we consider other disaster films. However, it is notable that *Jaws* plays upon the familial loss for its illustration of the point: if the authorities represent selfish bureaucrats, then in this context they are a threat to the well-being of the family. In this way, the mayor of the island is the dry land villain but the extent of his corruption is always mitigated by the presence of the shark off the coast. Because of his duplicity in the service of self-gain, Biskind suggests that

Mayor Larry Vaughan is Amity's Nixon (Biskind 1975 p. 26).

This is probably quite a powerful argument in the contemporary period. At a time when the corruption of elected authorities was very much an issue that had been foregrounded in other discourses including news and other thrillers, if the audience did not label Larry Vaughan another Nixon it can be expected that at least a collective utterance of "Tut! That's typical" might be elicited by his antics. Moreover, it is significant that the corruption in the film was originally to be spread out over a number of characters in the script until it was decided that it should be located primarily in the figure of Larry Vaughan (Gottlieb 1975 p. 65). Murray Hamilton thus represented the Heavy in the movie and it would presumably not be lost on audiences that he was also the actor famous for his portrayal of Mr. Robinson in *The Graduate*. Mr. Robinson, it would be remembered, was the father who tries to do everything he can to prevent the liaison of his daughter with Ben after he had initially encouraged it with the prospect of an advantageous marriage in mind. The same kind of financially orientated cynicism marks both the characters he portrays in *The Graduate* and *Jaws*. If one follows Biskind's argument fully then Larry Vaughan, in a corrupt way, is trying to fend off some unspecified threat. The identity of this threat which the shark embodies is open to question. It could still represent International Communism but, as we have seen, Biskind has rejected this. The logic of his argument therefore implies that the threat that

the shark poses to the community - which is, in its identity as a seaside resort, a potent symbol of capitalist social and economic relations - is connected to an anti-establishment impetus. The relentless and completely non-partisan nature of the shark's attacks in such a context imply that it represents the impersonality of social change. In such a manner, then, the shark's phallic nature within this argument would therefore represent rampant sexuality rather than a punishment of it. The community is established, settled, and conducting business peacefully until the shark enters into its existence. But the basis of the community's business is clearly fragile and relies on the right conditions in order to flourish, conditions which are natural in origin e.g. the weather and the absence of vicious sea-beasts. The only option left to the community if it wishes to fend off the threat of the shark is to take drastic steps. The shark must go in the name of capital - although the threat to innocent lives can be used as a cover for the real reason.

The employment of a bounty hunter, Quint, exposes the nature of the business relations upon which the island is built. The new scenario forged by him echoes the Hobbesian world of the western rather than the tranquility of a late twentieth-century seaside resort. In addition, as Biskind points out, Quint is nearly as dangerous to the social fabric of Amity as the shark itself (Biskind 1975 p. 26).

If one considers Biskind's argument closely, it can be seen that Quint and the shark have a great deal in common and what the audience does not know about the shark it can guess at after it has examined Quint. This is a possible reading strategy that *Jaws* offers and shares with other texts. In a recent interview Peter Benchley, author of the novel and co-author of the screenplay of *Jaws*, expressed his admiration for the work of Thomas Harris, claiming that

There is a universal fear of a maniac on the loose in society. They represent a force of evil that is unstoppable, because there is no logic. That is what I do in my books, but I use animals rather than people (Kelly 1991 p. 7).

We have already noted the mindlessness of the shark in this respect and the fear that it evokes. However, it is notable that Benchley should equate *Jaws* with the modern

serial killer novel. One of the most immediately recognizable features of the novels of Harris and say, James Ellroy, is that, in order to be caught, the serial killers in the narratives have to be pursued by a character who is not very different from themselves. In Harris' *Red Dragon*, Will Graham is haunted by his identification with the killer, Francis Dolarhyde; in *The Silence of the Lambs*, notorious murderer Hannibal Lecter effectively solves the case of Buffalo Bill; in Ellroy's trilogy of novels, *Blood on the Moon* (1988a; originally 1984), *Because the Night* (1988b; originally 1984) and *Suicide Hill* (1988c; originally 1986), Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins is manifestly as unbalanced as the killers that he pursues. In this way, *Jaws* and the serial killer novels of the 1980s are very similar. Quint is an outsider as far as the community is concerned; he spends most of his time on the ocean, like the beast he will pursue. He is overtly tough and grizzled - at one point, while on the boat, he crushes a can with one hand until it is a small piece of distorted metal; Hooper mimics this, crushing *a paper cup*. He is also unruly (a heavy drinker) but ruthless and amoral - accepting the task of killing the shark only because of the money he will be paid. Although they are manifested in different ways, this ruthlessness and amorality are salient characteristics of both Quint and the shark. Most outstanding amongst Quint's threatening features for the community, though, is that he is a bachelor who taunts the cosy domesticity of the island. Repeatedly, and especially directly at Hooper and Brody, he sings the refrain from an old sea shanty:

Farewell and adieu to you fair Spanish ladies/Farewell and adieu to you ladies of Spain.

Clearly, Quint is transporting Hooper and Brody from the security of family life embodied in Amity to the Hemingwayesque machismo embodied in the domain of the sea. Quint is outside the social order that Amity represents and possibly an anachronism. He, like the shark, must be killed in order to maintain the social fabric of the island; for Kael, the moment when the shark attacks the boat and Quint is killed therefore represents the death of machismo (in Kael 1980 p. 196). The shark's subsequent demise - significantly at the hands of a family man, Brody - allows the police chief and Hooper to paddle back to the security of the island. At this stage in the

narrative of the film it is clear that the shark and Quint have embodied a threat to family life. The text has continually played upon Brody's fears for his own children. If Quint's death represents the demise of machismo then the shark's death represents an end to the rampant sexuality that so threatens family life. This is not to say that audiences would necessarily follow the arguments of Kael, Biskind and others in attributing an allegorical status to the shark as an embodiment of new sexual attitudes, adultery, divorce and so forth. However, the fact that critics often guided interpretations of the text towards the threat that the shark poses to the security of family life embodied in Amity implies that there are at least grounds for the contemporary audience to recognize the import of that which is threatened among all the thrills.

In view of the possibility of a contemporary reading of *Jaws* which has a political dimension resulting from its exploration of family themes it is tempting to ask whether the corruption on Amity island elicits a more specific political reading. Stephen Heath states unequivocally - but unfortunately with little qualification - that

Jaws is a Watergate film (in Bennett et al. 1981 p. 200).

Fortunately, another British critic confronts this question directly and indicates where possible contemporary readings of the film in the way that we have discussed might function. Separating the book from the film, Andrew Britton states that

The keynote of Peter Benchley's novel is an immitigable contempt for everyone and everything. It is the post-Watergate best seller, a novel of complete disillusionment, cynicism and despair, which arouses and exploits, with dazzling efficiency, every phobia of the middle-aged, middle-class, menopausal American male (1976 p. 27).

The chief difference between the novel and the film, of course, regards the sub-plot in which Brody's wife becomes enmeshed in an affair with Hooper who is the younger brother of an old flame of hers. The ineffectuality of Brody coupled with the corruption of all the characters on the island means that the film feels much fresher by comparison, particularly as Hooper is a creditable ally in Brody's battle against the shark and also

the way in which Brody so emphatically disposes of the monster. Referring to the corruption in the novel, Britton continues

The tone and purpose of Steven Spielberg's film are as far from this as it is possible to be. The new *Jaws* might best be described, perhaps, as a rite of communal exorcism, a ceremony for the restoration of ideological confidence. The film is inconceivable without an enormous audience, without that exhilarating, jubilant explosion of cheers and hosannas which greet the annihilation of the shark, and which transform the cinema, momentarily, into a temple. Annihilation is the operative word. It is not enough for the shark to be killed, as it is in the book, only two feet from a helpless, hopeless hero whose two companions have already been devoured, and who has, himself, been implicated too disturbingly in the tensions which the shark has released. The film monster has to be, literally, obliterated. Evil must vanish from the face of the earth (p. 27).

It must be remembered that *Jaws* was a film seen by an enormous amount of people in a very short space of time. Rather than the 'X' rating that the film's scenes of violence would have entailed in Britain, *Jaws* received an 'A' rating which meant that children under the age of 14 could see the film with an adult's censure. This measure, in contrast to the certificating of *The Exorcist* and *The Godfather* in Britain, effectively swelled the ranks of those who visited the cinema to see the film although, in the United States both *The Exorcist* and *Jaws* received 'Parental Guidance' ratings.

Anybody who saw the film in this period would recognize the phenomenon of audience response that Britton refers to here. In addition, given that the sales of the novel were so massive, it is fair to say that a substantial proportion of those who saw the film in the cinema had also read the book. The expectations that the latter creates are eclipsed by the film. For example, it would be interesting to ascertain how many in the film's audience at a given time were wondering when Hooper would commence an affair with Brody's wife; in the novel Ellen Brody meets Hooper just over a third of the way through (p. 110). Presumably, when this does not happen then speculation over whether Hooper will die, as he does in the novel, ceases. However, I would suggest that, at the end of the novel, there is a certain amount of uncertainty over the shark's death. The narrative states that the shark stops and sinks after Quint's death and the sinking of the boat which Brody watches (p. 285); but to be able to pronounce the shark dead the reader must be in possession of the knowledge that sharks can only survive by being constantly on the move, causing water to pass through their gills. In fact, the film's narrative constantly relies on the belief that the shark is not present,

resting if not dead, to unleash its most shocking moments. The potential uncertainty of the shark's death in the novel therefore makes its annihilation in the film all the more emphatic. It is at this point that the exhilaration of the narrative fuses with the ideological confidence that Britton mentions. What is crucial in the film's narrative is that the shark is *seen* to be destroyed. If the film is to be considered as a post-Watergate film in the sense of *coming after* Watergate rather than ideologically illustrative of it then the shark's visible destruction is important in this respect also. As we have seen, the novel and the film are different in respect of the levels of cynicism portrayed in each. If the novel can be said to depict facets of a Watergate mentality, then the film, in contrast depicts the new climate of expectations. It will be remembered from Chapter 3 that we discussed the notion of a specific political climate which was embodied in expectations of the legitimacy of the Ford and Carter Presidencies. Connected to this is the fact that certain discourses in the period suggested that the crisis of Watergate remained unresolved. It is in this sense that I think Britton refers to the restoration of ideological confidence. The political reading that some critics hinted at, then, can be seen as reaching its end point in an imaginary resolution of the crises in American life that had dominated the previous few years. Once again, this is not to say that the annihilation of the shark equals the Carter Presidency. However, in terms of their highly visible attempts to tackle a social threat - successfully and conclusively in the case of the film; less successfully and inconclusively in the case of the Carter Presidency - they invoke homologous, but not identical, anxieties and desires.

All this does not mean that the text of *Jaws* was somehow an opium of the people, or an effective resolution of ideological anxieties. If it embodied only part of this function then it would most probably be a product of the elucidation of the implications contained in extra-textual cues. The potential for such a reading would involve a considerable extension of the hints contained in reviews and general publicity for the text. What it is important to note about the way in which readings could be arranged for *Jaws* is that it is similar to *The Exorcist* and *The Godfather*. The logic of the publicity

meant that the iconic representation of the film's narrative virtually dominated the text as a whole. The key semantic element that gave *Jaws* its specificity - the shark - also laid the grounds for its claims to verisimilitude. The dominance of this image, as we have seen, left the generic status of the text somewhat in question but also implicated *Jaws* in a plethora of other texts such as news reports about sharks. At the same time, the omnipresence of the emblem of *Jaws* meant that the figure of the shark became a potential site for speculation about the film's meaning. It was possible to ask what the shark represented. It is here that *Jaws* has important similarities as a text to be read with *The Exorcist* and *The Godfather*. The extra-textual cues to the latter texts overwhelmingly emphasized the *extrinsicity* of a threat to American society. At the same time, however, they hinted - purposely, but sometimes unwittingly - at the possibility of readings which placed the threat *within* the realms of American life. In the case of *Jaws*, a reading of the threat as intrinsic could be made by logically following through some of the implications of reviewers' throwaway comments. However, it seems that the manifest thrust of the extra-textual cues encourages readings of these texts as narratives of extrinsic threats - organized crime, the Devil and a freak shark - occasionally accompanied by a mere subsidiary cue suggesting the multiplicity of possible readings of the text. Nevertheless, there were a number of contemporary blockbuster texts which were so syntactically/semantically similar that a reading of the threats which they depicted virtually forced a political interpretation.

Disaster: *The Poseidon Adventure*, *Earthquake*, *The Towering Inferno*

Maurice Yacowar, in his essay on disaster in the movies, states that

Disaster films constitute a sufficiently numerous, old, and conventionalized group to be considered a genre rather than a popular cycle that comes and goes (in Grant 1986 p. 217).

He goes on to consider a large number of films in his analysis, suggesting that they share one thing in common and that

we have the essence of genre: a situation of normalcy erupts into a persuasive image of death (p. 217).

This definition is at once too general and too specific. Formulation of the disaster genre in such terms is too general for the simple reason that the narrative of normalcy disrupted by a seemingly fatal threat to that normalcy is characteristic of a huge amount of other narratives which may not be said to belong to the disaster genre at a given time. By default, however, Yacowar's statement does provide the basis for considering the relation between thrillers and the disaster genre at the level of a tropological theory. The definition is too specific for a different reason. In Chapter 1, we discussed the untenability of the notion of a generic essence with regard to the famous rules of detective fiction drawn up during the 'Golden Age'. Even if an analysis of a group of texts reveals a group of characteristics common to all - and Yacowar's analysis of a relatively large corpus of films is very thorough in this respect - this does not mean that those characteristics are immutable and timeless. They are never stable as textual elements 'in-themselves'; instead, they are subject to the specificity of a range of audience investments imported from a dimension which is traditionally thought to be outside the text but, as we have demonstrated, is actually part of the text's potential indeterminacies. What constitutes a text as a member of the disaster genre may seem to be based on some supposedly objective characteristics of the text; it may even seem to be based on the whim of a critic; but it is actually based on historical imperatives. Thus, when Jay Cocks states in his review of *Airport 1975* for *Time* that a film such as *The Taking of Pelham 123* (1974) is a disaster movie, he does so for a historically specific reason (Cocks 1974d). The film is not mentioned in Yacowar's article, originally published two years after the film was released, nor would it be any more likely to be in the disaster category now than any other film about hijacking such as *Operation Thunderbolt* (1977) or *Raid on Entebbe* (1977). However, Cocks was writing at a time when the disaster genre achieved such a high profile and such a high level of box-office success that it was more than feasible to place some tangentially related films within the

category on the basis of a reading of its subject matter or on the basis of an expectation that the film's producers had attempted to trade in on the success of the genre by moulding aspects of the film's narrative in a specific way. During the early seventies a succession of big budget disaster movies were released: *The Poseidon Adventure* appeared in December 1972, *Earthquake* was released in December 1974 (a month after *Airport* 1975) and advanced publicity for *The Towering Inferno* began a year before its release at the end of 1974. In a very loose sense one could say that all the films had in common that they featured a massive catastrophe mid-way through their narratives which entailed that the characters who are established before the disaster are thrown onto their personal resources in the latter part of the text. The films feature disasters involving a ship in a tidal wave, an earthquake in Los Angeles and a fire in the world's tallest building, respectively. These three were not the only disaster films in the decade; but they were the highest grossers, and two of them bore the name of Mr. Irwin Allen, who was to become almost the chief auteur of disaster.

As blockbusters, the three disaster films that we will discuss share a number of things in common with the three other blockbusters of the period that we considered above. Most salient among these is probably the pre-release hype that accompanied the films. *The Poseidon Adventure* was a novel by Paul Gallico (1972; originally 1971); like *The Godfather*, *The Exorcist* and *Jaws*, the producers of the film read the novel while it was in the galley stage and promptly bought the film rights to it (Publicity Brochure for *The Poseidon Adventure* 1972. p. 2). The film's potential producer, Irwin Allen, was particularly impressed with the written material and his reputation as the maker of the TV series, *Flipper*, according to the publicity, prepared him for the costly and arduous production that would ensue (ibid. p. 2). One of the most notable aspects of the production was the very difficulty of mounting some of the film's most spectacular scenes; it became apparent from an early stage that many passages in the film severely taxed the strength of the actors, and much of the action was so elaborate that Ronald Neame directed the 'dialogue' portion of the film while Allen turned his hand to the

action sequences (ibid. p. 2; Pennington 1972a p. 1). If the technical difficulties dominated the pre-release publicity of *The Poseidon Adventure*, then they were no less capable of dominating the publicity for *Earthquake*. The former dealt with the inversion of a massive, old-fashioned cruise liner while the latter involved the destruction of one of the world's largest cities. However, the publicity for *Earthquake* was more concerned with a new sound device called 'Sensurround'. It was reported that

Earthquake will be buttressed by a newly developed control track that could program everything from additional speakers to smoke machines in an attempt to simulate the sounds and sights of an actual tremor (Beaupre 1974).

This was to be the film's great selling-point but it was uncertain to what extent the new system would revolutionize film or whether it could actually be suitably applied to other movies. Nevertheless, it became part of the fabric of the text, not only as part of its existence within the cinema but also in terms of the attention it drew from critics. For example, Richard Schickel in *Time* declared that Sensurround is

a means of luring the credulous into paying good money for a bad picture (Schickel 1974b).

He explained the system to potential film-goers, adding wryly,

Sensurround consists of a bank of woofers that emit low-pitched rumbling sounds, causing the theater to vibrate in a mildly alarming manner whenever earth tremors are seen to move, shake and ultimately destroy the Los Angeles we know and love (ibid.).

The effect of Sensurround on critics seems only to have been to alert them to what they universally considered a very poor script. However, critics also acknowledged that the spectacle was probably the most important part of such films and that the script would always be a secondary consideration. The publicity for *The Towering Inferno* was further concerned with the technology and hardware involved in producing a spectacle. It was reported that not one director - or even two directors, as with *The Poseidon Adventure* - were busy in the production. This time there were four directors - John Guillermin, Irwin Allen, Bill Abbot and Jim Freeman - each of which had a second unit director and team (*Variety* 15 May 1974). If this did not indicate the epic proportions of the production then the fact that an unprecedented collaboration of two studios took place to make the film possibly did. The news in the spring of 1973 was that the galleys

of a novel called *The Tower* were being passed around Hollywood; as Harmetz suggests,

'The Tower' was 'The Poseidon Adventure' on dry land - or, rather, 1,000 feet up in the air (Harmetz 1973).

However, at about the same time, another novel called *The Glass Inferno* was found to be almost identical to *The Tower* and both studios, Fox and Warners, found that they had very similar property in their hands. From this starting point the two studios joined forces and collaborated to the extent that the script of *The Towering Inferno* not only split the story between the two novels but even some of the names of the leading characters (Harmetz 1973). The opening titles thus credit the basis for Stirling Silliphant's screenplay to the novels by Thomas N. Scortia and Frank M. Robinson (1973) and Richard Martin Stern (1974). At a very early stage, then, *The Towering Inferno* was hailed as the pinnacle of the disaster genre in terms of its colossal production costs and physical effort. Richard Schickel writes,

Among disaster films, *The Towering Inferno* is the superepic. Based on not one but two bad novels, featuring four stars above the title instead of just one, and having several scarcely less important figures (Jennifer Jones, Fred Astaire, O.J. Simpson) among the supporting players, it required an unprecedented combination of two major companies (Fox and Warner Bros.) to produce. Merely to turn out a single skyscraper they consumed twice the amount that Universal spent to destroy Los Angeles in *Earthquake*. That near crash in *Airport 1975* is not even in the same league fiscally speaking (Schickel 1975b).

Schickel's review actually goes on from this point to assert that the whole project of the production resulted in a bad film, implying that the publicity regarding costs was merely a smokescreen to cover the lack of quality elsewhere. However, to dismiss films such as *The Towering Inferno* as pointless is to do them a severe disservice. It can be demonstrated, in fact, that the publicity and the high profile of such films in depicting the disasters that might befall modern society do have some social effect. In 1975, Irwin Allen claimed that

With *The Poseidon Adventure* the shipping companies hated me. Business went down 30 per cent after that film came out (Gilchrist 1975).

A similar situation recurred with his next superepic; it was reported that

he [Allen] is delighted with *The Towering Inferno* because it has resulted in a serious re-examination of the safety of tower blocks all over the world (Gilchrist 1975).

The Towering Inferno actually had more widespread effects than this: when Allen died in late 1991 it became widely known that he had been made an honorary fire chief in 73 cities round the world, including London, and an honorary sea captain in 20 countries after *The Poseidon Adventure*. Moreover, the warning sign that advises people against running for a lift in the event of a fire which is now to be found in office blocks is a direct result of *The Towering Inferno* ('The Master of Disaster' *Daily Mail* 4 November 1991).³ Precious few texts have had such a direct effect on the real world, and for these reasons alone the narratives of the disaster texts of the 1970s are worth considering in addition to the hype that critics so summarily dismissed.

The fact that the disaster films of this period grossed so much encouraged speculation about their importance as a contemporary cultural phenomenon. The texts were given various labels such as 'pre-Vietnam', 'escapist' and 'vicarious'. Critics universally damned the contemporary version of the genre but this did not prevent them becoming hugely popular. The contemporary reading of the disaster film is therefore a clear case of decoding of a text with a disregard to some of its extra-textual cues. The reviews of the films in particular were very dismissive; but I would suggest that what was important about the reviews' dismissiveness of *The Poseidon Adventure*, *Earthquake*, and *The Towering Inferno* was the small amount of attention given to the actual narratives of these texts. One can therefore assume with a measure of confidence that those features of the texts that negative critical reviews overlooked were the very features which contributed to the success of the texts for the audience. We will therefore consider the attribution of meaning to the genre by reviewers in addition to aspects of the narratives which may have had special resonances for the contemporary audience. What is probably crucial about the former is that these texts were often considered to be either nostalgic or old-fashioned. Even the film's own publicity stressed this about *The Poseidon Adventure*:

³ c.f. the comments on Hailey and Benchley in Sutherland (1981 p. 139).

Irwin Allen's production of 'The Poseidon Adventure' is a return to the classic style of filmmaking which established Hollywood as the Film Capital of the world. It is in the grand tradition of 'Around the World in Eighty Days', 'The High and the Mighty', 'Airport' and other great motion pictures of the 'Grand Hotel' genre (Publicity Brochure for *The Poseidon Adventure* 1972).

The fact that this publicity forges a new genre classification for itself - 'Grand Hotel' - in one way indicates that it is an industry prescription. To be sure, *The Poseidon Adventure* does have a major feature in common with the original *Grand Hotel* (1932) - a societal cross-section of characters played by major actors. In fact, the three disaster films we are considering not only had this in common but the actors involved were almost exclusively established stars. If one thinks of Shelley Winters, Jack Albertson, Ernest Borgnine, Carol Lynley and Roddy McDowall in *The Poseidon Adventure*; Charlton Heston, Ava Gardner, George Kennedy, Lorne Greene, Barry Sullivan and Walter Matthau (appearing under his real name, Walter Matthuschansky) in *Earthquake*; and Paul Newman, Steve McQueen, William Holden, Fred Astaire, Jennifer Jones, Richard Chamberlain, Faye Dunaway et al. in *The Towering Inferno* - none of these actors are anything less than established names whose personae are associated with popular films older than *The Graduate*. The joker in the pack, of course, is Gene Hackman who plays the lead in *The Poseidon Adventure* and who made his major film debut in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967).⁴ This is mitigated, perhaps, by the fact that he played the main character, Popeye Doyle, in the top-grossing *The French Connection* a year before *The Poseidon Adventure*. This information is important to contemporary cinemagoers and the industry at this time if one considers that some of the most recent films to achieve high box office receipts in America had been films starring unknowns in the lead roles such as *The Graduate*, *Love Story* (1970) and - directed by, as well as starring unknowns - *Easy Rider* (1969). This fact also probably contributed to the disaster films being considered old-fashioned. Cocks suggests that

The Poseidon's passenger list is a manifest of stereotypes, her cargo clichés (Cocks 1972c).

⁴ His first film was *Mad Dog Coll* (1961) and he also had very minor roles in such films as *Hawaii* (1966) and *Banning* (1967) among others.

However, at the same time, such an array of what Cocks claims are stereotypes could also be a site of audience investment, especially if they are not recognized as stereotypes. Harmetz holds that

tense movies about groups of people trapped by man-made or God-made catastrophes have proved golden at the box office (Harmetz 1973).

One way to sustain interest in such claustrophobic situations is, obviously, to involve famous actors. This allows for a number of readings but one would be that the fame of the protagonists in the face of fearsome forces allows the audience some distance from the full terror of natural disasters. This is probably what commentators were getting at when they stressed the escapist aspect of disaster movies. Irwin Allen himself proclaimed *The Poseidon Adventure* to be total escape entertainment (Pennington 1972b p. 3).

Allen's statement was intended as pre-release publicity and is therefore emphasizing the escapism as a creditable feature of the text. Inevitably there were those for whom such a description of the text could be made in a pejorative sense, for example as A Mass Media Escapist Trend (Kaplan 1975 p. 3).

We will return to this shortly. Firstly, it must be noted that the appearance of famous actors in disaster scenes provoked discussion of its numerous possible dimensions. Thus, one critic would state

I think the appeal of the disaster films is the vicarious thrill the public get from seeing others in deep trouble (Gilchrist 1975).

This emphasizes that the danger of disaster provokes involvement on the part of the audience but is rendered quite unthreatening because it involves the 'unreality' of stars. Another critic goes to some lengths to show that disaster movies are actually more serious, because, at a basic level, they deal with the general fragility of our existence. (Larsen 1975 p. 20). And another critic says that there is actually some enjoyment to be derived from seeing famous actors in desperate straits *because* they are stars. Pauline Kael suggests that a film such as *Earthquake* performs the same function as the old Hollywood gossip rags that were often responsible for rubbing the careers of stars. Commenting wryly on the film, Kael writes

A lot of well-known people are casually left in the debris (Kael 1974b).

She adds

Los Angeles, a mock paradise, is so perversely beautiful and so fundamentally unsatisfying that maybe just about everybody there secretly longs to see it come rattling down (Kael 1974b).

This depiction of destruction is something which she actually claims to find disgusting, equating it with pornography. For Kael, there is too little compassion evoked in what are conventionally believed to be traumatic circumstances; of *The Towering Inferno*, she writes

each scene of a person horribly in flames is presented as a feat for our delectation (Kael 1974c).

What all of these views share in common is some kind of grasping for a psychological explanation for the appeal of disaster movies. What they also have in common is that they do not pay attention to the narratives of the genre and merely present highly subjective accounts of the importance of extrapolated portions of the texts. This is not to say that such accounts were uncharacteristic of the practice of reviewing as a whole. However, it is significant that for so many who wished to explain the appeal of such films in the face of their negative feelings about them, there was so little emphasis on the narrative aspect of the texts. In a more academically orientated publication there were some attempts to assess the contemporary popularity of the genre. Dismissing a psychological argument made by the psychologists Erich Fromm and Ernest van den Haag which located the popularity of the genre in relation to Watergate, Kaplan claimed that one must remember that Allen et al.

are doing, with the current slew of disaster film, the same sorts of things they've been doing for the past 20 years (1975 p. 3).

Even if one accepts that all of Allen's work before *The Poseidon Adventure* is identical, Kaplan has clearly made no provision for the possibility of different readings of the same text at given moments. However, he also adds that all the other analyses of the genre are faulty in their attribution of popularity; having dismissed psychology he then goes on, in spite of himself and in an absurd way to make a psychological evaluation of his own. The answer, for Kaplan, to the riddle of the disaster movies' popularity lies in the fact that "people" are "bored" (p. 4). This is probably the most extreme explanation

of the disaster films in the contemporary period but it demonstrates succinctly the pitfalls of the stance of moral superiority that was adopted by a number of other commentators.

Richard Schickel, in *Time*, notes in passing about *Earthquake* that

it requires a cataclysm to resolve the simple domestic problems of the hero (Charlton Heston) and his wife (Ava Gardner) (Schickel 1974b).

This is actually an acknowledgement that there is more than one dimension to the narrative of the film, that it is not simply about a disaster. Now it cannot be denied that the hype that accompanies the film and the spectacle that supposedly characterizes the film are very important. But even if one cannot be sure about how the audience reads the text, it would be wrong to dismiss the narratives of the films altogether, especially as it was clear that audiences did not respond at all in the same manner as the critics did or may have liked the audience to. So, when Kael writes, with a measure of incredulity, that

'Inferno' knocks off some two hundred people as realistically as it possibly can and then tells us that we must plan future buildings more carefully . . . (Kael 1974c)

it is worth suspending this incredulity in order to ascertain whether the two aspects of Kael's statement *are* mutually exclusive or paradoxical, especially if one bears in mind the effects that Allen's film's had on certain standards of safety in public places. John Sutherland's statement on the genre that

the recurrent message of these narratives is that the highest shall be brought calamitously low, that pride goes before a fall (Sutherland 1981 p. 238)

therefore invites analysis. It could be said that each of these films possesses a dimension of social criticism which virtually entitles it to the category of muckraking.

The very beginning of *The Poseidon Adventure* lets slip the main content of the narrative in an epigraph saying that the S.S. *Poseidon* met with disaster on New Year's Eve. Crucially connected to this in the narrative is the next scene which involves the Captain in conversation on the bridge with a Greek shipping merchant, Linarcos, who, it becomes apparent, has bought the ship and is not only taking it to be scrapped but has

also overloaded it with cargo on its last voyage. The exchange between Linarcos and the Captain is centred around questions of antagonism, authority and profit. The merchant orders the ship to go full steam ahead but the Captain is reluctant to place his passengers in danger. It is soon after this that the tidal wave which inverts the ship is reported. In terms of what the film depicts, the disaster could not have been avoided solely by ignoring the orders of the merchant; however, he is shown to be motivated only by profit and this is crucial in view of the crisis of leadership that takes place in the scene and its implications for the rest of the film. These features of the narrative have previously been noted by Rosen who wrote a short critique of the opinions of Kaplan that we have noted. He writes,

In *THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE*, *EARTHQUAKE* and *THE TOWERING INFERNO* the disasters take the immediate form of great, overwhelming natural phenomena: a huge tidal wave, and earthquake, fire. The first two of these disasters could have been mitigated, the third avoided, but for the corruption, greed, or incompetence of certain individuals: the greedy Greek shipping company has made the Poseidon dangerously top-heavy but refuses the Captain's request to slow its speed; in *EARTHQUAKE* both the seismology experts and the mayor hesitate to take the appropriate steps for fear of looking foolish if the quake didn't happen; in *THE TOWERING INFERNO* there's the corruption of the building's electrical contractor who skimmed on materials to increase his profits (Rosen 1975 p. 20).

The contributory negligence of some of the films' initial power-holders can be demonstrated at more length. Rosen also identifies a further important aspect of the narratives and that is the subject of leadership. He writes that the films depict

Heroic leaders (Gene Hackman, Charlton Heston) who come into conflict with previous, but now discredited figures of authority, and ultimately guide people through the disaster to survival (Rosen 1975 p. 20).

Rosen does not, however, stress that the narratives make explicit the link between the negligence of those who lead the protagonists into disaster and the new-found leadership skills of one or two central characters. The Captain in *The Poseidon Adventure* allows himself to be over-ruled; while the scene with Linarcos continues there is also a cut to a scene with a preacher (Gene Hackman) and his immediate superior. The latter tells the preacher that he is angry, rebellious, critical, a renegade.

The next scene involving the preacher is at a dinner table on New Years' Eve (where the pop group plays the apocalyptically titled song, 'There's got to be a morning after'); he tells the assembled that he believes

God wants winners, not quitters.

It is in the same room following the tidal wave that he exhorts the survivors to accompany him to the top (now the bottom) of the ship to escape. Significantly, the older clergyman, his superior, is among those who wish to stay and wait for a rescue rather than attempt to escape. During the ordeal involved in reaching the top (bottom) the preacher outlines his simple philosophy that we should look to ourselves and not to God; yet at the same time he conducts a dialogue with God, asking ultimately

How many more lives?

The preacher leads the group to safety but loses his own life. It seems crucial that the opening scenes should depict the crisis of leadership with Linarcos and the Captain while the end of the film should show the preacher's crisis of authority in respect of God. In addition, throughout the journey of the group the preacher has been antagonized by the policeman, Rogo (Ernest Borgnine) who constantly challenges his authority. The actual depiction of leadership in the narrative is, on one level, general enough for audiences to make their own investments. On another level there is room for a few specific readings. The group that stay behind are shown to be antagonistic to the preacher on the basis of his outspokenness rather than his strategy. In this way they are a silent majority unwilling to take action. The preacher himself is a forceful character and his philosophy is quite manifestly individualistic; however, put in the context of the first scene, his individualism is necessary to combat the creeping moral corruption that those who do not resist authority are subject to at all times. In this way, the preacher is a straightforward individualist, but he has the best of both worlds because he uses this as a tool to question the establishment - his superiors, a policeman, God. Moreover, this takes place in an inverted world: the ship has been turned over and it is the 'morning after', as the song says. If one remembers that the ship is an old vessel on its last voyage then it is not difficult to countenance a reading orientated to its representation of the old world of moral values. In the new world, the preacher's traditionalist outlook is coupled with the questioning stance that may have prevented the worst effects of the cataclysm if it was more universal. These facts about the narrative

establish the grounds for a political reading of the text without an exclusive focus on the putative psychological appeal of the disaster.

The narrative of *Earthquake* deals with the same issues in a similar way. The question of mitigating the effects of disaster is on the film's agenda from the outset. The narrative begins with a short tremor in the household of Graff (Charlton Heston) following a factual introduction to the film explaining the dangers posed to California by the San Andreas fault. Then a scene at the Seismological Institute ensues, in which a young scientist, Chavez (Pedro Armendariz, Jr.) presents his findings to Stockie (Barry Sullivan) suggesting that an earthquake is imminent. Stockie prevaricates, believing Chavez to be inexperienced. A subsequent scene shortly after this one involves seismologists in the field, actually taking measurements within the fault. As a small tremor occurs, they leave the crevice and express their belief that a major earthquake is due; the next shot is of some sheep in a field running away, a shot which recalls a famous sequence from Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel* (1962). Back at the Institute, Stockie tells Chavez that there is only slender evidence for predicting catastrophe and reminds him that he is only a "Graduate Assistant". Similarly, at the nearby dam, workers are concerned enough to report their worries but nobody in authority acts upon them. All in all this is, recalling Ibsen's play - as *Jaws* was to do in respect of Chief Brody - an 'Enemy of the People' scenario. It is significant to note, though, that the chief voice of prophecy is a student, and the person who ignores him is very much a man of the establishment who worries about how he will be seen, and what will happen if there is no quake.

Against this drama of possible prevention is the narrative of leadership that takes place in the text. Three main characters take part in this: Graff, an athletic man with marital difficulties; Slade (George Kennedy), a recently suspended cop; and Jody (Marjoe Gortner), a supermarket manager and National Guardsman. The first two are

straightforward in that they assume the mantle of leadership readily and, as a result of circumstances, join forces to rescue a number of people following the earthquake. Jody, however, is different. Earlier in the narrative he has allowed a young woman, Rosa (Victoria Principal), to have credit at his supermarket while he has leered after her; on one occasion, he has followed her home and spied on her through her window without being discovered, eventually gaining temporary access to her house on the premise that he had brought her a forgotten item of groceries. At his own home it transpires that he is continually teased by the hippies and black neighbours that he meets as he comes and goes from the house. Jody has long hair but every time he goes to attend National Guard training he dons a wig to make him look more square. This he gets from a cabinet in his room that contains an inordinate amount of militaristic paraphernalia, even for a National Guard enthusiast. All these facts have some bearing on the issue of leadership in an explicit way. Later in the film, Jody is in charge of a National Guard unit that is attempting to prevent wholesale looting and amongst those whom he suspects of this are the group of hippies who have previously taunted him. After an initial period of leniency he marches the group into a deserted spot and executes each one using his rifle. If this was not enough to signify that Jody is unsuitable for the leadership roles which are necessary in post-traumatic situations he then shows leniency to a genuine looter - Rosa - who he meets for the first time since the earthquake. However, it is not leniency without a price: as he attempts to rape her he is interrupted by Slade who is on a mission of mercy elsewhere. Although Jody manages to persuade Slade that nothing untoward is happening, the latter is still suspicious, and after having made the pretence of leaving, he returns and shoots Jody dead before the violation of Rosa can recommence. Despite the fact that, in comparison with contemporary critics' views on the film, this focus on Jody may seem akin to reading the margins of the text I would suggest that there is a political dimension at stake. The fact that Jody has two identities - one reasonably modern and one which is square - suggests a fundamental duplicity. Duplicity to the contemporary audience is clearly a feature of any narrative at this time which will be the site of possible post-

Watergate investments, and Jody's criminal tendencies cannot be divorced from this two-sidedness. In addition, it is significant that those he chooses to execute following the earthquake are those who have taunted him - hippies and black people. Moreover, he carries out the execution in his 'straight' role which, it must be remembered, is that of a National Guardsman. Four years after Kent State and months after the official conclusion to Watergate it is not difficult to imagine what sort of connotations a National Guard figure might suggest to an audience. This is not to say, of course, that Jody equals the Nixon Administration and his former tormentors equal late-sixties protest; however, it *is* to suggest that the general sets of investments regarding the Nixon Administration and regarding protest are analogous to those which might be active in a contemporary reading of the film. That Jody has to consummate the paranoia he feels about the hippies even when he is in a position of authority and power delineates him as unsuitable for leadership on the grounds of his lack of compassion. At the risk of a facile equation, the Nixon Administration in its reaction to say, the Kent students or the Vietnamese, could be said to be equally lacking in compassion. If one takes the two versions of compassion in a very general sense, there are possible overlaps even though one version refers to a fictional rather than a real character. This being the case, then one can posit that the topic of compassion has its specific points of audience investments which may overlap, or at least have some relation to other areas of the same topic. So, if one was to opt for a hermeneutical overload - as some critics did in suggesting that the disaster symbolized Watergate or changing social values or whatever - the reading can only be sustained by reference to these less salient features of the narrative that an audience might heed while the spectacle was absent from the screen.

Writing on the topic of the crisis of leadership in the disaster texts, Rosen gives his own view of its historical determinants; thus,

An undertow of dissent and dissatisfaction manifested itself in different ways at various times in the post-war period, which intensified in the late sixties in what appeared to be an outbreak of social turmoil in politics, racial relations, sexual attitudes and behavior, culture, education, etc. Each of these

related aspects of contemporary society experienced and continues to experience developments similar to what happens to the economy at times of crisis: established institutions, conceptions and authorities are hard-pressed by events and their viability is challenged. In the same way, attempts to maintain a sick status quo aimed at singling out culpable individuals as the cause of problems ('outside agitators', 'over-permissive' parents and educators, the press, various 'misfits' etc) promote new, 'dynamic' leadership ready and able to confront them toughly, and call for a return to the 'time-tested' values and virtues (Rosen 1975 p. 20).

This statement is helpful in offering an overview of some of the possible issues involved in the leadership aspect of these narratives. However, as our analysis has hopefully begun to show, Rosen is wrong in one crucial respect. He writes that the crisis of leadership is brought about basically as a means of dealing with the sources of the new social attitudes that have provoked the crisis that is then depicted as a natural disaster. The narratives of *The Poseidon Adventure* and *Earthquake*, as we have seen, depict the new leaders as crucially *new*, incorporating aspects of the new morality (or blurring of prior conventions) while dispensing with the worst aspects of the old order. So, in *The Poseidon Adventure* the preacher leaves behind the silent majority; in *Earthquake*, Jody is found unsuitable for leadership and is killed by someone who has proved himself eminently suitable for compassionate leadership after having been suspended from his job as police officer in the 'old' world. More than either of these, though, *The Towering Inferno* expresses in its narrative a need to be rid of the corruption upon which the old world is built. To begin with, the film's narrative tries to build an intra-textual base on the theme of compassion, opening with the epigraph/dedication

TO THOSE WHO GIVE THEIR LIVES SO THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE.

One of the initial characters that is introduced in the opening scenes of the film is Gary Parker, a senator in charge of the urban renewal commission which basically has as its remit the encouragement of more inner city skyscrapers. He is not shown to be personally discreditable in any part of the film, which is curious if one believed that the film wished to make an overt critique of Washington policy. However, in light of what takes place in the narrative, his mission might be viewed in a different light by the end of the film. One of the first characters who is introduced into the narrative from outside the workforce of the new building is a con-man played by Fred Astaire. His very first

scene shows him successfully cheating a taxi-driver out of a tip by saying he does not have change of a fifty dollar bill although by the end of the film, after having confessed his life of lies to an ultimately doomed woman he meets (Jennifer Jones), he is redeemed by his efforts on behalf of other during the fire in the building. This is clearly the basis for a reading of the film's ushering in of a new order of thoughtfulness heralded by the (Oscar-winning) song played at the opening party of the building, 'We may never love like this again'. If one were to ask what the narrative is disposing of from the old order one would have to begin with Duncan (William Holden) and Simmons (Richard Chamberlain). Duncan, as chief executive of the building has contracted out the installation of the electrical system to his son-in-law, Simmons. Although this is an act of nepotism the narrative implies that Duncan has acted in good faith. Simmons, at various stages in the narrative suggests that he was under pressure to cut corners but it soon becomes clear that he is personally disreputable and generally very slimy. This is a significant point in terms of the film and the star system because the actor who plays arch-baddie Simmons is famous for his portrayal of the ultra-clean and straight Dr. Kildare in the early sixties. At a very early point in the film it becomes apparent that the electrical system is faulty, and the way this is narrated allows a reading with highly specific resonances. An early meeting in the office of Duncan where the architect, Doug Roberts (Paul Newman), tells him of the electrical difficulties includes the following exchange between the two men:

"Doug, one piece of scorched wire from a burned out circuit breaker is hardly conclusive".

"I know, but after that I'm worried about what other shocks we're in for".

Anybody who has gleaned the least inside information of Watergate would instantly recognize the similarity of this and the general White House scenario following the June 1972 break-in. If this was not enough, there are various other reworkings of aspects of the Watergate affair in the narrative. For example, when Doug Roberts berates Simmons for his negligence, lack of foresight and callousness, Simmons replies

"You live in a dream world - I deal in realities".

This is the kind of argument which, as we have seen, recurred throughout *Watergate*. Another example comes later in the film when Duncan claims that a fire on the eighty-first floor cannot affect the floor where the party is being held many storeys above. Exactly the same dismissal of a 'fire down below' can be said to characterize Nixon's response to the activities of the Campaign to Re-elect the President. That Simmons is a thoroughly disreputable character is beyond dispute in the proving ground of the fire and the fight for survival that ensues. Like a rat on a sinking ship he assembles a group which is willing to fight its way into a lift that, because of limited space, has been allocated to women only. Simmons and his group are restrained and Duncan the announces that

I'm gonna be the last one out of here along with my son-in-law.

The narrative points out that Duncan had actually encouraged Simmons to make economies and so he must bear a share of the guilt. Referring to Duncan's rationalizations of Simmons' actions in stinting on electrical costs Doug Roberts asks

What do they call it when you kill people?

Very soon after his attempt to gatecrash the escape lift Simmons leads his group down the damaged staircase and ultimately to death. This, to an extent, represents a cleansing of the community that is made up of the stranded partygoers; however, the main cleansing of everything that the fiery building represents comes later. *The Poseidon Adventure* features a spectacular tidal wave caused by a "sub-sea earthquake"; *Earthquake* has a dam break which leads to many of the characters being swept away; and rather than have the fire department achieve victory over the fire directly, the narrative of *The Towering Inferno* opts instead for the detonation of a bomb beside huge water tanks towards the top of the building. That all three films should use water in such a fashion strongly suggests that the narratives are about cleansing, especially in the case of the last film.⁵ In any case, there can be little dispute that the narratives of all

⁵ This is echoed, perhaps, in Travis Bickle's call for rain in *Taxi Driver* (1976) (see Chapter 10).

three texts contain a significant amount of the muckraking spirit, and in *The Towering Inferno* especially there are explicit statements on social issues. At the end of the film Duncan says to Doug Roberts

All I can do now is to pray to God we can stop this from ever happening again.

Roberts replies,

I don't know. Maybe they should leave it as it is. A kind of shrine to all the bullshit in the world.

A number of critics expressed perplexity at this line in the film, claiming that there was no specific focus for what Roberts means when he refers to bullshit. Yet, although it is left open, there are indications of what he might have meant in the exchange with the fire chief (Steve McQueen) which follows directly after. Says the chief,

I'm gonna keep eating smoke and bringing out bodies until somebody asks us how to build them.

The last line of the film comes from Roberts:

O.K., I'm asking.

This line may have been the one which particularly pleased Irwin Allen in his zeal for reform that we have noted. At the same time, though, it is the muckraking of the narrative which allows space for a critique of the existing structures of capitalism.

Given that this is the case, the possible equation of the corruption in public life depicted in the film and that corruption which was shown by other discourses to exist in real public life, implicates the government in the narrative's critique. The social critique aspect of the texts may not be so obvious as the determinant of a reading in the light of the extra-textual cues, but the grounds for such a reading of the texts certainly exists.

Whether these were definitely taken up by those hordes of readers of the film who ignored reviewers advice is open to question, but it is very possible within the contemporary political climate.

The disaster genre exemplified by these three films reached its pinnacle of popularity in the mid-seventies. One could say that the disaster movie proper ends as a hugely popular phenomenon with *The Towering Inferno* although, as we have seen, films such as *Jaws* are also considered to be disaster movies. Moreover, Irwin Allen

continued to make such films as *The Swarm* (1978) involving killer bees, and which critics almost universally pronounced execrable; other disaster films ranged from *Rollercoaster* (1977) to *The China Syndrome* (1979). The thrust of the three disaster texts that we have discussed is far different from any films since the seventies which can be placed in the category. The most notable examples of the disaster film in the 1980s were probably *The Day After* (1983) and the British film, *Threads* (1984). Both dealt with a nuclear holocaust and, as a result, both dealt with a massive threat to human life. A film like *Backdraft* (1991) superficially appears to be treading the same path as *The Towering Inferno* with its graphic depiction of the effects of fire but it is easy to see that both films are shot through with a variety of very different narratives which, in the most recent of the two films, very much makes the disasters secondary to the film's narrative as a whole. What makes the texts we have discussed outstanding is captured to an extent by John Sutherland's comments; he writes,

It is one of the laws of the disaster novel/film that the blow should fall where it will do most damage; not, however, to the human population but to the social formation and to the sophisticated technological apparatus of modern society (1981 p. 237).

Where I would disagree with Sutherland is in his implicit statement that the disaster film as a whole adheres to this formula: the example of *The Day After* need only be cited here as a contradiction. However, as far as the texts we have discussed are concerned, Sutherland's statement is very appropriate. It seems to be true of all the narratives as we have outlined them in a little detail; each is concerned with how corruption in some sphere of public life ultimately leads to disaster involving human fatalities. In this way there is actually a relation between all the blockbuster texts that we have discussed, but one which is obscured by the fact that the disaster movies were so popular *in spite of* some of their extra-textual cues. As we saw with *The Godfather*, *The Exorcist* and *Jaws*, extra-textual cues presented the narratives as texts to be read by keeping in tension aspects of the narrative which were central to American life while simultaneously delineating them as purely extrinsic matters. That is to say that the Mafia, the Devil and the shark in these narratives all allow a set of interpretations which implicate them in the very fabric of contemporary American social life; yet, while

recognizing this, extra-textual cues left open, and even stressed, the option in which these features were purely extrinsic and therefore uncontrollably alien to the social formation.

In the disaster texts, two of the catastrophes are natural in origin while the third is the result of human negligence. Yet all of the texts suggest that the effects of the disasters could have been ameliorated were it not for the greediness and corruption of individuals and institutions. The disasters are therefore extrinsic: tidal waves, earthquakes and fire can be thrilling by their alienness and inexplicability. At the same time, they are also disasters which are very much of society: they occur in places where there is a representative concentration of capital at a given moment, they resemble the irresistibility of social forces and they are very much assisted by the blatant selfishness of the representatives of capital at the centre of the catastrophes. The amorality of the disaster, the immorality of the human representatives of it and the moral selflessness of the disaster's victims (c.f. *Jaws*) make these films more than mere spectacles of technical effects. Pre-release publicity for the texts emphasize the huge amounts of capital and planning that go into the films' production; the reviews of the films emphasize the artlessness and the pointlessness of the spectacles depicted; and the narratives of the films can all be demonstrated to contain extended critiques of the way that capitalism functions. These three factors can be said to be in play within a contemporary reading of the disaster genre as well as discourses about the social formation at the time. The films can be said to have two foci, then, rather than these four: the industry discourses about the size of the production merge with the reviews' critique of them to become one area of interpreting the film; discourses about the contemporary social formation merge with those features of the narrative which present characters such as the National Guardsman as areas of investment. Put another way, the films contain the spectacle plus the narrative. Both are subject to investments by the contemporary audience: the spectacle as reported and the narrative as it is unreported, or reported inadequately, by the extra-textual cues means that the potential indeterminacies

of the text are enhanced. Although there is also the question of novelty, it is probably quite safe to assume that the popularity of the disaster films at this time involved a considerable amount of reference to the discourses about the social formation in the filling of these potential indeterminacies. Yacowar suggests that the disaster film is about man's helplessness against the forces of nature; Sutherland attempts to demonstrate that the disaster film attacks capitalism where it is most vulnerable - both of these arguments we have found to be inapplicable to the genre as a whole. What they fail to answer is why the disaster genre was more popular in the 1970s than at any other time. As I have suggested, the contemporary readings which made up the film's popularity had a very historically specific view of what nature and capitalism entailed. This is therefore the place to locate a discussion of the meaning of the texts at a given moment and in given circumstances.

Cues to Reading

In Chapter 4 we used the Fish/Iser debate on indeterminacy to illustrate what is at stake in the discussion of how readings are shaped. Having established that a text has *potential* indeterminacies it became clear that it is in the nature of a reading formation to always already effect the filling of such 'gaps' in the text as are allowed by potential indeterminacies. The key point is that the gaps in texts can never really be rendered visible; they must be gaps only in the abstract. In 'concrete' readings of texts they are always filled in such a way that even the potential of lacunae seems hard to imagine; as a result, a peculiarly contemporary reading of a text can never really know itself as such. Instead, the reading seems to be based on what is actually 'there', what the text is 'in-itself'. My readings of the narratives of the disaster films are not based on how they would usually be read in the 1990s except insofar as they are readings of the texts in terms of a 1990s *version* of the 1970s social formation. That is to say that the historical audience's potential reaction to a number of extra-textual cues can only be based on an

examination of those cues. This is almost an identical point to the one that we made about history in Chapter 2: that it can only really be rooted in historical documents. Similarly, readings of texts from the 1970s can only be posited on what was contemporary rather than, say, a 1990s analysis of the long-term trajectory of late capitalism. As we have noted earlier, what the Fish/Iser debate alludes to but fails to discuss is the possibility of a historically verifiable reading formation which contains a range of discourses co-existing with given texts. Moreover, these other discourses or texts do not simply co-exist with given texts; the fact that it can be demonstrated that texts are characterized by potential indeterminacies which are always already filled strongly suggests that different discourses in a reading formation are actually built into each other to a greater or lesser extent. In more direct terms, the reading formation of the 1970s incorporates discourses about the social formation and more explicit discourses about given texts. These latter (extra-textual) cues have the function of not only commenting on the text in question but also often mediating those discourses about the social world that might exist in the reading formation. For example, reviews might draw attention to certain aspects of the social formation which are depicted in the text. So, in one way, extra-textual cues, insofar as they cannot *be* the text in question have a tendency to simplify. That is to say that the multiplicity of a fictional text, all those potential indeterminacies which are to be always already filled with material from a plethora of sources, is limited. The gaps are immediately filled from a more proximate and limited source. Why is an American film dealing with a building in flames from the 1970s not read in the contemporary period with reference to nineteenth-century German discourses on the aesthetics of architecture? There are numerous reasons; these include the fact that such a text is narrated in a mode that the contemporary readership recognizes as referring to the contemporary world; the narrative has relations with a genre - the thriller - which has traditionally foregrounded its verisimilitude; the text's relations with this genre involve it in a further relation to those topics upon which that genre has dwelt, e.g. conspiracy; other discourses in the contemporary world have also foregrounded certain notions of conspiracy at this time, and so on. These are the given

text's most proximate neighbours in a reading formation. Now, what this fact entails has very general implications for the study of genre. As we saw in Chapter 1, Altman and others attempt to negotiate the limiting of a text's polysemy by attributing it to the work of an interpretive community and/or the genre itself. The discussion of Fish and Iser has emphasized that neither of these has sole control over such a task: while an interpretive community might exist it is subject to change and the nature of its readings must be focussed by factors outside itself during such change; similarly, genre texts, like non-genre texts, are inextricably tied to other texts, their potential indeterminacies always filled by them. The concept of genre can be said to limit meanings in quite a specific way; but not in the manner that Altman and others claim that it does. Although it may seem to be a mere theoretical nicety which defines my version of genre's act of limiting against other versions there is actually a significant difference. Rather than genre 'in-itself' being a limitation of the text's polysemy, it is the *designation* of genre that creates the limitation. That is to say that once a text is designated a generic text by a series of extra-textual cues, this is the beginning of a limiting process acting upon the text's polysemy. The potential indeterminacies that it may have as a designated non-generic text will possibly be immediately filled from sources other than those that would do the job if the text were designated a generic text. This is not to say that there are no recognizably generic texts; but the process of their designation as such is crucial to activate a much wider range of negotiations within a reading formation than has previously been considered. Once again, to transcend a genre is an oxymoron: a text can only transcend a genre if it is designated as doing so from an extra-textual source. This has implications for the topic of generic innovation as we will see.

In this chapter we have observed the mechanisms involved in a reading formation and we have seen their specific interaction with some very high profile texts of the period. Approaching this from another angle, what can these texts and the relations for a reading of them in the contemporary period tell us about a wider corpus of thrillers? As we saw, *All the President's Men* was a text which, among its components, also had

built into it the role of Robert Redford in a thriller called *Three Days of the Condor* (1975). The texts we have discussed were, with one exception, very high profile narratives of the period. A major purpose of this chapter, then, has been to present a body of texts and their contemporary readings as particularly prominent in the reading formation of thrillers that we will discuss. These are the proximate texts and readings that co-exist with say, private eye novels and police stories in the contemporary period, offering a frame of reference within history. The thriller, as we have noted on numerous occasions, has a special relationship with the non-fictional text which is a result of the thriller genre's specific verisimilitude. Like other discourses about the world of politics and social life that we encountered in Chapter 3, the non-fiction thriller cannot avoid having a very close relationship with a range of other thrillers. It acts, perhaps, as a buffer between the thriller and other non-fiction discourses about the contemporary world. In fact, the relation between the non-fiction thriller and the fictional thriller is boosted by their similarity on at least one level; Jameson writes,

The more powerful of them preserve the existence of a secret in their historical content, and, at the same time that they purport to give us a version of the events, exacerbate our certainty that we will never know for sure what really did happen (1979 p. 79).

The suspense and mystery element is often common to both. As we have demonstrated, the tropological difference between the two modes of narrative are slight enough to be deemed non-existent; the way in which the texts are classified relies very much on extra-textual cues which, in providing a classification for non-fictional texts, also provide their justification for being non-fictional. This is usually couched in terms of truth being stranger than fiction. So, if non-fiction is to be differentiated from fiction, the designation of the former is often based on its complexity. Potentially there need be no difference in the polysemy of a fictional or a non-fictional narrative; but extra-textual cues, by confirming the non-fictionality of a narrative, limit the polysemy of a text by, paradoxically, designating it complex. Given that this is the case, it is not surprising that the non-fictionality of certain thrillers might be influential in filling other thrillers' potential indeterminacies. A genre which relies on verisimilitude is understandably ripe for the incorporation of aspects of texts designated non-fiction into the very fabric of its

texts as texts to be read. The prominence of these non-fiction thrillers will hence assist in building them into other thrillers of the period, and they will act like further extra-textual cues.

In the case of blockbusters their non-fictionality is not an issue. However, their tangential relation to thrillers does not prevent them from becoming part of the fabric of the genre. In many ways the blockbuster and its extra-textual cues provided a paradigm for the 1970s thriller. The way in which these texts so redefined the public's relation to their textual material could not help but have repercussions for thrillers that trod the same ground. *The Godfather* meant that all other narratives about the Mafia for some time were encoded with the blockbuster text's legacy. The same can be said for the other blockbuster texts in general terms. The tension in the contemporary readings of them maintained by the extra-textual cues meant that threats to American life contained in the narratives were caught between an interpretation of them as either internal or external to the social formation. The 'internal' interpretation was assisted by discourses about contemporary political events, particularly Watergate, and, almost certainly, by such thrillers as those dealt with in the chapter on paranoid narratives (below).

However, the tension between the two possible readings and, perhaps, a leaning toward the internal, would be particularly important for those thriller texts with which the blockbusters co-existed in the reading formation. In this way, the blockbusters also operate as important cues for contemporary readings of the corpus of thrillers we will consider.

What we have discussed in the last three chapters has been concerned primarily with the recognition of a general realm of narrativity in which thrillers exist plus internal relations within such a realm at a given time. If these relations - which are very much *relations between texts* - are responsible for generating specific readings, then the historicity of such readings can be viewed in a new light. The notion that texts 'represent' or 'reflect' history is often based on a belief in history as always readily

available rather than constantly mediated by signs and textuality. A historical reading based on this notion merely has to ascertain some facts about the contemporary social formation and examine how the text transforms them. However, as we have argued, the history itself is 'textual' and so a historical reading cannot be based on some reconstruction after the fact of an 'objective' historical reality. Instead, the historical audience can only be reconstituted through those contemporary texts which, in various ways and with various designations, mediate historical reality. The opposition between ideology and reality, in this way, ceases to be an opposition; only ideology is available. Yet, in the realm of the discourses that make up an ideological formation, there are clearly areas where epistemological primacy can be allocated. This is the general process which takes place, for instance, in the designation of a text as a generic entity or a valorized member of a previously designated canon. If it is true that a hierarchy of discourses exists *in* the thriller genre or in specific texts, then there is a concurrent hierarchy which characterizes the ideological formation of which the reading formation is a part. Such a reading formation allows for a hierarchy of which texts are to be the most proximate to a given text and how it is to be read, demarcating the areas of the given text's effectivity within a designation the reading formation has sanctioned. In Chapters 3 and 5 we discussed the incremental nature of Watergate's unfolding and the congruency of this with certain putative characteristics of thrillers. Many thrillers are believed to be fundamentally incremental in their narration although there are some which are said to be almost devoid of this characteristic. The latter are the texts which make up the subgenre of the hard-boiled story. In the next chapter we will consider the progression principle in this kind of fiction in the 1970s with a view to showing that virtually all narrative can be shown to be incremental in nature, that the designation of hard-boiled style as objective is inextricably tied to this characteristic of narrative, and that such a designation in the contemporary period has quite specific ideological imperatives.

CHAPTER 7

Narrative Progression and the Hard-Boiled Hero

Every government, say the politicians, is perpetually degenerating towards corruption, from which it must be rescued at certain periods by resuscitation of its first principles and the re-establishment of its original constitution. Every animal body, according to the methodic physicians, is, by the predominance of some exuberant quality, continually declining towards disease and death, which must be obviated by a seasonable reduction of the peccant humour to the just equipoise which health requires (Johnson 1751 in Wimsatt 1969 p. 39).

One gentleman, in particular, of whose knowledge, judgement, and experience, as well as candour, the editor has the highest opinion advised him to give a narrative turn to the letters, and to publish what concerned only the principal heroine - striking off the collateral incidents and all that related to the second characters, though he allowed the parts which would have been by this means excluded to be both instructive and entertaining. But being extremely fond of the affecting story, he was desirous to have everything parted with, which he thought retarded its progress.

The advice was not relished by other gentlemen. They insisted that the story could not be reduced to a dramatic unity, nor thrown into the narrative way, without divesting it of its warmth and of a great part of its efficacy, as very few of the reflections and observations, which they looked upon as the most useful part of the collection, would then find a place.

They were of the opinion that in all works of this, and of the dramatic kind, *story* or *amusement* should be considered as little more than the vehicle to the more necessary *instruction*: that many of the scenes would be rendered languid were they to be made less busy: and that the whole would be thereby deprived of that variety which is deemed the soul of a feast, whether mensal or mental (Richardson 1985 pp. 35-36)

A fiction story is like a joke. The reason you listen to a joke is to get to the punchline. Pacing a story is like sex: you start off with the teasing, then work up to the rough stuff and then all of a sudden you get the real boom-da-boom-da-boom-da-BANG, the big explosion, then you're finished. The closer to the last word you can get the climax, the better. Nobody reads a book to get to the middle, you read a book to get to the end and you hope the end is good enough to justify all the time you have spent reading it (Spillane in Miller 1989 p. 36).

Introduction

In the next two chapters we will discuss some thrillers with the specific aim of posing some questions to do with narrative dynamics. We have argued that contemporary readings of narratives in the thriller genre are determined to a great extent by extra-textual factors. We have also discussed briefly those analyses of genre which conclude that the nature of genre is almost exclusively textual. Such analyses invariably posit the notion that the very structure of the generic text is somehow responsible for actually constituting the reader. These are quite powerful arguments as it would be foolish to overlook the possibility that readers have specific investments in the *process* of narrative. In this chapter we will address this issue with specific reference to the fundamental narrative component of progression. In order to confront the issue in the most direct possible way, we will analyse the hard-boiled story, a sub-genre which, even among thrillers, is thought to be narrated in a manner which is almost exclusively geared towards progression. This is very germane to our concern with the 1970s thriller as the period saw a considerable resurgence of what can be said to be a dated sub-genre. That it was not considered to be dated in the 1970s is an issue that we must discuss. Let us briefly summarise the most salient features of this generic resurgence.

A number of detective novels appeared in the 1970s which had as common features a series character and a hard-boiled style. The series character was often a private detective of some sort although a police operative would sometimes be the hero. Because of the enormous breadth of popular fiction strict taxonomies of genre can rarely be made to apply and so the subgenre of private eye fiction I choose to examine here exists within somewhat arbitrary boundaries. What is immediately evident, though, is that the style of these novels was imported almost wholesale from the classic hard-boiled writers Hammett, Chandler and Macdonald and the series character was also derived in part from the creations of these authors. However, a putative consensus demanded that the private eye's character be updated. This involved complex questions

of the nature of genre as a contract between writer and audience, in particular how this is affected by ideological changes in the real world. It was also linked to the constraints of verisimilitude, especially with regard to how other subgenres treated their raw material. Through its effects on these novels this updating of the private eye became a site of generic innovation: adjustment of and accommodation to certain key conventions contained in classic hard-boiled fiction. One of the most commercially successful of the 1970s writers was Robert B. Parker whose private detective, Spenser, has appeared so far in bestselling novels from *The Godwulf Manuscript* (1973) to *Double Deuce* (1992b), as well as a TV series. The Spenser novels have consistently attempted to confront social changes while remaining within a recognisable hard-boiled tradition. In the first part of this chapter we will consider these novels by examining the interaction of their general style with the figure of Spenser, an updated private eye who has to face a number of contemporary issues. One obvious example of these - an issue with which I choose to deal here - concerns the status of women in the novels. This is a huge, problematic topic in detective fiction generally and is dealt with in a new way in the Spenser stories.¹ In the last part of the chapter we will consider Dave Brandstetter, a private eye who is much different to Spenser, and we will compare the ways in which he negotiates issues of gender and violence.

Narrative Progression and Hard-Boiled Style

A crucial element of any narrative, regardless of genre, is narrative progression. In the same way that an object cannot have just one dimension but must have two or three, a narrative must advance to its end whilst simultaneously delaying it. This dynamic has

¹ The Spenser novels of the 1980s deal with new issues to do with gender and the family (in *Early Autumn* [1985a; originally 1981] and *Ceremony* [1987a], for example) and with new developments in the genre (such as the outlaw adventure novel - *A Catskill Eagle* [1987c] *Pale Kings and Princes* [1988a] - and the psychopathic killer novel - *Crimson Joy* [1988b]), all of which lie outside the scope of this chapter dealing with the seventies. My references are therefore limited to the first six Spenser novels up to *Looking for Rachel Wallace* (1980).

been most cogently expressed by Roland Barthes; in *S/Z* (1974) he analyses a Balzac short story by elaborating five codes through whose matrix the text passes. One of these codes - the 'hermeneutic' - is of particular interest to this analysis as it is the code of formulation and disclosure of an enigma which, along with the figure of the hero, is the fundamental constituent of detective fiction. It must also be remembered that this code has a dual function: to push the narrative forward towards disclosure and to simultaneously retard the narrative's progress by way of 'equivocation', 'snares', and 'false replies'. These individual delays on the way to a narrative's end which Barthes has recognized in his discussion of the Balzac story can be collected (as has been done by one critic) under the term *detours* (see Brooks in Felman 1982). These *detours* are woven so imperceptibly into the fiction that they may not be instantly recognisable as delays but rather as snatches of dialogue or sequential description.

What is significant for the discussion of thrillers is that *detours* are components of the process that creates the phenomenon known as suspense. Theorists of the genre have often overlooked this integral feature of the genre's appeal while those who have confronted the question head on have not taken into account the importance of the narrative dynamic as a whole. Jerry Palmer, for instance, has concentrated on the point of view of the hero:

Events in the thriller are dramatic because thrillers portray conspiracies. But this is not an explanation of why the reader finds them exciting. Excitement derives from experiencing those dramatic interruptions through the eyes of the hero; his perspective dominates the reader's. This is true both morally and physically: morally, insofar as we identify the hero (for as long as we are reading the story, at least) as the source of good in the world; and physically insofar as, even when the narration allows us to see some things from the villain's angle, dramatic and significant events are always shown from the hero's side of the fence (1978 p. 59).

This argument is supplemented by a passage from *Casino Royale* in which an ambush perpetrated by the villain is initially narrated from the villain's point of view. At the crucial moment the narration returns to the point of view of Bond; Bond's reactions and his helplessness in the situation serve to impress the point that the ambush is a disaster for the hero. It is true that this mechanism allows the reader to identify the hero and recognise the disaster but, *in addition*, the sequence in which events are narrated from

the villain's point of view has the effect of delaying the favourable outcome of the episode. As a result, Bond has temporarily been stopped on his mission. The villain is a block before the forward thrust of the narrative, a dynamic which finds its chief embodiment in the figure of the hero. It is in this tension of delays and the move towards resolution that the phenomenon of suspense seems to reside. And the vicissitudes of this tension so specific to the pleasure of the thriller is the main topic of this chapter.

One way to approach this question is to examine how the dynamic of narrative differs from narrative's other features. In order to theorize a possible site of textual pleasure Peter Brooks (in Felman 1982) has utilized categories first employed by Barthes (1974). He notes the metonymic, linear dynamic of narrative, or movement towards disclosure but also states that narrative has a metaphorical aspect. Brooks here also utilizes two concepts distinguished by the Russian formalists: *fabula* refers to the chronological sequence of events which make up the raw materials of a story; *sjuzet* is the way the story is organized into a plot. These terms are usually translated as 'story' and 'plot' respectively. Shklovsky writes:

The idea of plot is too often confused with the description of events - with what I propose provisionally to call the *story*. The story is, in fact, only material for plot formulation. The plot of *Evgeny Onegin* is, therefore, not the romance of the hero with Tatyana, but the fashioning of the subject of this story as produced by the introduction of interrupting digressions. One sharp-witted artist (Vladimir Miklashevsky) proposed to illustrate *Evgeny Onegin* mainly through the digressions (the 'small feet', for example); considering it as a composition of motifs, such a treatment would be proper (in Lemon and Reis 1965 p. 57).

Brooks seems to be operating within this problematic when he introduces a comparison of the working of a narrative's material with the mechanism involved in metaphor. The analogy of narrative with metaphor lies in the notion that, in purporting to relate a sequence of prior events, narrative can be considered, like metaphor, "the same-but-different." *Fabula* (prior events) is organized in a way that presents itself as 'the same' as those events but is 'different,' because it is reorganized and plotted, i.e. *sjuzet*.

According to Brooks' argument the key rationale for their combination lies in narrative's end:

The very possibility of meaning plotted through time depends on the anticipated structuring force of the ending: the interminable would be meaningless (in Felman 1982 p. 283)

A corollary of this is that the *detours* - all those delaying factors on the way to the ending of a narrative - are bound to a system. They exist in relation to the end of a narrative. Brooks adds,

Textual energy, all that is aroused into expectancy and possibility in a text . . . can become usable by plot only when it has been bound or formalized . . . To speak of 'binding' in a literary text is thus to speak of any of the formalizations (which, like binding, may be painful, retarding) that force us to recognize sameness within difference, or the very emergence of a *sjuzet* from the material of *fabula* (p. 283).

So 'binding' is the process by which a detour is created. A 'binding effect', therefore, is something that produces all those retardations of the narrative's progress that Barthes discussed: 'snares', 'false replies', etc. A brief look at tough style will illustrate its 'binding' effect in hard-boiled fiction. What follows in the next few paragraphs, then, is a summary of the analyses of hard-boiled style to be found in a number of secondary works on Hemingway.²

The foremost characteristic of tough style lies in its short sentences. These are often devoid of adjectives and adverbs, and the words that remain are generally those that are more commonly evident in everyday language rather than the 'flowery' terms used in literature. So 'said' will replace 'asserted', 'queried' or 'expostulated', for instance. The nouns used are usually concrete and recognisable while any adjectives that are employed will probably be inexact, such as, 'nice', 'bright' or 'big'. Verbs, too, will be stripped to a minimum with a heavy reliance on the verb 'to be'.

This simplicity is carried over into the construction of hard-boiled sentences as well as the choice of words: the sentences will be mainly simple declarative ones, or a couple of these joined by a conjunction; subordinate clauses will be very infrequent thus lessening narratorial observation. When these sentences are used to describe events or

² See, for instance, Donaldson (1978); Lynn (1989); Meyers (1987); Reynolds (1986); as well as the works cited in the text.

actions the sequence is intact with the events being presented in the sequence in which they occurred, directly and unmixed with comment. As a result the depiction of violence in hard-boiled fiction (which is frequent) often gives an effect of irony, detachment and understatement; as one critic puts it,

If you describe really outrageous events as though they happen daily in your backyard, you get a critical impact which Woe Woe and Cry Havoc do not impart (Atkins 1964 p. 87).

This style, derived from Hemingway and journalism, developed in America between the Wars and has often been viewed, then and since, as some kind of pure style which is an almost transparent vehicle for the reporting of objective facts. Hemingway implied this himself, but his critics exacerbated the situation. Philip Young (1966), for example, claims

His subject was violence and pain and their effects, and recovery from the effects in the face of and partly through more of the same. The style which expresses this subject matter is itself perfectly expressive of these things . . . (p. 208).

On closer examination of the prose he adds

His style is as eloquent of his content as the content itself; the style is a large part of the content. The strictly disciplined controls which he exerted over his hero and his 'bad nerves' are precise parallels to the strictly disciplined sentences he wrote. Understatement, abbreviated statements and lack of statements reflect without the slightest distortion the rigid restraint the man felt he must practise if he were to survive. The 'mindlessness' of the style is the result of the need to 'stop thinking', and is the purest reflection of that need. The intense simplicity of the prose is a means by which the man said, Things must be *made* simple, or I am lost, in a way you'll never be. There is no rearrangement and re-ordering of the material because the mind operates no more than it has to. And all these things are communicated by the manner of presentation. (p. 208)

It is notable that Young, when describing Hemingway's prose in the passage, twice considers it as a "reflection". He treats style as a vehicle for transmitting other things such as emotions or events. Moreover, he says there is not "the slightest distortion", nor any "rearrangement and reordering of the material". True, a feature of tough style is its sequential presentation of events but if one thinks of a description in writing of a static situation - the interior of a building, for example - the depiction of objects will necessarily be *ordered*, and ordered in a different way from that of the eye. The order presented in writing is different from that in the focussing of vision. Similarly, all description of events must be constrained by limited time and space in order for the prose to deal with them; haphazard description of events and objects would be meaningless. What Young fails to point out is that the imposition of narrative form

must always lead to the 'distortion' of facts and, like other critics, he saw tough style as pure reflection; he is positing a false relation between style and *fabula*, the story matter.

If, with Brooks, we take narrative to be a "sameness within difference" we can see that the error of such critics was a failure to emphasise the "difference" in this formula.

Style is one important formalization among those which constitute *sjuzet* and and go to make up the "difference" of *sjuzet* from *fabula*. Events in a story need not necessarily

be conveyed by one particular style which purports to be most appropriate. The

categories employed by Genette (1982) are useful for confronting this question: he used two terms, *histoire* and *recit* which correspond to *fabula* and *sjuzet* respectively, but

also specified a third term, *narration*, which is of importance here. *Narration* is the

actual process of narrating the *histoire* (*fabula*, 'story') and this is executed both by a

fictional narrator and a real author.³ The narrator of a hard-boiled story narrates by way

of a tough style but this style is merely one among many styles which the narrator, even

if he is a private detective, could utilize. Convention dictated that the hard-boiled story

should have a tough, spare style and this is the result of a consensus reached by writers

and critics of such stories. But, apart from convention, there is no real reason why the

story events should not, for example, be narrated in Elizabethan English. Moreover, the

hard-boiled style was not simply an unhampered movement of actions through narrative

to their end; it merely engendered a semblance of realism and seemed to lessen the

detours, by relying on less description of scenes and characters, no narratorial

interruption, little psychological probing, etc. We will see shortly how the hard-boiled

hero as either narrator or character enmeshed in the *fabula*, or both, determines the style

while in turn being determined by it.

One salient characteristic of the style is that it accords almost equal attention to the

description of inanimate objects (tables, guns, walls, antiques, etc.) and animate objects

(people); there is an avoidance of speculation on the thoughts of characters in

³ A summary of these points can be found in Rimmon-Kenan (1983 pp. 3-4).

preference to describing their actions. Such attention to actions and appearances in the name of objectivity, even while avoiding the *detour* of psychological probing, can, paradoxically, have a delaying effect; a description of emotions and thoughts can often be more economical than the depiction of surface appearances. Thus Hamilton (1987 pp. 141-142) in assessing Dashiell Hammett's style, notes that a crucial moment of emotion in *The Maltese Falcon* is objectified by the rolling of a cigarette. Raymond Chandler believed that the use of this technique produced a special pleasure for the reader: in a famous passage he stated his contention that the reader is not interested in the fact that a man got killed in a story, but that at the moment of his death he was trying unsuccessfully to pick up a paper-clip:

A long time ago when I was writing for the pulps I put into a story a line like 'He got out of the car and walked across the sun-drenched sidewalk until the shadow of the awning over the entrance fell across his face like the touch of cool water'. They took it out when they published the story. Their readers didn't appreciate this sort of thing - just held up the action. I set out to prove them wrong. My theory was that the readers just *thought* they cared about nothing but the action; that really, although they didn't know it, the thing they cared about, and that I cared about, was the creation of emotion through dialogue and description. The things they remembered, that haunted them, was not, for example, that a man got killed, but that in the moment of his death he was trying to pick a paper clip up off the polished surface of a desk and it kept slipping away from him, so that there was a look of strain on his face and his mouth was half open in a kind of tormented grin, and the last thing in the world he thought about was death. He didn't even hear the death knock on the door. That damn little paper clip kept slipping away from his fingers (in Gardiner and Sorley Walker 1984 p. 214).

So by describing elements of the scene which do not necessarily alter the course of events - and which actually delayed the narration of the crucial events in the manner of a 'binding effect' - Chandler sought to intensify the reader's enjoyment. This juxtaposition of tangentially related sentences or parts of sentences is a marked facet of hard-boiled style and it is difficult to pinpoint its effectiveness. However, it is possible that the pleasure to be derived from such juxtaposition is due, in part, to its 'binding effect'. Larzer Ziff has analyzed the following sentence from *The Sun Also Rises* :

There were pigeons out in the square, and the houses were a yellow, sun baked colour, and I did not want to leave the cafe (in Wagner 1987 p. 383).

Firstly, the narrator has conveyed his emotions without making reference to them: he does not say he is happy but we discern that he is so and that this makes him want to stay. Secondly, it is very uncertain as to whether his emotions are due to or at all

connected with the pigeons or the houses and why they should appear in the sentence. What is clear, however, is that it would be far more economical to say "I was happy".

A much simpler example of this phenomenon occurs at the close of Chapter 25 of Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1948; originally 1939). Marlowe is in his office pondering the authenticity of some information he has received; the last four sentences of the chapter are as follows:

I thought about it most of the day. Nobody came into the office. Nobody called me on the phone. It kept on raining (p. 143).

The final sentence, although seemingly not associated with the others, becomes associated with them by its very juxtaposition. The comment on the weather indicates that the rain is quite obviously a metaphor for the desultory stage which Marlowe has reached in his case. Unsurprisingly, this facet of tough style is also conspicuous in Parker's novels. In the following example at the end of Chapter 6 of *The Judas Goat* (1983a; originally 1978), Spenser is in England, armed against a terrorist group he is pursuing.

The shoulder holster under my coat felt awkward. I wished I had more fire power. The steak and kidney pie felt like a bowling ball in my stomach as I headed out onto Prince Albert Road and caught a red double-decker bus back to Mayfair (p. 39).

The first two sentences are straightforward: Spenser feels awkward carrying firearms in a country where not even the police are armed and yet he feels, also, that he needs more fire power to protect himself. The final sentence appears to consist of description only; however, a closer scrutiny shows that it bears directly on the first two. Spenser apparently knows his way around this foreign city and tries to eat like the natives. But "steak and kidney pie", "Prince Albert Road", "red double-decker bus" and "Mayfair" are all markers of what is, to him, an alien place and his awkwardness is reflected in the "bowling ball" that weighs heavy on his stomach. The final sentence in this extract therefore acts once more as a metaphor to illustrate Spenser's present contradictory situation. Description and juxtaposition of what are only tangentially related elements in a scene serves to delay whilst elucidating the action. This technique has been adopted

and, to an extent, modified in Parker's fiction; the following short extracts are taken from the climactic fight scenes that appear in several of the Spenser novels:

He lunged at me. I moved out of the way and got him with the side of my fist on the temple. Don't break your hand. Don't hit his head with your knuckles. Shuffle, move, jab. The sweat began to slip down my chest and arms; it felt good. I was getting looser and quicker. Ought to warm up really. Should do some squat jumps and stretching exercises before you have a fight with a 215-pound body builder who probably killed a guy with his fist last week (1977a; originally 1974 p. 159)

I had weight on him, maybe 15 pounds, and I was stronger. As long as I stayed up against him I could neutralise his quickness and I could outmuscle him. I rammed him against the wall. My chin was locked over his shoulder and I hit him in the stomach with both fists. I hurt him. He grunted. He hammered on my back with both fists but I had a lot of muscle layer to protect there. Twenty years of working on the lats and lateral obliques (1977b; originally 1975 p. 169).

Both these passages are taken from much longer pugilistic scenes and occur on the brink of the novel's denouement. The fact that such bouts act as final confrontations invests them with expectation, yet their description has more in common with an unbiased factual commentary than a sharp dramatic climax. The paradox lies in the fact that, taken as a whole, these passages *do* act as a dramatic climax even when they last for pages and pages as in *The Judas Goat*. The narrator speaks of tactics and what should be done as much, if not more, than the events and the effects of the blows. It is clear that, on the one hand, this device, is employed to emphasize Spenser's expertise in the world of body building and assert the professionalism of the boxer over the emotionalism of the brawler, factors we will consider later. On the other hand, however, the extracts fall within the frame of the objective technique in which the novels are written; they illustrate the retarding effect which results from the binding of this scene in the hard-boiled style - the end is consequently delayed.

The Hard-Boiled Hero: Spenser

It is now time to analyse the so-called objective technique of tough style with reference to the private eye in fiction. Although not all hard-boiled fiction uses a private detective

as its central character - including that of the style's two pioneers, Hemingway and Cain - such a hero has become almost inseparable from the style. This fact has provided a stumbling block for critics attempting to assess hard-boiled fiction. When commenting on Chandler, who wrote his stories with a first person narrator, Philip Durham (1963) makes the mistake of conflating first person narration with the objective technique. "Objectivity," he writes

focuses on one person, who must be a man of action. No thoughts or feelings can be implied by characters other than the narrator or third person so designated; no expressions of the author can come except through his spokesman. The omniscient one has no place (p. 120).

Durham overlooks two connected things: that the *actions* of secondary characters imply their feelings and that the *narrator* - in theory - does not imply the feelings of anybody, rather s/he attempts to give a report of *actions*. This is what Genette (1982 especially pp. 189 ff) has more adequately theorized by using the term *external focalization*; the hero performs but we never know his/her thoughts or the thoughts of others: they can only be implied. However, *external focalization* is only partially applicable; Spenser will occasionally state facts of which he cannot objectively be sure, for example: 'He was hurt'. So Durham and Genette are describing two ends of a specific spectrum of focalization; narrator/characters such as Marlowe and Spenser tend to fall in the middle ground. Such narrators can never be omniscient, yet as participants in the story relating it after the event they possess certain privileged knowledge which will allow them to tell of things that true objectivity would have to omit.

The hero therefore determines, and is determined by, the style. S/he determines the style because the private detective cannot know all the thoughts of the secondary characters and, even as the central character, remains very tight-lipped and cynical about him/herself and everything else. Yet, on the other hand the private detective is determined by the style which is, supposedly, employed in such stories to describe only the external appearances of events in which the private detective is a part, even if an integral part, in a first or third person narration. He (or she) is laconic, world-weary, and full of wise-cracks, pervading the fiction in its very fabric. It is also no

coincidence that in being bound to the hard-boiled style the actions and, especially, the sardonic jokes of the detective will act as significant *detours* - instead of proceeding with the uninhibited description of events the detective's wisecracks can function as a humorous commentary on the preceding action. (These jokes also have other effects as we will see later).

The hard-boiled hero then, is both a cause and effect of tough style; but the hero's ability to establish subsidiary characteristics in the sphere of actions proves that s/he is capable of being what Michael Denning (1987b pp. 46, 94 and 139) calls a 'figure'. This last term transcends various categories by which character has previously been described. If we were to create a caricatural spectrum of methods concerned with addressing the nature of characters in texts, at one end of the spectrum would, perhaps, be a psychologistic model and the position at the other end would probably be occupied by a wide body of work that has been influenced by Vladimir Propp (1968; originally 1928). As we mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, the difference between this work and previous discussions of character is that the question of a character's psychological complexity is not even considered. The disquisition on fictional protagonists in *Morphology of the Folktale* is centred, instead, around questions of characters as narrative functions, mere bearers of textual structures rather than independent entities with psychological histories. For Propp, character is primarily a function of the text and he reduces character in the Russian folktale to just seven functions or spheres of action (pp. 79-83). This has been taken up most notably by Greimas (1983) but has been acknowledged and applied in varying degrees by a number of theorists in the field. Moreover, this idea is not solely restricted to so-called 'popular' texts: the same notion of character as function could be applied to valorized fiction e.g. much of Dickens. Propp's formulations are therefore very valuable. The objection to his view, of course, is that such a method reduces characters to mere ciphers and that it is only common sense to realize that readers get very involved with fictional protagonists. It can be persuasively argued that readers *do* care about soap opera characters and wonder about

their destinies as much as they do about Dorothea's marriage in *Middlemarch* (1965; originally 1872), say. If we take this kind of perspective on character in fiction to its logical conclusion then it is possible to occupy the other position at the end of our caricatural spectrum. Ernest Jones' famous study, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1954; originally 1949), for instance, gives in-depth psychological explication of a fictional character in a play by Shakespeare virtually as if that character were a real person suffering from neuroses. Fictional characters are not real people and are not to be understood as such; however, it does seem that readers often do form some kind of psychological engagement with characters. To put it another way, characters are a site of investment: in novels alone, from Samuel Richardson onwards, characters seem to have a life of their own which takes them beyond the boundaries of the texts in which they first occur. Richardson's character, Lovelace, appeared in stage plays after his initial appearance in *Clarissa* (1985; originally 1747-1748), Twain's Col. Sellers was a Vaudeville act after *The Gilded Age* (1981; originally 1873) James Bond's ubiquity after *Casino Royale* (1953) is well known, etc. This is to name but a few fictional protagonists. The psychoanalytic insistence on investment in characters is not, therefore, without value. But as sites of investment it would seem that characters are not 'people'.

That characters can be seen to be more than simple textual functions but also less than real people makes Denning's notion of characters in popular fiction very suggestive. The term 'figure' designates characters not as references to a psychological reality, displaying traits indicative of a particular mental condition. Nor does it refer to characters as either bundles of universal attributes, embodying abstract social forces (e.g 'the revolution'), or as 'actants', mere supports of the story's structure. Instead, the term 'figure' recognises character in fiction as condensations of numerous aspects of social reality and potential sites of investment by the reader. Denning writes

[In dime novels o]ne finds neither 'representations of workers' in the descriptive, pictorial sense that characterized the ideologies of the emerging 'naturalist' novel, 'muckraking' journalism and 'sociology' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, nor chronicles of a 'true', transparent class

consciousness, but an unstable economy of formulaic narratives: the 'mystery of the city'; the *bildungsroman* of the 'honest mechanic'; the exploits of celebrated outlaws; the allegorical landscape of tramps and millionaires; the disguised nobleman working in mine or mill; the romance of the orphan working-girl; the workman unjustly accused of a crime; versions of Cinderella and her step-sisters; and the master not of deduction but of disguise, the dime novel detective. These narratives are the dream-work of the social, condensing (compressing a number of dream-thoughts into one image) and displacing (transferring energies invested in one image to another) the wishes, anxieties, and intractable antinomies of social life in a class society. Each of these formulas has its moment of success, when it is able to offer convincing symbolic resolutions to social contradictions, and its historical limits, when the pressure of the real reveals its plots and resolutions to be merely imaginary (p. 81).

It is important for Denning that the power of these 'figures' is not inseparable from the fact that the dime novel was very much a genre, and, moreover, transient in its popularity. Denning shows characters and situations are fixed *historically* for a given readership. A good example of this is his discussion of the Molly Maguires stories. The Molly Maguires were twenty Irish coal miners who were hanged in the late 1870s for a number of murders attributed to them under their guise as an alleged secret society. Despite the fact that the first tales of the Molly Maguires appearing in the leading story papers were almost contemporary with the trial of the miners in 1876, the depiction of characters and the strategies of reading are far from straightforward. Denning adds,

All in all, then, the first dime novels of the Molly Maguires are stories of honest mechanics - mine bosses, handsome engineers, and worthy laborers - involved in mysteries of murder and abduction against the drama of the Long Strike of 1875. The strike is viewed ambivalently, as well it might after the miners' disastrous loss. And the Molly Maguires remain a multiaccentual sign, at one time the vengeful arm of the miners, at another time a criminal organization for the personal vengeance of the villains, at yet another time in league with millionaires and monopolists (pp. 138-139).

The fruitfulness of Denning's study - as we have discussed in Chapter 1 - lies in his calling into question the traditional assumptions of how audiences read. The investments of popular audiences do not correspond to literary critical prescriptions neither do they resemble those of the ideal transhistorical subject posited by much psychoanalytical and reader-response criticism. As a result, their readings of characters cannot be said to be based on the understanding of characters proposed from either end of our caricatural spectrum.

One further aspect of character which we must briefly consider at this point is connected to the concept of 'seriality'. In their book on the long-running TV science fiction series, *Doctor Who*, Tulloch and Alvarado state that

One of the successes of the programme has been its ability to replace not just the doctor but also the 'star' several times (1983 p. 75).

They argue that the serial nature of the narrative alerts the audience to the fact that the main character will not die and that this enhanced in *Doctor Who* by virtue of the fact that the narrative repeatedly refers to the Doctor's power of periodically changing his shape in the process of rejuvenation. Accounting for the role of seriality when analysing characters in TV fiction is obviously quite important. On this topic, Kozloff points out that

because the characters must continue from week to week, suspense is minimized; the viewer knows that Magnum is never in great danger. [Also] the series format requires a constant stream of new antagonists and new love interests. Moreover, series characters all seem struck with selective amnesia. It is often said that series have no memory and no history; this is partially true in that none of the characters seem to notice that they did exactly the same things the previous week. And yet the characters' problems and relationships do not continually start over from scratch; while past events seem to disappear into a black void, characters do build their relationships from week to week . . . Still as long as the series continues, the viewer can bank on the fact that the central tension or premise will not be resolved . . . Only on rare occasions will a series resolve its central premises . . . (in Allen 1989 pp. 68-69).

As a character in novels which are published, on average, about once every eighteen months, Spenser does not represent exactly the kind of seriality to which Kozloff refers. However, there are various ways in which Spenser can be said to conform to Kozloff's description once the series of novels began to establish itself in the later part of the seventies; for example, generally the same hints about his background and character formation are given throughout the series. It is not until *Pastime* (1992a; originally 1991) appears, that Spenser relates the details of his childhood, family background and his meeting with Hawk. What is crucial, though, in Spenser's relationship to seriality given that he can be considered as a figure is indicated by a further quote from Kozloff:

television stories generally displace audience interest from the syntagmatic axis to the paradigmatic, that is, from the flow of events, per se, to the revelation and development of 'existents' or setting and characters (ibid. p. 53).

In Chapter 2 we mentioned this idea more casually when we suggested the possibility that readers of the Sherlock Holmes stories might derive pleasure from the depiction of the late Victorian milieu, Holmes' idiosyncrasies etc. What is important here is that the amount of seriality that Spenser bears in these texts allows for a concurrent relief of the burden of pushing a narrative towards its conclusion. More simply, as a series

character, Spenser offers the possibility of greater investment in his social interactions than if he was solely the carrier of the function of narrative progression. This is where it is important to remember that he is, in Denning's meaning of the term, a figure; and this, in turn, is an integral feature of the hero's existence in the thriller, which as we have illustrated, is both semantic and syntactic.

In what ways, then, can Spenser be said to represent condensations of the social? The classic private eye was constituted by hard-boiled cynicism yet also took on a knightly role in the stories, embodying a rigid personal code in his actions. The 1970s private eye necessarily retains traces of this knightly role as one of its determinants - see, for example, the plethora of references to Chandler and chivalry in the first Spenser novel, *The Godwulf Manuscript* - but is subject to modernisation. Accounting for the resurgence of hard-boiled fiction in the 1970s Parker has said,

Spenser is certainly a post-Vietnam figure. The '30s were a time of disillusionment as profound as this, when the Great War turned out not to have done much for anyone, and in both cases the question that's prominent is who is the justice and who is the thief (quoted in Taylor 1987).

Greiner goes even further than this and asserts that

Spenser is Parker's example of the educated man confronting the dregs of his society as American culture continues to decline . . . [he is] mired in a post-Watergate, post-Nixon, post-Vietnam U.S. . . (1984 p. 36; p. 41).

In concordance with this new meaning and as a result of social change the private detective has had to adjust to the new social forces that confront him/her in the fictional form of his/her adventures. Spenser, as an example of this phenomenon, is overdetermined with social meaning; he is a 'figure' constituted simultaneously by and against those same social forces as depicted in the fiction. What is also implicit here is that Spenser, in his operations on a new moral terrain, comes to embody the moral imperatives with which he interacts. This will become clearer shortly; however, it is worth noting that by this means, the figure of Spenser is offered as a specific zone of investment.

A reading of any of the Spenser novels will reveal him as a multifaceted, distinctive character. The fact that Spenser is a private investigator places him in a specific genre framework from the outset. For instance, the novels often begin with a client calling on him or his office with a case. It is this private status that allows Spenser his measure of distinctiveness, and as we pointed out in our discussion of J. Jay Armes (Chapter 5, above), distinctiveness was very much a theme in the 1970s private eye story. Part of Spenser's distinctive derives from his private status: unlike a policeman, he is not caught in a potentially stifling hierarchic bureaucracy that demands such things as respect for official superiors and service to the public. Spenser's private life, therefore, merges imperceptibly with his business: for example, his disposition to humour can find full reign in his work. He takes care over his (markedly 1970s) clothes and devotes time to what seem relatively innocuous pastimes but are actually significant markers of character, namely cooking, eating and reading. These serve to set Spenser apart as an educated modern bachelor. As mentioned earlier, the hard-boiled hero determines and is determined by the novel's style and this is so with Spenser: his speech is as clipped and laconic as the narration. However, he constantly makes jokes and one-liners that fit into two broad categories - jokes against himself and jokes against the adversary. In *Looking for Rachel Wallace* (1980) Spenser takes the job of bodyguard to radical lesbian feminist, Rachel Wallace. At one point in the novel she is due to give a lecture at a city library and Spenser arrives at the library early to find that the entrance is surrounded by pickets who want to prevent Rachel from speaking. A solitary police car is parked near the library and Spenser encounters two cops, one with a "young wise-guy face". Spenser asks the latter if they are there on duty for the lecture. The cop says, "You think we're down here waiting to pick up a copy of *Gone with the Wind*?" To which Spenser replies: "I figured you more for picture books" (p. 35). This example is typical of the Spenser novels, showing the private detective's willingness to confront the self-righteous pomposity of some policemen. However, this antagonism makes the cop ever-vigilant and determined to usurp Spenser in his role of (private, as opposed to public) protector of Ms. Wallace. Spenser now finds that he

has to distract the young cop and surreptitiously strike a picket to allow Rachel to enter the building. His wisecrack has precipitated action. Similarly, in *The Godwulf Manuscript* (1976; originally 1973) Spenser's trail leads him to the office of the gangster, Joe Broz, where he meets two large mob heavies. The private detective cannot resist making fun of them: "Either of you guys seen *The Godfather*?" he asks and, almost immediately, a fight ensues (p. 79).

When Spenser's humour is directed at himself, unsurprisingly, it does not lead to action. The novels are peppered with examples; even after the incident in *Looking for Rachel Wallace*, above, Spenser is once again in a self-deprecating mood, admitting the ease he has in rubbing people up the wrong way. Rachel asks him what he has been up to and he says,

Annoyed another cop . . . That's 361 this year, and October's not over yet (p. 35).

He is just as likely to accuse himself of moving his lips while reading to modestly efface his knowledge or, when showing his P.I. license picture in *The Judas Goat* to comment that

It disappoints me, too (p. 147).

Both types of humour - self-deprecatory and antagonistic - are a noted feature of Spenser's character and the novels in which he appears. The latent pleasure for the reader that might lie in this humour may be rooted in its dual function in the novels. The antagonistic humour serves as a commentary on the pompous characters and deflates their importance, yet its insulting nature precipitates action and a forward movement of the narrative. The self-deprecatory humour also has two contradictory functions: it comments on Spenser in a deflatory manner while *also* indicating that he is above such minor matters as outward appearance to impress others or knowledge for its own sake; it implies that he is a hero who will triumph at the novel's close without the recourse to superficial aspects of personal dignity. The humour, then, acts as a stylistic *detour*, a binding effect; but, at the same time, it moves the narrative forward by way of action and character.

The role of the hero's character in pushing thrillers toward their conclusion is crucial and it is obviously the case with Spenser, both as private detective and as human being. What is significant, however, is that Spenser repeatedly defines and justifies his role by reference to those things to which he is opposed. One of these is the police - this topic merits a much wider discussion than the scope of this chapter allows, but what is of note here is that the police are intrinsically linked with Spenser by objectives which are usually identical. This is expressed most succinctly by the hippie in *The Godwulf Manuscript* who tells Spenser that, public or private, "a pig is a pig", to which Spenser replies

Next time you're in trouble call a hippie (pp. 16-17).

It is clear that the private detective, like the police, is in the business of solving problems and must have the ability to do so if the novel is to progress to disclosure.

One overwhelming factor in Spenser's character contributes to his heroic professionalism and ability - his preoccupation with bodybuilding and exercise.

Various indicators throughout the series of novels assemble Spenser's other macho credentials - his career as a heavyweight boxer and his war experience in Korea are characterised as trips through an existential proving ground which in turn gives him the power of judgement in his contemporary battles. The Korean experience, especially, distinguishes Spenser from his adversaries; Vietnam is implicitly a 'dirty' war and it is notable that the aforementioned wise-guy cop in *Looking for Rachel Wallace* is recognised by Spenser as a Vietnam veteran. Yet fitness and bodybuilding are also explicitly ever-present factors and are not unconnected with the general health fad that gained momentum in the 1970s (although Spenser is an unashamed consumer of junk food and beer). More importantly, weightlifting and jogging are aligned with masculinity: at the Harbor Health Club - Spenser's place of exercise - there is no mention (until the club is converted in the very late novels) of females pumping iron. It is here that the private detective works out with Hawk, a black ex-boxer who makes a

living as a hired killer and, in the later novels, becomes an independent side-kick for Spenser.

The Hawk/Spenser relationship frequently hints at an unspoken macho code despite - or because of - the two being simultaneously separated and linked by career: the hired heavy and the private investigator are forced to work and take drastic action in and outside the law at different moments. However the camaraderie is not homoerotic - Hawk's distance, coolness and calculation bear this out effectively. Even so, Hawk and Spenser fall into a broad American literary tradition of masculine bonding which includes, among others, the Leather-stocking novels of James Fenimore Cooper, *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Critics such as D.H. Lawrence (1971; originally 1923), Henry Nash Smith (1950) and Leslie A. Fiedler (1984; originally 1960) have detected in these and other canonical works of American literature certain key themes: the spirit of adventure engendered by the existence of the frontier, the need for extraordinary men to react to the vastness of the wilderness and the resulting symbolic friendship of some white males with some negro or savage of the same sex. This is a tradition with which Parker is certainly familiar;⁴ in his Ph.D thesis on the 'violent hero' in American literature he writes with regard to the theme of the wilderness that

The Violent Hero . . . began with the westward movement of people seeking to be free of the things that oppressed them, a movement across the sea's landlessness compelled by a private conviction of their own morality (1971 p. 67).

His conviction that the private eye story is rooted in a developing myth to do with conceptions of both pioneer spirit and the wilderness is revealed in statements such as that

[James Fenimore] Cooper's forest evolved into Chandler's city, and complicity in evil became harder to avoid. The good man could not flee it because evil had become part of the fabric of his culture. And he could not accept it because acceptance would violate his honor (ibid. v).

That Parker sees private eye heroes operating within this rubric set out by an American myth is important for the hard-boiled genre as well as for other thrillers in the seventies

⁴ This is most manifest in Parker's novels in *A Catskill Eagle* (1987; originally 1985), a novel which is a thinly veiled tribute to Herman Melville. For a contestation of the moral fidelity Spenser bears to his literary forebears see Carter (1980) and Mahan (1980).

as we will see. Most immediately, Parker presents the violent hero as, in some sense, a representative of his society but also outside of it. The point of the tradition described by Lawrence et al. for these hard-boiled novels is that they pit men against the threats of a forbidding landscape which can only be combatted through violence. The character of Spenser is clearly influenced by his classic literary forebears, as far as Parker is concerned, and his ability to cope and triumph in the modern city is analogous to Natty Bumppo's hunting skills and yearning for the life of the woods. This provides an almost pre-constituted space for the working out of readers' investments; however, Parker's comments on the 'post-Vietnam' status of Spenser indicate that even he is aware that the framework of American myth in which Spenser operates does not have an eternal and immutable meaning. So, the bodybuilding and the machismo of the Hawk/Spenser relationship serves to stress masculine professionalism in the urban wilderness, to be on top in the world of violence. Yet the machismo is employed to keep at bay the forces of 'evil' in this world of violence; the character of that evil will largely depend on the preferences of the contemporary audience.

Spenser's constitution as a hero and as a figure involves a heavy stress on masculinity and its potential for redemption in a threatening world. Another way this is articulated relies on Spenser's encounter with women, especially Susan Silverman, his girlfriend from the second novel onwards. Susan has a suitably modern career, educational psychologist, which involves her not only working with families but situates her in the role of deciphering and elaborating Spenser's world-view. She is determined to make the most of her occupation and individuality and Spenser's encounter with her forces him to modify aspects of his character. He recognises some of his thoughts as 'sexist', making oblique references to the women's movement. In turn, he articulates this with the practicality of his cooking and food interests. Susan also elicits other responses, for example, a sense of chivalry following the final fight in *God Save the Child* and, more importantly, gradual commitment to one woman; Brenda Loring, Spenser's fun-loving girlfriend in the first novels gradually fades from the action. This, in itself, is a

departure from the classic Chanderlesque detective who refrains from any emotional involvement with women. In addition, Susan Silverman gains respect from the ruthless Hawk who, we are told, is indifferent to anyone else; this emphasises her ability to carry out one of her functions in the novels - to establish a dialogue between the floodtide of feminism and Spenser's macho code. However, she acts mainly as a commentator, constantly offering observations to the extent that one critic has complained of Parker's clumsiness in instituting Spenser's "cheering section". Carl Hoffman writes

... self-congratulation abounds Susan Silverman cannot stop her praise for Spenser's goodness. She tells Hawk: 'He does what he must, his aim is to help'. Later, she admires Spenser to his face: 'You constantly get yourself involved in other lives and other people's troubles. This is not Walden Pond you've withdrawn to'. And again: 'Much of [you] is very good, a lot of it is the best I've ever seen'. And yet again: 'You are the ultimate man, the ultimate adult'. A little of this would be tolerable - perhaps - but, when it starts turning up every few pages, it is hard to keep from suspecting that Spenser is an insecure phony who needs to be stroked constantly and just happens to have God, in the form of the author, pulling strings for him (1983 p. 138).

A possible antidote and fuel for Hoffman's argument about what he finds so distasteful in the depiction of the Spenser/Silverman relationship is offered by Parker's non-Spenser thriller of the period. In *Wilderness* (1983b; originally 1979), Aaron Newman returns home to find his wife bound, gagged and naked on a bed with the letters A and K scratched on her stomach:

She groaned at him insistently, and her eyes were as wide as she could make them. She shrugged her body angrily on the bed. For a moment he stood soundless and without motion. The panic that flooded over him gave way to an urge to rape her. There she was. Miss Complete Control, absolutely helpless since the first time he'd known her. She couldn't turn away. She couldn't even talk. The two impulses flushed his face and paralysed him for a moment. Then he thought of who might have done it (p. 20).

The contrast of the Newman's marriage and the relationship of Spenser and Susan Silverman indicates the kind of narrative dynamic that is at work in Parker's private eye novels. In his Ph.D thesis, Parker quotes Chandler's comments on the hero's honour:

He must be, to use a weathered phrase, a man of honor - by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it (Parker 1971 p. 4).

The final clause of this statement, therefore provides the grounds for Susan Silverman's first realm of functioning in the narratives:⁵ on the one hand her statements

⁵ It is, however, worth comparing this with the comments of Evans (1980):

These long intellectual conversations - which break another hardboiled convention, that of not discussing the code - I find shallow and unconvincing (p. 106).

are supportive of the hero and fulfil the generic function of 'kerygma', that is, they are a strong reminder of the thriller hero's special qualities and ability to bring the story to a resolution (see Palmer 1978 pp. 63-65); on the other, her words are merely explanatory. A typical example of her analytic eulogies is as follows:

Two moral imperatives in your system are never to allow innocents to be victimised and never to kill people involuntarily . . . Spenser" she said "You are a classic case for the feminist movement. A captive of the male mystique, and all that . . . And yet I'm not sure you're wrong . . . (1977b p. 175)

In each case her discourse is secondary. She has not got the macho qualifications to solve the 'big' problems although her role as educational psychologist allows her to deal with the smaller scale ones. Because Spenser is tight-lipped about his efforts - except when indicating what he is *against* - Susan Silverman must, to an extent, act as a commentator; but, in the potential hierarchy of discourses that ensues, a reading which focussed on the hero would dictate that hers occupies a subordinate place in relation to the narrated deeds and few words of Spenser.

In a now famous essay Colin MacCabe (1974) has described the salient features of what he calls 'the classic realist text'; one of these bears directly on the discourse of Susan Silverman in the Spenser novels, fiction that quite blatantly falls into the realist category. The specific ideological verisimilitude of the thriller genre demands that the story be narrated in the 'classic realist' manner; this norm and the narrative prose, therefore, are almost always inseparable. MacCabe shows that those words in the realist text that appear in inverted commas are adjuncts to the narrative prose because the narrative prose tends to efface its own presence by not marking itself as writing. He also shows that the narrative prose is the dominant discourse of classic realism; in eschewing such things as authorial intrusion ("dear Reader", and the like) favouring instead the depiction of events, the narrative prose - and, by association, the verisimilitude of the genre - functions as though transparent, or as if it did not exist merely as writing. Susan Silverman's speeches concern issues we know to be proven by the dominant discourse, for example Spenser's fairness. This can be directly related

to the narrative thrust of the novels - helped by the fact that they are first person narratives, the laconic Spenser is defined in the novels by what he does (action), which tends to propel the story forwards. Susan, though, is putatively a 'secondary' character and defined mainly by what she says and what others say about her (dialogue), which tends to have a binding effect. Thus a further potential hierarchy of action over talk exists, as it does in the classic tradition where the American wilderness is opposed to civilization; Susan operates in a world of talk, civilization, while Spenser is up against the harsh realities of the urban wilderness. This is fundamental to all the Spenser novels and probably most clearly demonstrates its potential in *Promised Land*. The novel contains much talk of broadly feminist issues precipitated by one of the central characters, Pam, who has escaped from an obviously stifling marriage into the arms of a radical feminist group. However, it soon becomes apparent that the talk of the women has no material effect:

They're theoreticians. They have nothing much to do with life (p. 113),

Spenser declares. As if to underline this there is a scene where one of the feminists attacks him physically, kicking him in the crotch. In theory, this kick to the balls should floor Spenser but, although hurt, he remains standing and goes on to subdue his assailant. As the terrain of the story switches to gun play and serious violence involving criminals, the feminist discourse becomes palpably redundant.

As we argued in Chapter I, it is very likely that a hierarchy of discourses can be shown to exist with regard to the verisimilar. In terms of the adherence to a specific ideological verisimilitude which constitutes an important aspect of the expectations activated by texts in the thriller genre, the narrative prose clearly has an important function. As we also noted in Chapter 1, by not announcing that it is an enunciative mechanism, narrative prose can have the effect of creating an illusion that it is a direct statement about the world; our discussion of the lack of differences between fictional and non-fictional discourses strengthens this argument. In spite of the hierarchy of discourses which might be perceived in the Spenser novels the narratives allow other readings

which are not dominated by the narrative prose and which allow readers to confront some of the contradictions of the male mystique of the hero. In *Looking for Rachel Wallace*, for instance, there is the possibility of a critique of Spenser's machismo : at a meeting of female insurance workers in their canteen Rachel Wallace is manhandled by a security guard who wants to eject her from the building. She passively resists but Spenser reacts by punching the guard and his superior. Ms. Wallace is furious and tries to explain that it would have been far more productive in dramatising the sexism of the company if they had been allowed to drag her out. She sacks Spenser, and for lack of a bodyguard is later kidnapped by an extreme right wing group. At this stage Spenser is aware that his macho act, far from protecting Rachel, has put her in danger. However, now that there *is* a situation of recognisably acute danger, violence is needed to resolve it and Spenser comes to the rescue. In the final scenes Rachel comments on and explains Spenser's actions :

You couldn't remain passive when they wanted to eject me from the insurance company because it compromised your sense of maleness. I found that, and I do find that, unfortunate and limiting. But you couldn't let these people kidnap me. That, too, compromised your sense of maleness. So what I disapproved of, and do disapprove of, is responsible in this instance for my safety. Perhaps my life (p. 216)

The first third of the novel takes place, then, in the sphere of politics; but the scene shifts to the world of violence which is dominant through the narrative discourse, a fact that almost erases Spenser's earlier mistake. It can be seen from these examples that much of the potency of the Spenserian discourse and, by association, the narrative prose relies on its articulation against other things. In the case of Rachel Wallace, Spenser is pitted against militant feminism; however, the discourse of violence is not so dominant that it does not allow Spenser to become the object of criticism. The discourses which Spenser sets himself against do imply something about his character but, much more importantly, they are marked as subordinate by the retarding effect they have on the progress of the narrative. In fact, the stories are largely about how Spenser reacts and accommodates to the various social threats embodied in these subordinate discourses.

What we have argued so far is that there is a fundamental narrative dynamic in which the characters of the hard-boiled story - chiefly, the hero - can be said to be enmeshed. This involves the hero at various stages embodying a progression principle. However, as both Brooks and Barthes imply in their analyses of such narrative dynamics there is the potential for yield of pleasure in the delays or detours which may restrict or retard progression. These also constitute the mechanism of suspense which is so often taken to be integral to the specificity of the thriller genre. In the Spenser novels we have suggested that detours are most usually associated with subsidiary characters; however, the hero invariably finds himself embroiled in these detours and they come to permeate his existence. As sights of potential pleasure - and investment - they therefore provide a different means of reading a text in contrast to a hypothetical dominant reading. In order to make this clearer and to suggest how readings of the Spenser narratives of the seventies might be arranged we will focus on a couple of the discourses with which the hero becomes embroiled.

Spenser, the Police and the Family

Some of Spenser's relations with the police have already been mentioned when considering the dichotomy of public and private detective work in the latter's ability to work outside the law. This fact is probably best exemplified by the way Spenser is forced to kill two mobsters in *Mortal Stakes*. Yet the implicit criticism of the police is more closely connected to the Spenserian rationale in which the freedom of the individual is concrete and the collective good is abstract. In *The Godwulf Manuscript* he argues

I handle the problems I choose to; that's why I'm freelance. It gives me the luxury to worry about justice. The cops can't. All they're trying to do is keep that sixth ball in the air (p. 70).

Once again Spenser sets himself apart from the police as a whole who can actually be his adversaries in the fight for the freedom of the individual. In this formulation, their discourse is secondary. But this situation is not without its contradictions: the Boston

homicide cops (with whom Spenser has most contact through the series of novels) are actually depicted as the elite professionals amongst police. This is manifested in the fact that they are rounded characters, they are recognisable and their appearance in a succession of Spenser narratives means that they partake of the same seriality as the hero. However, this does not necessarily mean that all the police that Spenser meets are like this; part of the homicide cops' status in the texts derives from a certain privilege they are allowed. When a corrupt policeman appears, for example Trask in *God Save the Child*, he is significantly a non-member of the elite police corps. The homicide cops, Quirk and Belson, however, are reasonably well-rounded characters, a far remove from the corrupt officers of 'Poisonville' in *Red Harvest* (1978; originally 1929) or the amateurs, Dundy and Polhaus, in *The Maltese Falcon*. In the latter of these two Hammett novels, the private detective hero, Sam Spade, is embroiled in the conspiracy from the outset and the two plain-clothes policemen repeatedly enter the scene and exit no wiser. Their amateurish antics were one way of emphasising Spade's professionalism. Palmer defines amateurism thus:

The Amateur cannot learn from experience because, for him or her, everything is new. The essence of experience is that it encompasses both old and new, the foreseen and unforeseen: experience only becomes such when phenomena cease to be radically disparate, when the new occurrence can be related to a set of old ones in a way that the set is altered by the inclusion of something new, and the new phenomenon is construed in terms of what is already known. The Amateur, transported out of his familiar world into the world of the thriller, lacks the appropriate set of previous knowledge (1978 pp. 11-12).

It seems that this definition could be fitted to the actions of certain police operatives in thrillers; apart from *The Maltese Falcon* there are the failures of Inspector Lestrade in the Sherlock Holmes stories. But if this was ever tenable in terms of the thriller's reliance on a specific ideological verisimilitude, it certainly cannot be said to be so for the contemporary audience of the Spenser novels. Spenser unfortunately has no recourse to an evaluation of the police as amateurs: like him, the elite police are professionals in their own field. The police have to "keep that sixth ball in the air," to administer social programmes, a fact that was increasingly evident in the wake of the 'Great Society' of the 1960s. The Civil Rights movement, the anti-war movement, the urban race riots and growing poverty in cities in the sixties all made the role of the

police a more high profile one. Also, the professionalism of the police in the Spenser novels is not unconnected to the popularity of other sub-genres of the thriller. A plethora of sub-genres to do with the work of police operatives can be found in the 1970s, particularly on TV (see Appendix 1). The 'police procedural' as practised by its most famous exemplar, Ed McBain, had been in evidence in its modern form since the 1950s and his output continued steadily through the seventies, maintaining a significant measure of popularity (see Appendix 1). Contemporaneously, Joseph Wambaugh was making a hard-boiled hero out of ordinary policemen in novels such as *The New Centurions* (1972; originally 1970) and *The Blue Knight* (1973; filmed in 1973 and made into a TV series two years later). As we have seen, *Serpico* revealed a new sense of moral imperatives in police work and social problems were the focus of police series as different as *Kojak*, and *The Streets of San Francisco* which replaced westerns as the most popular television genre. Amateurish police seemed to be no longer feasible within the genre framework; if the police in fiction could be said to be a site of social investments for readers in this period then depiction of the police as simply amateurs would most likely be looked on with scorn. Besides which, on a number of occasions a fissure appears in Spenser's ideological insistence on self-sufficiency: like other private detectives he is forced to seek the assistance of the police. In *Mortal Stakes*, for example, a novel in which Spenser appears to say and do things to set himself very far apart from the police, he crucially requires their assistance: firstly, he requires their help for fingerprint verification (p. 55) and then he requires them as official guards against mobsters who want him dead. So within the specificity of the private detective novel there has been a slight change: the police still occupy a subordinate place, tending to hinder Spenser's progress to a solution in many places, yet they are not so much amateurs as mired down in social programmes which prevent them attaining justice so readily. This constitutes a significant generic innovation, not because it represents a minor change in the structure of the narrative but because it provides a place for specific contemporary investments in police work. The depiction of the work and the characters of Quirk and Belson can be considered as simply semantic features of the text;

however, the changed semantic features are so inseparable from the syntactic features of generic texts that semantic mutations effectively produce the probability of a new reading, or what might seem to be a new text. This is not to say that Palmer's categories of agents in the thriller need necessarily be despatched; other characters, of course, still fulfil the generic function of amateurs. Marty Rabb is inexperienced enough to be unable to determine which course of action to take when he is caught between loyalty to his team and to his family in *Mortal Stakes*; the villains are also still bureaucrats involved in overplanning such as the excessive bodybuilder, Harroway, and the Tae Kwan Do expert, Lester, in *God Save the Child* and *Mortal Stakes* respectively.

Although many fictional private detectives have at some time been policemen, thus providing a training ground for their investigative work, they are usually forced to quit the force as a result of some manifestation of insubordination. Despite the mutual professionalism of Spenser and the police and the similarity of their objectives, it is worth remembering that there is a wide gap between their methods and constraints. Parker points out in his Ph.D thesis that the policeman in Chandler's novels, Ohls, is tough and honest and devoted to justice, but he is an organization man like Major Heyward and McCashin Edmonds, he upholds the system and works within it. His values are derived finally out of it (p. 127).

Spenser wants to avoid this and his reasons for doing so seem to revolve around the need to deal with certain aspects of contemporary social mores. In order to do this he must work on a more direct and individual basis. This becomes apparent when Quirk expresses the ideology underlining the way the police work:

We're trying to keep the germs from taking over the world. To do that you got to have order and if someone gets burned now and then so someone gets burned. If every cop started deciding which order to obey and which one not, then the germs would win. If the germs win, all the bleeding hearts will get their ass shot. (1976 p. 111)

Spenser would probably agree with the sentiments about "germs" and "bleeding hearts" but elsewhere he says:

Whatever the hell I am is based in part on not doing things I don't think I should do. Or don't want to do. That's why I couldn't last with the cops. That's the difference between me and Martin Quirk (1977b p. 174).

Quirk and his colleagues must abide by the law and follow orders without taking private action; Spenser, on the other hand, can take direct action to save individuals from situations where the law has no purchase. The potentially endless inertia of the police results from a stifling bureaucracy; this is marked in the novels as a binding effect. So the old generic dichotomy in the thriller of individualism versus corporatism is given a new slant: the generic innovation arises from the fact that the police can no longer be amateurs because the terms have changed; they must be offered as sensible and credible sites of investment in the novels. The police are professionals who are unable to attain individual justice so readily and the reason for this is that they are bound to a system which does not work slavishly within the rubric of individual honour. In the world-view of Spenser - and, apparently, Parker - the private eye's independence gives him the opportunity of occupying the position of both social commentator and figure of honour in contrast to the police. Moreover, this is inextricably tied to and enhanced by the hard-boiled style. The way the hero of the classic hard-boiled narratives is distanced from the events of the stories gave the private detective an oft noted status as a social commentator. In keeping with the hard-boiled style the detective was cool and detached but his/her actions and words also provided a field for the development of other personal attributes. In this context, Parker believes that the style of these novels was an historically determined Trojan horse employed to deliver a discourse on honour:

When Hammett was learning to write, he was working in a world which, after the fiasco of World War I, found the man of honor an embarrassment and talk of honor naive. It found toughness necessary and cynicism only sensible (in Winn 1978 p. 125).

This method of elaborating a personal code of chivalry for the detective is what Parker finds admirable in the writing of Chandler and Hammett. So even though the hard-boiled hero is tied to a tough style, it is still possible for a character to display his/her other qualities - be they chivalry in Chandler, or a sense of vengeance in Spillane. In terms of the private eye's relation to the police, his chivalry may need to extend to breaking the law. Parker sets out three options for the violent hero:

He may adjust his moral vision to the practices of his society. He may make a separate peace and withdraw to a place where his moral vision may be enacted. He may actively oppose those things in his society which he finds corrupt (1971 p. 3).

Clearly, Spenser does not take the second option. However, if the two options that he can be said to negotiate are recast, then it is possible to see how contemporary social factors might arrange investments in Spenser's actions. The hard-boiled hero's code may involve him in transgressions of the law in a way that the police could not be involved, and this would put him firmly on the terrain of the pre-Constitutional hero.

Parker writes of the hard-boiled hero

His commitment is to a private moral code without which no other code makes any sense to him. He regularly reaffirms the code on behalf of people who don't have one.

He is the last gentleman, and to remain that he must often fight. Sometimes he must kill (in Winn 1978 p. 125).

However, the coherence of his reasons for transgression of that law and the grounds for their reading as admirable require that there are a range of social investments on the part of readers which are compatible with transgressive actions. This is something that Parker, in his assessments of his own work, tends to ignore; stressing Spenser's lineage from the work of Hammett and Chandler, he writes of the moral code in their narratives thus:

It wasn't Marxism. It was much more fundamental. It took Chandler to point out that the hard-boiled hero was not concerned with economics. He was concerned with honor (in Winn 1978 p. 125).

When Parker loosely uses the term 'Marxism' here, it can be presumed that he means to say that the novels of Chandler and Hammett do not allow for an analysis of their contents based around the social relations of production depicted therein. More decisively, Parker adds

To claim that Hammett and Chandler were writing proletarian fiction is to read them very selectively (ibid. p. 123).

Clearly, Parker believes that the hard-boiled hero can only be read validly in terms of one definite reading strategy, which is concerned with the author's intent, moulded by the tradition that he identifies in his Ph.D thesis, and which he has been in the privileged position of being able to recognize. Yet, as we have noted on numerous occasions, the kind of 'true' reading that Parker describes need not be more valid than any other reading; given that texts are not univalent there is absolutely no reason why

Chandler's novels should not be read in terms of their depiction of social relations of production. Reading 'selectively' is precisely what all readers - including Parker - do. Parker's error seems to lie in his underestimation of the importance of the level of social interaction in which the hard-boiled hero becomes embroiled and the potential for investments that that social interaction offers to readers. In other words, Parker's stress on the actions of the hero as a generic dominant, a hypothesis that is assisted by the narrative dynamic which s/he appears to represent, fails to take into account the other side of that narrative dynamic: the detours which retard the hero's movement towards a resolution, the social interactions which the hero must involve him/herself in before the text can reach its end. In fact, as we have argued, these social interactions often give Spenser the license to transgress institutionalized law. One of the grounds of fundamental concern in the 1970s which might allow for a validation of transgressive actions - as we will see when we consider revenge narratives in Chapter 10 - is the institution of the family.

The changing role of the police and its apparent re-alignment with social programmes is a reaction to those same social developments in the novels which Spenser opposes for their threats to individual happiness. Within the contexts of the stories various embodiments of change in the 1970s have a negative connotation and they also function necessarily to delay or hinder the movement toward justice. For example, the commune in *God Save the Child* is associated with drugs, sex and dirty movies while its chief representative, Harroway, has supposedly corrupted a middle-class suburban boy. The fact that Charles Manson, convicted only a few years earlier, was the leader of the most notorious commune of the 1960s - an alternative 'Family' whose apotheosis resulted from violence - would not be lost on the novel's original audience (see Sanders 1989). Similarly, the fictional student protest organization called SCACE in *The Godwulf Manuscript* is characterized by Spenser and others (including, perhaps, the narrative prose) as a group of moaning hippies. For readers of the novel when it first appeared in 1973, such a characterization of student protest would not be lost on them: only three

years earlier, President Richard Nixon had called protesting students and campus radicals "bums" (see Chapter 3). The purposes of such groups is never made explicit - SCACE stands for Student Committee Against Capitalist Exploitation and, as with the feminists in *Promised Land* who attempt to purchase an absurd amount of guns for no discernible reason, it becomes immediately manifest that they stand against unreal abstract foes.

In the latter case, Hoffman outlines the strategy by which both feminism and student protest are rendered ineffectual in the narrative; while both are characterized as abstract movements they still pose a threat to the family which has to be neutralized. In *Promised Land*, the estranged wife, Pam Shepard, is recruited into a bank robbery by her new compadres, the radical feminists, Rose and Jane, who wish to raise funds for their movement. Hoffman takes up the story:

The apparent inspiration for the novel's bank robbery was a real-life incident in which three Brandeis University radicals, two of them women, teamed with a pair of professional criminals to rip off a bank, killing a policeman in the process. The Brandeis women also were feminists, but their primary commitment was to anti-Vietnam militance, a crucial point which Parker loses by the way he transforms the heist for his own purposes. By setting *Promised Land* in 1976, he eviscerates the Vietnam motive and places the action in an era when political terrorism in the United States, never overwhelming, had shrunk to miniscule levels. So his credibility is marred from the outset, but he pushes it even further by making Rose and Jane's sole motive, their mindless feminism. They are the only women's libbers I have ever heard advocating the armed overthrow of the U.S. government; whatever the faults of the feminist movement, a penchant for revolutionary violence is not one of them, and Parker is simply twisting things to score points in his ongoing commentary on the foundering U.S. marriage. What is more, the robbery as described in the book could never have netted \$100,000; the militants rifle just one cash drawer. Even Parker senses this incongruity, for when Pam recounts the raid she doesn't mention the exact amount of loot; Spenser slips it in casually some pages later (1983 p. 137).

As Hoffman convincingly points out, then, these 'abstract' causes are only such in so far as they are counterposed to Spenser in the narrative. The incoherent and 'abstract' bands of young people are depicted in contrast to Spenser's practicality and that of the black editor who tells the private eye:

Jesus they're so miserable, those kids, always so unhappy about racism and sexism and imperialism and militarism and capitalism. Man, I grew up in a tarpaper house in Fayette, Mississippi, with ten other kids. We were trying to stay alive; we didn't have time to be that goddamn unhappy (1976 p. 60).

Here again the experience and pragmatism engendered by the confrontation with adverse conditions like that of old America's wilderness is counterposed to the

privileged mediocrity of today's youth. The tarpaper house is not strictly identical to the wilderness, of course, but it is homologous. This hankering for the old America is tied to the use of the metaphor of 'levels' common to hard-boiled fiction: there is a can of worms below American society which can lead to the criminal elements (e.g. mob boss, Joe Broz) manipulating the weaker, more naive members of that society (e.g. Hayden and SCACE). A corollary of this is that Spenser's actions are often of a fatherly nature; however much his surrogate children may transgress his practical law Spenser is there to protect them from being manipulated. In *The Godwulf Manuscript* Spenser is forced to beat up a young radical in order to gain vital information; like a father admonishing a child he tries to explain his actions:

I said, 'Everyone gets scared when they are overmatched in the dark; it's not something to be ashamed of, kid'.

He didn't stop crying and I couldn't think of anything else to say. So I left. I had a lot of information, but I had an unpleasant taste in my mouth. Maybe on the way home I could stop and rough up a Girl Scout (p. 134).

In the same book Spenser observes an argument Terry Orchard has with her parents and comments

If I told my father to get laid he would have knocked out six of my teeth (p. 51).

The sentence is quite economical: it inculcates the notion of righteous masculinity, calls for its reinstatement in family relations in the face of moral decline, and within the novel sees its extension to the solving of social problems. It should come as no surprise that Terry's reply is

I bet if I said that to you, you'd knock out six of my teeth (p. 51)

Spenser's paternalistic bent - both chastising and protective of weak individuals - is insignificant in itself. It can be seen, for example, as the residue of a courtly code which is evoked throughout the Spenser novels by means of references to English literature. However, Spenser's activities in the larger public sphere, bringing criminals to justice by way of fatherly awareness, implies an isomorphism of social and familial relationships; it is as if the re-assertion of patriarchy is a social panacea.

This argument in favour of patriarchy is set out through a series of family dramas which dominate most of the Spenser novels and are not just isolated in *The Godwulf Manuscript*. The theme runs through the novels in numerous guises - partly because it is inherent in the private eye genre anyway but also because of this topicality - and, in its articulation, overlaps with other ideological concerns. In his Ph.D thesis, Parker comments on Ross Macdonald's novels that

the problems with which [Archer] must deal are finally problems which result from the failure of the family (p. 147).

More conclusively, David Geherin states

The disappearance of a child and the subsequent revelation that it was prompted by his search for a substitute father introduces a theme that has all but been patented by Ross Macdonald (1980 p. 26).

On this issue we might also make reference to the comments of Jay J. Armes on runaways (see Chapter 5, above). Terry is clearly the product of an inadequate family background which makes her act rudely to her parents in contrast with the more reverent attitude of Spenser and the black editor. She is therefore misguided enough to seek harmful surrogate families: SCACE, followed by the Ceremony of Moloch (a mystical cult of the kind which appears in such novels of the hard-boiled genre as *The Dain Curse* [1976; originally 1929]). The weakness of the Orchard family unit is mirrored in the Haydens' relationship; at a point of confrontation the self-centred, quivering coward, Hayden, scratches Spenser's hand:

There were four red scratches on the back of my hand. Lucky it wasn't the wife; they would have been on my throat (p. 131).

Although Spenser does not compensate for the scarcity of masculinity here he does so elsewhere by having sex with Terry and her mother within hours of each other and, in the process, contravenes the genre convention of the abstemious knight in Chandler. In doing so he is both embodying the new sexual freedom of the early 1970s and bowing to the generic influence of the Bond novels and Spillane thrillers where the protagonist does not shrink from sexual liaison with desirable women. To be completely abstemious in the seventies would be to test the thriller hero's verisimilitude.

An inadequate family relationship is also integral to the plot of *God Save the Child*. Kevin Bartlett, the 'kidnapped' boy, has parents who are both too weak to make decisions, especially the father. Kevin therefore seeks the companionship of an alternative family - the commune - and Vic Harroway. The latter is a bodybuilder, an activity which we have seen to be synonymous with masculinity although the narrative stresses that Harroway has overdone it, and for the 'wrong' reasons. The other part of Harroway's character is associated with the connotations of the commune, i.e. perverted sexuality. When searching Kevin's possessions Spenser finds back-copies of a bodybuilding magazine, *Strength and Health*. These contain a number of pictures of Harroway in a white bikini (p. 89). This underlines the idea that there can be degrees of masculinity: the paternal machismo of Spenser is marked by his compassion and refusal to use bodily strength gratuitously. Harroway, on the other hand, is a bodybuilder gone mad; his physical fitness is the outcome of narcissism. It is notable that this novel also introduces Susan Silverman in her role of educational psychologist. She helps to make visible the latent psychological undertones which constitute the novel's hidden agenda. Thus, Kevin's homosexuality is delineated in terms of the weak father/self-obsessed mother dyad. In the final fight Harroway loses - his excessive planning (with the weights) is no match for Spenser's compassion and the parents' love. Meanwhile, in the subplot of the story, it is important that the two arch-villains are the corrupt cop Trask (who was a family friend of the Bartletts) and Croft (a doctor wanted for performing an illegal abortion). Harroway, Trask and Croft all represent that corruption that feeds on the weakness of other individuals. The title, 'God Save the Child', is therefore ambiguous - from whom? Potential investments and possible answers to this for the contemporary audience would be likely to revolve around the erosion of traditional parental roles.

Looking for Rachel Wallace and *The Judas Goat* are novels which make use of the family in a different way. In the latter, Spenser is ostensibly bringing to justice a terrorist gang but what is explicit in his verbal contract is that he avenge the death of

Dixon's family, hence the bloodshed that ensues. The idea of family loyalty, then, is articulated in connection with protection of innocents from terrorism. Conversely, in *Looking for Rachel Wallace*, the emphasis is shifted so that Spenser must protect 'innocents' from family dysfunction. It is no coincidence that Julie Wells (nee English) is a lesbian; not only does she provide a plot device by being the lover of Rachel Wallace and precipitating the conspiracy, but she is a product of the deranged English family. Lawrence English and his 'Momma' are responsible for Rachel's kidnapping and while illustrating the extremity of a badly functioning family they are also related generically to other such families. The Grissom gang in James Hadley Chase's *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* and the kidnapers in Faulkner's *Sanctuary* (1953; originally 1931) are both led by an abnormally strong and brutal matriarch. When a family does not function properly, the novels seem to be saying, members of the unit will flee to (more often than not) dangerous situations: Pam leaves her husband and enters the world of lesbian separatism in *Promised Land*, Julie Wells makes a similar move in *Looking for Rachel Wallace* and, as we have seen, the protagonists take almost identical routes in the first two novels. (In the later novels this is still true: see especially *Ceremony* [1987a; originally 1982] and *Early Autumn* [1985a; originally 1981], but also *A Catskill Eagle*). The same pattern can be seen in *Mortal Stakes*: Linda Rabb is a problem child as a result of flimsily documented evidence on her family (p. 61). She flees from her parents to crime and prostitution and finally to her own new family. She has been unable to negotiate the crisis point of the traditional female experience of moving from one nuclear family (where she is a daughter) to another nuclear family (where she is a wife). By fluke, though, all has ended well until the conspiracy of blackmail intervenes. Spenser confronts the blackmailers, Lester and Maynard, towards the end of the novel; by this time much of their bargaining power is lost as Spenser has persuaded Linda Rabb to make public, via a sympathetic journalist, her past life as a prostitute. It is significant that this final showdown with the would-be disruptors of family life takes place in the Rabbs' apartment; Spenser therefore engages in physical combat while the nuclear family of Marty, Linda and their son look on.

The family ideology is central to all the novels and allows for a reading of it as being more closely associated with vice, crime and social unrest than the socio-economic determinants. In addition to articulating attitudes toward the origin of criminal phenomena the family also becomes an arena in which masculinity has a definite place and should be actively asserted contra the general drift of Susan Silverman's opinions. In the later novels such as *Early Autumn* and, more problematically, *The Widening Gyre* (1987b; originally 1983), this expression of masculinity as a necessary ingredient in family life reaches its apex. All those instances of family dysfunction that Spenser encounters are ironed out by his benevolent masculinity. This is inextricably connected with the narrative flow: it could be argued that it is a feature of the genre that the hero must embody machismo to bring the story to a resolution using physical strength if necessary. In the Spenser stories the family problems are all potential *detours* and masculinity is a strategic weapon to push toward the end, to justice. Paternal strength, therefore, solves problems in familial situations and in social relationships and propels the narrative forward. Having said this, of course, it must not be forgotten that the detours themselves constitute a realm of potential pleasurable investment that is at least equal to the narrative progression. The 1970s Spenser novels deal with the theme of the family implicitly as an emergent ideology which serves to link the rescue of the individual, the essential vulnerability and abstraction of ideologies which challenge the family, and the re-positioning of the threat posed by feminism to traditional American ways of life.

Spenser was one of a number of updated fictional private detectives that emerged in the 1970s. The traditional hard-boiled detective seemed to be an anachronism and was untenable given the changes in social and generic mores. So we can see that the updating of the hero by way of social input contributed overwhelmingly to the private eye's status as a figure, an embodiment of new attitudes towards, for example, women and sexuality. However, the thriller is not a genre dealing with the untrammelled

adventures of an interesting protagonist; the hero is necessarily bound to the framework of a plot. In addition, the hero is fully implicated in a narrative dynamic. It is a banal point indeed to say that narrative progression also implies delay, but in the weaving of delay and progression lie elements which are ruled by this tension. The hero seems to be omnipotently a forward-thrusting force: s/he solves problems, relies on action rather than talk and the movement towards the hero's triumph is largely inevitable in the thriller. Yet, on the other hand, the hero is bound to certain exigencies of the unfolding of the plot. Chief among these, of course, is the actual narration in a particular style of events whose progress is not identical to that depicted in writing. But, also, we must remember that there are forces in the narrative which oppose its narration to a successful end. The villain embodies the most threatening discourse while the hero's allies may also pose a retarding discursive threat to the narrative because they operate from a slightly different ideological standpoint. As has been witnessed the Spenser novels are particularly apt exemplars of this; their reliance on violence as a palliative in certain situations dictates that the hero occupies a position in a hierarchy of discourses that constitute narrative progression. If the reading of the text is one which is specifically and overwhelmingly concerned with investments in the hero, then it could be argued that the hero might occupy a pole position in a hierarchy of discourses as far as *that reading is concerned*. However, it cannot be guaranteed that all readings will be organized in this way. In the process known as updating the private eye, those semantic elements which arise from a historically determined verisimilitude - that is to say, the depictions of the contemporary world - allow for readings which will invest them in a specific way and activate concomitant investments in the inseparable syntactic dimension. Given that this is the case, in a text such as *Looking for Rachel Wallace*, for example, there is a question as to whether Spenser has modified his behaviour or whether he has proved his personal code to be correct. Commenting on the same text, Palmer argues that

In the relationship between story and narrative, the fundamental focus of the text is established through the decision about what events and perceptions to prioritise; thus the overall shape of the narrative creates a situation in which skills which are traditionally male are foregrounded. The hierarchy of

discourses which constitutes the genre, which establishes a contract with the reader, also settles which categories of action are to be presented as the most worthwhile, and we have seen that associating them across the traditional divide between genders creates tensions in the narrative framework (1991 pp. 151-152).

As we suggested in Chapter 1, the generic contract is more problematic than Palmer allows; rather than the text establishing the precise hierarchy in which discourses operate in a thriller, we have argued that a reading of the text will create its own hierarchy based on the reading formation in which that reading operates which provides the organization for investment in the narrative's dynamic and its raw materials of *sjuzet* and *fabula*. The prioritizing of a text's elements is therefore based not on a relationship of two elements, story and narrative as Palmer puts it, but on a relationship which also involves the imperatives of the reading formation.⁶ Although there is a potential for investment in the violence in the Spenser novels, the violence can in no way said to dominate them even when it appears at crucial moments. This is evident in a review of the eighties Spenser novel, *Valediction* (1985b; originally 1984):

Parker has a lot to say about the damaging effects of love in this novel. Especially about the ways people betray themselves and each other when under the influence. Although the prose does get a trifle pompous when dealing with the dark night of Spencer's [sic] soul, the thematic elements are nicely tied to a suspense plot that is truly suspenseful. And for those hard-boiled souls who are sick and tired of all this love and commitment, there are a couple of quite dramatic shoot-'em-ups (Maio 1984 p. 744).

Maio might as well say that there is almost something for everyone in the Spenser novels. In the seventies there were certainly a number of spaces in them for contemporary social investments.

In addition to the diverse readings that can result from the multiplicity of the Spenser narratives, we have also mentioned on a number of occasions that the private eye genre as a whole in the seventies was thoroughly diversified. As this is the case, and as violence can be seen to be a crucial site of investment in the Spenser novels, it is worth very briefly considering a 1970s private eye for whom violence is of very little use.

⁶ It must also be stressed that the story and narrative of the Spenser novels are not immutable throughout the series. A good example of this is *Crimson Joy*: as a serial killer text it incorporates a narration by the anonymous villain - all other Spenser texts are exclusively narrated in the first person by Spenser. The means by which Spenser becomes involved in the search for the killer also relies on a totally new relationship with the police which verges on the preposterous.

The Hard-Boiled Hero II: Dave Brandstetter

The character of Dave Brandstetter appears in a series of novels by Joseph Hansen. The first of these, which we will discuss in a moment, is *Fadeout* (1986; originally 1970). This was followed in the seventies by *Death Claims* (1987; originally 1973); *Troublemaker* (1986a; originally 1975); *The Man Everybody Was Afraid Of* (1984a; originally 1978) and *Skinflick* (1984b; originally 1979). Each novel charts a progression in Brandstetter's life although the narratives do all deal with material that makes them each individually part of the sub-genre. At the level of personal idiosyncrasy which seems to characterize the private eye character as s/he proliferated in the 1970s, Brandstetter's can probably be said to be the fact that he is gay. In fact, homosexuality is integral to the novels as we will see. However, what probably stands out more than this about Brandstetter is that, although he is a private investigator, his occupation is by no means identical to that of the traditional private eye. In Hammett, Chandler, Spillane, Macdonald, Parker and a host of other writers' hard-boiled novels, the investigator is always self-employed. Unlike all of these, Brandstetter works for an insurance company called Medallion Life and his work involves him investigating claims which somehow seem suspicious. Immediately, therefore, he is different from Spenser; the protracted discourses on honour and the necessity of independence which are so much a feature of the Spenser novels are absent from the Brandstetter narratives. If anything, then, the kind of stifling hierarchy that Spenser avoids is responsible for employing Dave Brandstetter. Having said this, Brandstetter is allowed a measure of distinctiveness in that he only investigates 'death claims' - those cases where somebody connected with the insurance policy has died - and his tie to the Medallion Life could be said to be mitigated by the fact that his father is chairman of the company. When his father dies, in *Skinflick*, for a number of reasons Brandstetter becomes a freelance investigator. These are the basic facts about Dave Brandstetter's existence in the series.

In the first Brandstetter novel, *Fadeout*, he is sent to investigate the circumstances which have caused country singer Fox Olson's car to have crashed into a creek without leaving any trace of a body. The rest of the plot of the novel is quite intricate and like the novels of Ross Macdonald, involves complicated family configurations and webs of relationships from the past. However, the gist of the story is that Fox's wife, Thorne Olson has been having a long-term affair with Hale McNeil whose son by his marriage brought shame on him as a result of his homosexual proclivities. Fox has recently been seeing a boyfriend, Doug Sawyer, who he has not met since the Second World War and with whom he is still in love. Pornographic pictures of Fox and Doug which they took themselves as youths have been used by the mayor of the town, Lloyd Chalmers, to blackmail Fox when he threatened to stand against him in an election. Brandstetter steps into this web and, as we can see, it is one in which homosexuality is crucial. Brandstetter does perform the tasks of a conventional generic detective, though; at the end of Chapter 18 of *Fadeout*, after Doug has been arrested for the murder of Fox, Brandstetter immediately notices that a Mexican child at the place of Fox's death is putting something in her mouth. It is the rubber tip of the cane which belongs to Fox's rich father-in-law, Loomis, who is later incriminated by this evidence in the shotgun killing of Lloyd Chalmers (p. 150). This conventional clue-finding, of course, propels the narrative forward; but let us look at some of the detours which provide sites of investment for the reader.

The first set of detours are actually blocks to the progression of the narrative in quite an explicit way. These are obstructions to Brandstetter's work, and they are occasionally humorous. Thorne Olson, for instance, is immediately wary that Brandstetter is trying to accuse her and Fox of having

concocted some James M. Cain sort of scheme to collect his life insurance (p. 11).

On another occasion, Brandstetter meets a similar block: Mildred Mundy almost pleads with him when she says

Be fair Mr. Brans . . . Have heart. If your comp'ny pays . . . it don't cost you nothin'. It's tough life. What do you wanna go makin' it tougher for? . . . (p. 44).

The knowledge that this is the poor helpless mother of a cerebral palsy victim who has taken to alcohol for a complex of reasons that are narrated in the text makes her fulfilment of the function of detour qualitatively different from the first one. Her situation is offered for a range of different investments. The cantankerous but rich old father of Thorne Olson elicits yet different investments when he tells Brandstetter 'Clear off', he said. 'Git. Go home and tell your outfit my son-in-law is dead' (p. 65).

Significantly, it is much later on in the narrative that Brandstetter, when he meets one more reaction of this kind takes verbal action:

'It's my job to be suspicious', Dave said. 'Stop taking it personally' (p. 116).

By this time Brandstetter is closer to resolving the mystery. Now, without doubt, these answers that Brandstetter has met constitute the kind of detour that Barthes calls a *snare* (1974 p. 210), an evasion of disclosure which must be defined for the two characters; yet how are the other detours to be characterized in the narrative and do they even seem to act as detours? In *Fadeout* there are a number of sequences in the narrative which seem to bear no explicit reference to the plot whatsoever. The depiction of the cerebral palsy victim Buddy Mundy with whom Brandstetter plays a game of chess can probably be said to bear on the plot of the novel as the investigator receives some valuable information about Fox Olson as a result of their time together (p. 42-43; p. 72 ff). However, the conversation that Brandstetter has with his old friend, Madge Dunstan, does not have any bearing on the investigation of the Olson case (p. 79-85). Nor, too, does the rambling discourse of the Mexican boy, Anselmo, who is in love with Brandstetter and states this in a sequence which, like the conversation with Madge, requires a whole chapter to narrate (pp. 106 ff). This is not uncharacteristic of the hard-boiled story at all; one of the most famous examples of this, which we have already mentioned in another context (see Chapter 5) is the story of Flitcraft told by Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* (pp. 57-60). Critics have speculated over the story's status as a parable (see, for example, Malin in Madden [1968 pp. 104 ff]), but there is a strong sense in which it could be construed as gratuitous if *The Maltese Falcon* was not

read within the constraints of literary criticism and a belief in the formal artistry of the author. This is not to say that gratuitous detours may always work; Symons, citing precisely the undesirable nature of gratuitous detours, once again demonstrates why he believes a particular author's *œuvre* should be excluded from the thriller history corpus:

A characteristic Wheatley book contains chunks of pre-digested history served up in a form which may appeal to readers with a mental age of twelve. *Come into My Parlour* (1946), which Wheatley thought 'one of my better stories', begins with the invasion of Russia in 1941. When the satanic-looking Gregory Sallust meets his chief Sir Pellinore Gwaine-Cust he is told that 'whether we like the Bolshies or not, Winston was one hundred per cent right to declare that any enemy of Hitler's is a friend of ours', although 'They haven't shown up any too well - so far'. Sallust's reply is that 'if the main German armies had not gone into Russia this summer they wouldn't be sitting on their bottoms' - and we are off on another bit of potted history for the ignorant (1992 p. 202-203).⁷

However, critics seem to think that the detours in the Brandstetter novels work. Let us briefly examine a crucial site of delay in the narratives, specifically *Fadeout*.

Homosexuality in the Brandstetter narratives is a major theme; in *Fadeout*, for instance, Fox is subject to blackmail because of the existence of records from his gay double life. So, like the reading of the Flitcraft episode as a parable of Sam Spade's outlook, there are some grounds for saying that the depictions of homosexuality are bound to the exigencies of the plot. Geherin assesses its integrality thus:

Hansen's avowed purpose in the Brandstetter series is to 'deal as honestly as I know how with homosexuals and homosexuality as an integral part of the fabric of contemporary life, rather than something bizarre and alien'. To this end, he sought 'to stand on their heads a lot of received opinions about homosexuals'. Thus his homosexual characters are neither effeminate or swishy (1985 p. 170).

This suggests questions for the role of investment in genre fiction that we will come back to shortly. For now, it is worth noting that the depiction of homosexuality in the narratives is well-received. Baker and Nietzel hold that

⁷ Clearly, detours must be finely tuned in order to maintain a level of interest and suspense in a narrative. In spite of both Symons and himself, it is notable that Wheatley seems to have realized this; early in the first person narration of his novel, *The Ka of Gifford Hillary* (1969; originally 1956) there is an interruption:

Before proceeding further with this account I feel it is right to state that the details of my secret conference with Sir Charles have no bearing on my personal tragedy. It was the action which I took as a result of it which later had such disastrous consequences, and I am recording the details only because they explain that action. In consequence any reader of this document who is uninterested in future strategy and our measures of countering the threat of Soviet aggression will lose nothing by omitting the next few thousand words and resuming this account on page 40 (p. 22).

(Incidentally the mention of 'potted history for the ignorant' in the third edition of *Bloody Murder* is changed from 'potted history for the semi-literate' in the first edition [1974; originally 1972 pp. 219-220].)

Hansen has created the most accurate portrayal of a homosexual in the mystery field. Never romanticized, never stereotyped, Brandstetter copes with the world around him sometimes successfully, sometimes not (1985 p. 222).

It would be difficult to test their first assertion, as it would be difficult to test what is the most accurate portrayal of any aspect of the real world. Presumably they mean that the narratives do not rely on stereotypes. Despite the fact that Brandstetter is the first gay series detective, the introduction of the theme of sexuality in *Fadeout* is very low-key. His lover of twenty years, Rod Sterling, has recently died before the narrated events to do with Fox Olson begin; as a result, the full range of their relationship is very much on Brandstetter's mind. Therefore, in the midst of events to do with his insurance investigations, Brandstetter's (plot) unrelated thoughts on the affair are narrated; as Thorne Olson demands to know why Brandstetter does not ask her about Fox's health, he goes into a dream:

Bright and fierce, he pictured again Rod's face, clay-white, fear in the eyes as he'd seen it when he found him in the glaring bathroom that first night of the horrible months that had ended in his death from intestinal cancer (p. 10).

Again when he is questioning Loomis:

'... Life plays funny tricks'.

'Sometimes not so funny', Dave said.

Loomis' muddy eyes regarded him wisely. 'Them are the ones you got to laugh at hardest'.

I never will, Dave thought, *not about Rod dying* (p. 67).

These two sequences cannot be said to be directly related to narrative thrust; only in the sense that they illustrate something about the character of Brandstetter can they be construed as indirectly participating in the move towards disclosure. The depiction of Brandstetter's relationship with Rod begins some way into the narrative when he starts to think about his home:

He ought to have left the house, sold it. It had been a bad place for him to stay, from the moment he learned Rod was never coming back to it alive. Empty. Worse - haunted.

Because the emptiness hurt, but not so much as the regret. In that wide white wickerwork bed of theirs, regret took the place of sleeping, and at the table in the brick-and-copper kitchen, the place of eating. It made him refuse to pick up the phone, unable to pick up the phone, unable, if he had picked it up, to talk. Even less able to talk to anyone - even Madge - face to face. Regret. Because, as he had told the girl in the car this afternoon, twenty years was a long time (p. 45).

This is then followed by the narration of some of the events in their relationship beginning after the Second World War, which consumes a whole chapter (pp. 46 ff). It would therefore seem that this description of the relationship allows for a reading of it as having more to do with challenging received opinions about homosexuals than speeding the narrative to resolution. That Brandstetter has been in a very stable relationship is important for the series of narratives. One reason for this is that his future sexual liaisons are shown to be meaningful; at the conclusion of *Fadeout*, for instance, he strikes up a relationship with the man he has saved from a murder charge, Fox Olson's boyfriend, Doug Sawyer (p. 176). Another reason that stable relationships might provide an area of investment is to do with the contemporary proliferation of unstable relationships among both homosexuals and heterosexuals in the real world.

Jeffrey Weeks writes,

Although promiscuity has long been seen as a characteristic of male homosexuals, there is little doubt that the 1970s saw a quantitative jump in its incidence as establishments such as gay bath-houses and back-room bars, existing specifically for the purposes of casual sex, spread in all the major cities of the United States and elsewhere, from Toronto to Paris, Amsterdam to Sydney . . . For the first time for most male homosexuals, sex became easily available . . . (1989 pp. 47-48).

In contrast to this kind of promiscuity, Brandstetter's outlook is probably a more developed version of that set forth by the boy Anselmo, who, already tired of being used by sexual partners despite his tender age, says:

Anyway, I like sex. I like it a lot. But not like I've got a faucet and somebody's thirsty so they turn it on and drink and then turn it off and walk away (p. 107).

Brandstetter's position in the narratives as a figure of commitment is further enhanced by the introduction of his father, Medallion Life chairman, Carl Brandstetter. As the narrative quickly makes clear, Brandstetter senior is a womanizer who occasionally leavens his promiscuity with heterosexual sentimentality:

'I'm preparing to shed Nanette. Someone, as the old fairy tale puts it, has been sleeping in my bed'.

'That's too bad,' Dave said.

'It could be worse'. His father rose with a very wry smile. 'She could have caught me sleeping in somebody else's bed. That can be very costly'.

'She lasted a long time', Dave said. 'Three years? Four?' He took Old Crow from a cabinet that was metal patterned to look like wood. Chunky glasses. Ice cubes.

'Damn near five', his father said behind him. 'She was beginning to bore me anyway' (p. 94).

'All right. Now he's gone. That infatuation's done with. You're forty four years old. It's time you found a wife and settled down'.

Dave laughed. 'Look who's talking about settling down'.

'Well, damn it, you know what I mean. Kids, a family. Future. I at least gave you life'.

'A slip-up and you know it', Dave said. 'What is it you're getting at? You want to be a grandfather? That I find very difficult to believe'.

'I don't see why'.

'What the hell kind of genetic legacy are we supposed to bequeath to the world of tomorrow? An old satyr and a middle-aged auntie!' (p. 95).

Once again, there is little to indicate what direct relation this scene bears to the progression of the narrative beyond establishing the relationship of the two Brandstetters within the company, but the hard-boiled prose does, perhaps, contribute to the function of elucidating Dave's relation to his father and the role that homosexuality plays in this. For example, when Dave pours himself a drink, there are three hard-boiled, but apparently banal sentences. Yet, in their seeming tangentiality to the scene, they are like the examples which we have quoted from *The Big Sleep* and *The Judas Goat* (above) in that they comment on the events. Carl's drinks cabinet is metal but it pretends to look as though it is made out of wood; this is analogous to the way that Carl is now acting, pretending to aspire to a 'natural' norm of family life while actually retaining the steeliness that years of promiscuity have built up. That this promiscuity is a feature of machismo is indicated in the connotations of the next two sentences about chunky glasses and ice cubes. While this scene is not related to the solving of the Olson mystery it still allows for a reading informed by a knowledge of hard-boiled style. In addition, though, it is contributing to a much different picture of the hard-boiled story than the one that we met in Spenser. The detours in the Brandstetter novels seem to allow for the erosion of a potential hierarchy of discourses based on the exigencies of the progression principle. The key factor in this would appear to be the way the Brandstetter narratives cope with the violence which is so often a feature of the American thriller.

The macho credentials of the hero which we discussed in the Spenser novels is wholly absent from the Brandstetter narratives. The first reason for this must be that Brandstetter is an insurance investigator; even though it could be argued that real life detectives are involved in the mundane tasks of surveillance and divorce litigation, the image accruing to them as a result of hard-boiled fiction is different from that of the insurance worker. But in addition to the potentially low violence rate in the occupation of insurance investigations, there is also Dave Brandstetter's gender relations. Being gay, being the hero and being the focus for investments, Brandstetter's semantic existence disturbs those pre-designated syntactic features of the genre in which he operates. Baker and Nietzel seem to recognize this when they write

Not only does [Hansen] occupy Brandstetter with a profession where a leering philosophy of lechery towards women appears to be almost essential, he puts him in the employ of the insurance industry, an establishment renowned in the homosexual community for its suspicion and hostility toward homosexuals (1985 p. 222).

Brandstetter's operations in the narrative are never supported by an emphasis on either violence or the need to dominate the opposite sex, even though gayness would certainly not prevent him from using force. In the latter stage of *Fadeout* he becomes involved in an exchange about Olson with the homophobe, Hale McNeil, which illustrates this:

'They're all alike,' McNeil said. 'No guts'.

'I'm sorry about your bad luck with your son', Dave said. 'But you don't want to let it short-circuit your brain. Olson had guts'.

'Not enough to knock Chalmers down and take those photos away from him'.

'Knocking people down doesn't occur to everybody as a way of solving problems'.

'It doesn't occur to faggots', McNeil said.

'I can name you a welterweight faggot who beat an opponent to death in the ring a couple of years ago . . . ' (pp. 161-162).

Despite the fact that Brandstetter could prove to McNeil that homosexuality does not entail effeminacy, lack of courage or competency in physical violence, it is significant that all of the Brandstetter novels of the seventies where the investigator meets the killer during the denouement rely on a resolution which involves an absolute minimum of violent acts. This is demonstrated by the following extracts which come from *Fadeout*,

Death Claims, Troublemaker and The Man Who Everybody Was Afraid Of

respectively:

The intelligence went away. 'I didn't do it'. Then, very fast and very surprisingly, there was a hatchet in his hand. he squatted for it, came up with it and swung it at Dave's head in the same single motion. Dave ducked, rammed his head into the boy's belly, grabbed his knees, lifted. Phil's head slammed back against the mixer barrel. Dave felt him go limp. The little axe dropped. The boy slumped to the ground (p. 172).

Norwood had turned. Dave took a step and chopped at his wrist. The gun fell. Dave put his foot on it. Norwood swung at him with a wild backhand left. Dave tilted away from it, then drove a fist into the bookman's soft belly. He doubled over and dropped, clutching himself. Dave picked up the .22 (p. 188).

And Taylor lifted a nickel-plated revolver. Light slipped orange along its barrel. Dave struck Taylor's arm. The gun spat fire and a bullet drew a groove in a polished floor plank. Taylor half turned. Dave chopped him across the windpipe with the edge of a hand. The gun clattered away. Taylor dropped, making a hoarse, rasping sound, clutching his throat, trying to take bites of air (p. 175).

He woke face down in his own vomit. he turned. Franklin stood over him, long hair flying. The ship tilted and he sat down hard on the deck. Something was under Dave's hand, a shaft of cold, wet metal. Franklin lurched to his feet and lunged himself at Dave. Dave swung the crow bar at Franklin's head. It connected. Franklin rolled with the ship and came to rest crumpled against the gunwale (p. 165).

The climax of the final Brandstetter of the seventies, *Skinflick*, features not a confrontation of investigator and killer as in the other texts, but the dramatic rescue by Brandstetter of the drowning transvestite Randy Van (p. 200). The contrast with the Spenser novels - especially *The Judas Goat*, where the narrative works resolutely to a monumental punch-up at the Montreal Olympics between the combined forces of Hawk/Spenser and a 305 pound weightlifting champion called Zachary - could not be clearer. Brandstetter's involvement in scenes with criminals is predominantly a result of his work for Medallion Life; Spenser, on the other hand, works privately and is free to pursue his own interests. As we have seen, one of the most crucial of these interests is the state of the family, and the final fights often take place within range of a family in the narrative. Regarding the focus of concern on family life in the seventies Weeks writes:

There appears to be a complex knot of feelings at play here. The most obvious enemies are the social movements that explicitly threaten the old values - feminism and gay liberation, particularly. Behind this is perhaps a more pervasive fear: that the changes of the past generation have served to undermine the ties that bind men to women. A powerful force in the anti-ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] campaign, was a fear of the sexes mingling, of a breakdown of the traditional boundaries between the sexes, and of women losing traditional male support as a result (p. 37).

In this light it is interesting that Evans (1980 p. 170) notes that, in three out of six novels, Spenser beats up homosexuals. Does homosexuality necessarily have to

occupy a subordinate place in detective fiction? Obviously not; but the issue of homosexuality in the two sets of thrillers that we have discussed raises issues about the role of a putative discursive hierarchy in the genre. On account of its content, it took three years for Hansen to get *Fadeout* published after he had written it (Geherin 1985 p. 183) and although it is quite clearly a hard-boiled detective novel there is arguably still a lingering question as to whether the Brandstetter novels are primarily detective fiction or primarily narratives of homosexual life. When Hansen says

I chose the mystery novel form as a way to keep readers turning pages while I gave as faithful a picture as I could of a side of life I believe I understand and that needs no apology (quoted in Baker and Nietzel 1985 p. 222)

the question is still left largely unanswered. Geherin is surely oversimplifying matters when he writes

If Hansen were simply writing polemical novels about the plight of the homosexual in American society, his books would appeal to only a limited audience. One reason for widespread popularity is his success in incorporating homosexual characters and themes into novels that are, first and foremost, outstanding mysteries. He thus manages to broaden his audience to include homosexuals who might not ordinarily read mysteries and mystery readers who might not ordinarily read about homosexuals. The key to his success in this regard isn't simply the sympathetic portrayal of his homosexual main character nor his ability to construct complicated plots. The secret of his success is that he is a writer of considerable skill and imagination (1985 pp. 180-181).

However, there is a grain of usefulness in what Geherin claims. The detours in the novels to do with the depiction of the varied facets of homosexuality are rendered in such a way as to maintain the range of generic expectations and investments of potential thriller readers. There is no doubt that there are strong movements towards a resolution in each of the Brandstetter narratives, but it is also certain that this is diminished both by the absence of machismo and the decreased expectation of a violently explosive end, plus the lingering detours on the subject of homosexuality.

We can say that the Brandstetter and Spenser narratives are differentiated on the grounds of violence and sexuality. Clearly, the Spenser novels offer the possibility of reading them in terms of a hierarchy of discourses which are organized along lines of gender and delineated by Spenser's machismo; moreover, this potential hierarchy is founded on the alliance of the figure of Spenser with a narrative dynamic of progression. This is not to say that they necessarily have to be read in this way; in the

contemporary period concern over the family in the real world was itself articulated with a contradictory embrace of liberal values as we mentioned in Chapter 3. With regard to the Brandstetter narratives, the machismo of the hero is absent. If there can be perceived a hierarchy of discourses in the narratives which is represented by the hero then the pole position, such as it is, will probably be occupied by Brandstetter's search for truth. As this invariably involves revelations about homosexuality in the narrative, there is a diminished difference between the detours and the progression principle in the Brandstetter narratives. It is in this way that the seemingly redundant detours on Dave Brandstetter's life become relevant. However, the main point to note is that the potential for investments in the Brandstetter novels is greatly increased by the fact that the hierarchy of discourses is significantly blurred. Whether the homosexual theme in the narratives was read sympathetically in the seventies is another matter. It is true that there had not been a homosexual private eye before Dave Brandstetter; that Hansen was eventually able to publish his book in 1970 suggests that the time was, perhaps, riper than it had been. However, as Weeks argues

Sexuality is a fertile source of moral panic, arousing intimate questions about personal identity, and touching on crucial social boundaries. The erotic acts as a crossover point for a number of tensions whose origins are elsewhere: of class, gender and racial location, of intergenerational conflict, moral acceptability and medical definition. This is what makes sex a particular site of ethical and political concern - and of fear and loathing (1989 p. 44)

Dave Brandstetter suffers this fear and loathing through the seventies novels to a greater or lesser degree; significantly, it is in the 1979 novel, *Skinflick*, that Carl Brandstetter has died and Dave is almost immediately fired from his job at Medallion Life, ostensibly through homophobia. Perhaps it is not coincidental that this takes place right at the cusp of the New Right's rise to power in the West, a rise that can be seen in terms of a backlash. On the sixties, Weeks writes

The peculiarity is that the reaction against that dramatic but historically heterogeneous decade has a wider resonance in at least two other quarters. In the ranks of those we might call 'disillusioned liberals' (many of whom, of course, gravitate fairly easily to the growing ranks of the new conservatism) there is a developing argument also, that in the 1960s 'things went radically astray'. For them the sexual legacy of the 1960s is seen as an epidemic of venereal disease as much in greater sexual choice, in the rise of an aggressive language of sexual abuse as much as in greater verbal freedom, in the worship of quantitative sex as much as qualitative change in human relations (p. 18).

The importance of this phenomenon to which Weeks refers and its role in arranging investments in thrillers will become clear in Chapter 10 (below).

What this chapter has sought to do is to critically confront some of the ways in which a generic text can be said to have some kind of internal textual structure which makes it quintessentially a genre text. The strongest example of this must be the fundamental aspect of narrative: its progression. The fact that the thriller is so often assessed in terms of its revelations of enigmas and its forward thrusting hero seems to be so fundamental that it becomes a very strong argument in establishing its specificity. However, as we have shown, narrative progression and suspense are by no means as simple as they seem. Moreover, they do not necessarily dominate the thriller; in fact the very mechanism of suspense, as we have argued, provides a certain space in which semantic investments can take place. The detours which are essential to progression allow the potential of lingering to savour their details. In Chapter 1, we saw that Wolfgang Iser described this process of investing certain elements of the text and marginalizing others as a 'wandering viewpoint'. If, as we have argued, that wandering viewpoint relies for its directions on investments which largely originate outside the text, then the hierarchy of discourses which can be said to characterize a generic narrative do not require strict adherence from the reader. One might even say that the arrangement of discourses is not even a hierarchy, especially as investment of semantic aspects is, always already, wont to forge changes in the syntactic dimension of the text. Wolfgang Iser's use of the term 'wandering viewpoint' is based on the notion that the text itself will determine how the wandering viewpoint will function. In contrast to our argument, Iser overlooks the work of the reading formation in arranging investments. The notion that the text rigidly provides for the reader the strategy for reading the text is what we have implicitly challenged with qualifications in this chapter. In the next chapter we will find ourselves on similar ground.

CHAPTER 8

What Do We 'Believe' when We 'See'? From the Private Eye to Views of Crime

An intelligent friend of mine has admitted to using the works of Huxley throughout his adolescence as a steady source of pornography. The orgies satirized in *Brave New World* were for him genuinely orgiastic, with no cosmic or satiric crosslights; his failure to see the satirical point was of course unchallenged by any direct hint from the author. Most of us, especially if we read widely when young without guidance from more experienced readers, can recall misreadings of this kind. They can range all the way from sadistic pleasure in scenes intended to rouse horror or revulsion to the acceptance of intellectual positions that the author intended to satirize (Booth 1961 p. 389).

'Is your book any good?'

'Its different.'

'Good and dirty?'

'Dirty enough'.

'Then why don't you read it?'

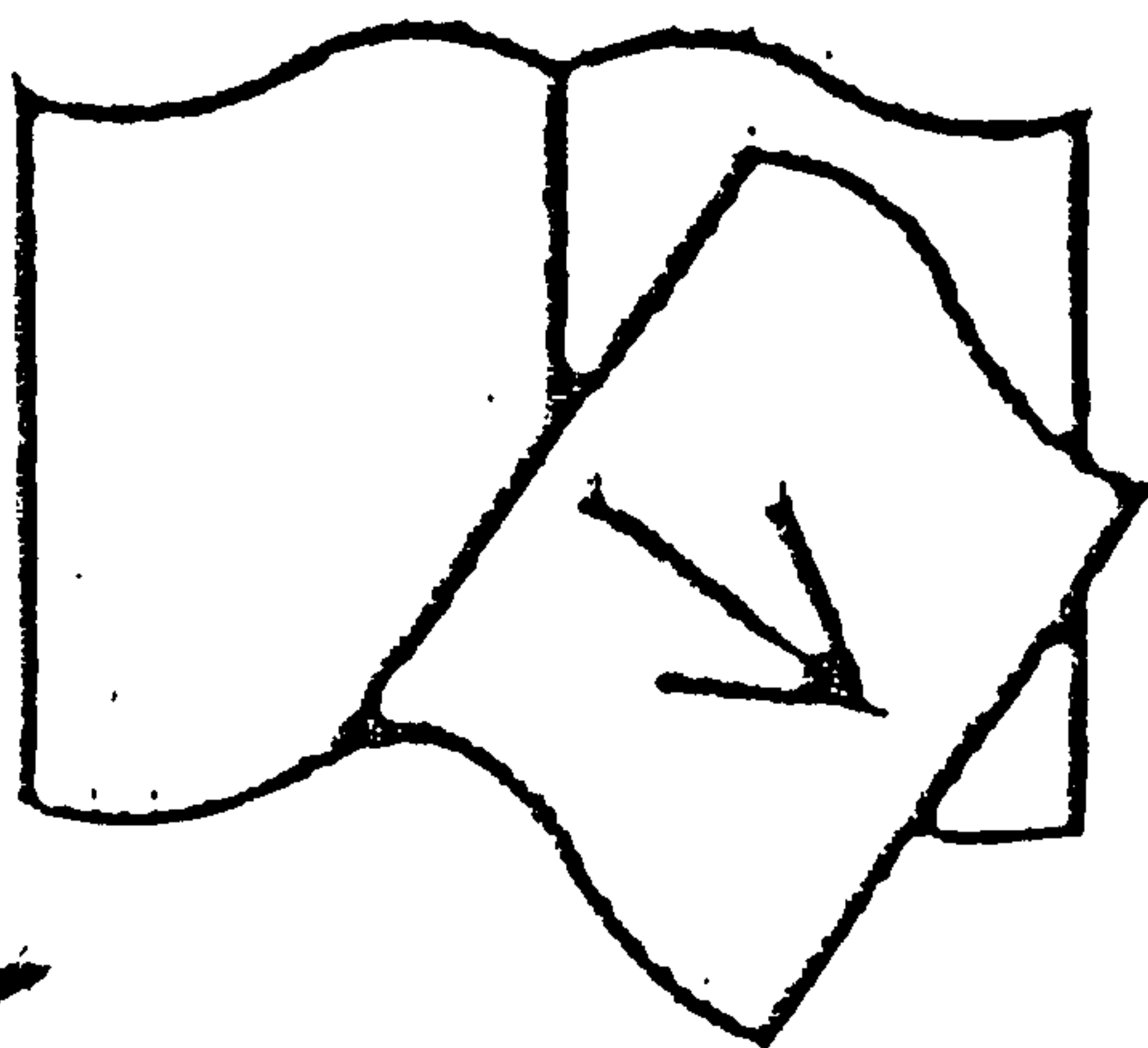
'And shut the fuck up'.

'Right,' Renda said, 'and shut the fuck up' (Leonard 1986a p. 71; originally 1974).

Introduction: From the Hard-Boiled to the Crime Story

The issue of 'vision' is central to the question of generic innovation in thriller narratives of the 1970s. In the hard-boiled detective story we have seen how a particular style - often referred to as an 'objective technique' - contributed to the character of the genre. The style acted in combination with a potential hierarchy of discourses which was related to the outcome of the plot. And this had existed in one form or another since the mid-1920s. However, the novels discussed in the last chapter were evidence that the genre had the potential to embrace social change. The 'objective technique' was not objective; instead, in purporting to relate events from a distant and sometimes almost omniscient standpoint, the style executed a significant amount of ideological work: it served to blur the potential distinctiveness of the hierarchy of discourses and as a result, other voices could function in the text in tandem with the law of the hero and the progression principle. In this way, there is no dominant procedure in such texts but, instead, there is visible for us the beginnings of a space where potential indeterminacies may be filled by readers. One further crucial concept in narrative which we must discuss is the way in which 'vision' within the narrative perhaps structures the reader's interaction with the text. This subject has a long lineage in film and literary criticism and is usually conceptualized by reference to the terms 'point of view' or 'focalization'. Lately, Seymour Chatman (1990; see below) has challenged the use of both of these and while I acknowledge the substance of his argument, for the sake of convenience, having used the term 'external focalization' in an explicit way in the last chapter, I shall stick to subsuming questions of vision under 'focalization'. Where focalization is an important topic for us in our consideration of potential readings in the 1970s is that it has often been discussed with a view to illustrating how a reader is necessarily 'inscribed' in the text or 'constituted' by it. In order to confront some of these issues in this chapter we will concentrate on the differences in focalization between the private eye narrative and the crime story.

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even, sometimes, the narrators) simply say it. So the element of subterfuge we see in operation in Hammett's text results from the relationship of what is focalized (the event of swearing) to the focalizer (Sam Spade) and to the narrator. If the tough, streetwise Spade were the narrator he would merely repeat the word. This is an issue that we met but did not deal with in great detail in the last chapter when we discussed external focalization briefly. Quite simply, what this passage demonstrates is that narrator and focalizer are not identical; Spade is at the scene but it is not him that narrates. Moreover, the separation of focalizer and narrator often occurs even in first person retrospective novels. A famous example of this occurs in the narration of Pip's childhood by the older Pip in *Great Expectations*. It is an example that is used frequently by narratologists to stress the difference between narrator and focalizer. The story is *narrated* by Pip as a grown man; yet the crucial early parts of the story, such as his meeting with Magwitch, is *focalized* by the young Pip. A more problematic illustration of this can be found in a recent novel by Graham Greene. In *The Captain and the Enemy* the first part of the narration concerns the main character's childhood and is narrated by his older self (who also tries to pass this section off as a manuscript). At one stage, the Captain takes the boy to the cinema:

Never mind, my memory leaps ahead to an evening when he took me to a movie house in order to see a film - it was I think called *King Kong* (1989 p. 43).

The narrator is trying to evoke the vagueness of the child's knowledge as the reader with the requisite popular cultural competence to know the contents of *King Kong* will, in due course, recognise. Subsequent statements over the next page or so testify to the narrator's intrusion, and his attempt to efface this intrusion, into the boy's version of the events:

it was by that time already an ancient film to my young eyes King Kong, if it was King Kong, clambered about the skyscrapers with a blonde girl . . . (p. 43);

and then, with more certainty,

I felt sorry for King Kong but not to that extent (p. 43).

The "young eyes" in the second quote purport to belong to the focalizer. But in this quote it is clear that the narrator still intrudes; the man (narrator) has not merged with

the boy (focalizer). However, he clumsily attempts to efface his intrusion by creating a false sense of uncertainty: that is, he interjects "if it was King Kong". By the time the narrative has reached the next quote the focalization has abandoned all pretence to not knowing the hero of the film. It is difficult to discern at this stage whether the boy has now become aware of the identity of the film's hero or whether the knowledgeable narrator is intruding once more. In the context of the last references to *King Kong* in the text, it is clear that the latter is the case. Distinguishing between the levels of sending and receiving the narrative message depends on the schema we set out in Chapter 1 which included an implied author, narrator, narratee and an implied reader. What we are adding to this schema is the notion of the character inside the text - between narrator and narratee - who focalizes or provides a frame for the reading of the narrative. Occasionally novels utilize these existing levels of the narrative's transmission for their own specific purposes: the example we cited in Chapter 1 was the epistolary novel's reliance on the role of the narrator. However, detecting the difference between the levels in many cases requires a specific literary competence. Booth writes

Can we really be surprised that readers have overlooked Nabokov's ironies in *Lolita*, when Humbert Humbert is given full and unlimited control of the rhetorical resources? . . . [O]ne can understand [Nabokov's] feeling that he has done all that anyone but an 'illiterate juvenile delinquent' could possibly need to prevent misunderstanding. But the laws of art are against him. His most skilful and mature readers, it is true, will have repudiated Humbert's blandishments from the beginning; the clues are numerous, the style is a dead giveaway throughout - *if* one happens to see it as such. One of the major delights of this delightful profound book is that of watching Humbert almost make a case for himself (1961 pp. 390-391).

In this instance, the narrator and focalizer are, to all intents and purposes, merged in Humbert. But as the previous examples have shown, the fact that narrations of this kind take place 'after the event' entails that there is a Humbert as narrator and a Humbert as focalizer. Booth's comments indicate that Nabokov worried that readers would think that Humbert's opinions were the author's despite the clues given to the contrary in the prose style. This would involve readers not only conflating the perceptions of the narrator with those of the focalizer, but also the perceptions of the real author with the narrator. Such a reading, of course, also effaces the role of the implied author who edits and presents the parts of Humbert's discourse as required.

The conclusion that must be drawn from this is that readers are apt to ignore those positions which are sometimes offered by narrative agents for them to occupy. Whether this is because they do not possess a prescribed level of literary competence or not can only be left to speculation; what is clear in many cases, however, is that, despite the possibility of demonstrating the existence of levels of narration in a text, these are not always recognized by the reader.

In the hard-boiled story, one could say that the narrator, in spite of his/her objectivity, is somehow closer to the focalizer of the scene than in such novels as *Lolita*. This may be because they are thought to share the same general outlook and language: one factor governing the putative advance in realism of the hard-boiled story is that, by using a prose style which is supposedly homologous to the language of the protagonists in the *fabula*, it closes the gap between the narrator and the focalizer, the latter of whom can only perceive outward appearances. If this were the case, then the opinions and outlook of the character or focalizer would be that much more immediate. However, Booth argues

By giving the impression that judgment is withheld, an author can hide from himself that he is sentimentally involved with his characters, and that he is asking for his reader's sympathies without providing adequate reasons [T]he modern author can reject the charge of sentimentality, saying, in effect, 'Who, me? Not at all. It is the reader's fault if he feels any excessive or unjustified compassion. *I* didn't say a word. I'm as tight-lipped and unemotional as the next man'. Such effects are most evident, perhaps, in the worst of the tough-guy school of detective fiction. Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer can, in effect, do no wrong - for those who can stomach him at all. But many of Spillane's readers would drop him immediately if he intruded to make explicit the vicious morality on which enjoyment of the books is based: 'You may notice, reader, that when Mike Hammer beats up an Anglo-Saxon American he is less brutal than when he beats up a Jew, and that when he beats up a Negro he is most brutal of all. In this way our hero discriminates his punishment according to the racial worth of his victims'. It is wise of Spillane to avoid making such things explicit (1961 pp. 83-85).

What Booth is suggesting is that even the most 'objective' of narrations entails judgments, however well disguised. For Booth narrations can be made even more judgmental if they extend the notion of objectivity and narrators recede even further; he argues

objective narration, particularly when conducted through a highly unreliable narrator, offers special temptations to the reader to go astray. Even when it presents characters whose conduct the author deeply deplores, it presents them through the seductive medium of their own self-defending rhetoric. It is consequently not surprising that reactions to such works have been marked with confusion and false accusations (p. 388-389).

It is well known that in the literary historical debate over 'showing' and 'telling' in narration, Booth implicitly favours the latter.³ However, Booth's arguments are to be borne in mind as we confront the notion that the crime novels of Leonard et al. represent an even greater realism than that of the hard-boiled story. As we will see, the claim of greater realism is based on the idea that the crime novel brings the narrator and focalizer just that little bit nearer to each other.

'Vision' in Print and in the Cinema

A great deal has been written about the concept of vision both in printed narrative and in cinematic narrative. Full-length studies by a number of authorities⁴ assess developments in the study of 'point of view' or 'focalization' in written and/or cinematic narrative. Rather than rehearse the arguments set out by these authorities once more we will consider an overview of some of the most salient factors of 'vision' which concern us. It is already clear that the status of the entities 'narrator' and 'focalizer' is crucial to our analysis; Chatman, who rejects the term 'focalization', nevertheless has something of value to offer when he writes

Recent narratologists have pretty much abandoned the term 'point of view' as loose and imprecise. Various terms such as 'focalization' have been proposed to replace it, but like 'point of view', these do not face the main problem. That problem, as I see it, is the need to recognize *different* terms for the two different narrative agents, narrator and character (Chatman 1990 p. 139).

For him, focalization must be rejected on the grounds that it is not specific enough - it does not specify the different kinds of focalization that accrue to different narrative agents - and that it is an excessively visual metaphor: that is to say, it does not account for means of perception which are exclusive of vision. This last point is made clearer when Chatman writes of the narrator of *Dombey and Son*:

Though fictional, he is a different *kind* of fiction from Dombey or Dombey, Jr. He resides in an order of time and place different from that occupied by the characters; his is a different 'here-and-now'. And

³ For a summary of this debate see Rimmon-Kenan (1983 pp. 106 ff).

⁴ These include Genette (1980) Chatman (1978; 1990); Mitchell (1981); Martin (1986); Bordwell (1988); Bordwell et al. (1988); Bordwell and Thompson (1990); and Rimmon-Kenan (1983).

that's true for every narrator, no matter how minimal his/her/its distance from the 'here-and-now' of the story (as, for example, in the epistolary novel) (1990 p. 142).

In order to provide a means of differentiating between a narrator's point of view and that of a character, Chatman introduces the terms 'slant' and 'filter'. 'Slant' designates the influence of the narrator on the narration of events and, in this way, is not too dissimilar from the idea of an ideological slant. 'Filter' designates those narrations of events which treat a certain character as a frame and disregard those aspects of the events which lie outside this frame. Chatman argues

The effect has been well understood since Henry James. The story is narrated *as if* the narrator sat somewhere 'inside' or just this side of a character's consciousness and strained all events through that character's sense of them (1990 p. 144).

This will be the sense of focalization which we consider when we discuss the crime novel. As Chatman points out, the concept of 'filter' allows for the conceptualizing of the role of the implied author who, presumably, is responsible for deciding who and what in the narrative will be a 'filter'. Chatman makes this clearer when he says that, for conventional (as opposed to avant-garde) narrative

Only characters reside in the constructed story world, so only they can be said to 'see', that is to have a diegetic consciousness that literally perceives and thinks about things from a position within that world. Only their 'perspective' is immanent to that world. Only they can be filters. The narrator cannot perceive or conceive things in that world: he can only tell or show what happened there, since for him the story is already 'past' and 'elsewhere'. He can report them, comment upon them, and even - figuratively in literature, literally in cinema - visualize them, but always from outside, from a post out in the discourse. The logic of narrative prevents him from inhabiting the story world at the moment that he narrates it (1990 p. 146).

This restates the point that we have made about the difference of narrator and focalizer. What it stresses, however, is that the work of the filter is a work of a certain specificity. We will return to the implications of this shortly. Chatman refrains from making any explicit judgment on the effect that filter and slant may have on a reader. However, it has been the custom in the past for theorists working on similar topics to do with cinematic narrative to posit effects and prescribe 'correct' cinematic techniques.

In his recent works on narration, David Bordwell has simply characterized 'point of view' in the cinema as consisting of the optically subjective shot (Bordwell 1988 p. 60; Bordwell and Thompson 1990 p. 68 and p. 178).

Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1988) point out that, generally, in 'classical' cinema, 'point of view' shots

are firmly anchored within an 'objective' frame of reference (p. 33).

Bordwell's no-nonsense approach to point of view in the cinema is in contrast to a body of work in film theory which appeared in the seventies and was occasionally prescriptive in its orientation (see Chapter 9). Towards the end of this period of film theory, Nick Browne argued that

The concept of 'point of view' has achieved its present significance, and perhaps centrality, in recent film theory and criticism as the contemporary beneficiary of a certain line of predominantly French thought. The joining of Lacan's and Althusser's description of the subject, and setting this description into place in the critical discourse on film, has produced a problematic which presently shapes a picture of the field of contemporary theoretical problems. *Screen's* project in recent years has been systematically to elaborate and extend the French line. Perhaps more than any other body of writing, it has set the issue of spectator/reader position as a problem of ideological representation (1979 p. 105).

We will not examine the theoretical cul-de-sac that much of this criticism found itself in except to say that, at least in drawing attention to concepts of 'point of view', it did contribute to a discussion of the text's interaction with the reader. The lack of specificity in these analyses of 'vision' in film, where a false dovetailing of a general human subjectivity with a general subjectivity of the text was theorized, is captured in another statement from Browne:

By contrast, the dominant problematic as shaped by Lacan/Althusser's analysis of the subject explicitly sets up the problem of the spectator/subject within a social context and within an explicitly technological apparatus. This contemporary problematic of spectator/*dispositif* relations, proceeds from the premises laid out most explicitly - though anticipated in Foucault's analysis of 'Las Meninas' - in Althusser's 'Ideological State Apparatuses'. The spectator is entrapped in an ideological (social) machine in order to ensure the reproduction of the social order. The subject is represented as as a State function or effect. The argument by which this ideological entrapment is pictured explicitly draws on the model of capture and misrecognition proposed in Lacan's paper on the mirror stage, a paper that serves as the justification, and the basic term of mediation, for introducing a psychoanalytic, specifically Lacanian, schema, into the political domain. In this way the relation of the film text to the spectator is inscribed in the social/historical context. The film text 'interpellates' the subject for ideological ends in a way described through a psychoanalytic idiom (p. 106).

So, in this formulation the text *inscribes* the subject in the texts' own 'subjectivity', or rather the text's structuration.⁵ There are two main problems, here. The first is that the

⁵ The question of the text and its relation to subjectivity is clearly a vast subject and, despite the theoretical dead ends of some film theory in the 1970s, there is still much work which could be fruitfully pursued on the topic. It is worth noting here that an issue to do with general theories of subjectivity is implicit in what we have just mentioned. In the Introduction to this thesis (above) we noted that one of the difficulties of 'interpellation' was that it was a concept which relied on a preconstructed notion of the subject. The reader 'inscribed' in the text's structure as posited by some theorists writing in *Screen* in the seventies, rests on a similar notion of the preconstructed subject. This being the case, 'inscription' might imply the reader being interpellated not into a text, but into a

action of the text cannot be said to really execute any social role until the nature of its specificity has been settled. That is to say, fictional texts are unable to inscribe readers into a view of the world which matches the text's subjectivity if that text is recognized by the reader as being a fiction or simply writing. The second problem implied in Browne's statement is that the subject (or reader) that is to be inscribed in the text is a transhistorical one. It is a subject that is, following Althusser, 'interpellated' by the institutions of the State; such a formulation of the human subject sees the State as almost monolithic and imputes only passivity to the subject in the face of the State. Browne's analysis of this strand of theory embodies a criticism which is pertinent to our inquiry; he writes

This universalizing tendency, supported by the Lacanian logic of the signifier - the subject is subject of/to the signifier - defines the spectator/film relation in a way that dissolves the crucial difference between subject position, or point of view, and the text's point of view. It makes possible the assertion of an unbounded assimilation of film to the domain of ideology by *defining* the subject as a necessary effect of a signifier, and blurring the distinction between the formal inscription of the subject in the work and the concrete empirical subject differentiated according to class, sex and historical circumstances. 'Point of view' if it is to escape the absolutism of purely formal interpellation must consider the address of the subject with an historical conjuncture (p. 106).

The implications of Browne's statement are that, in cinematic and other narrative, it is imperative to recognize levels of narration in the text and to identify a space where the reader's interaction takes place.

In the putative Lacanian/Althusserian formula these levels are not sufficiently analysed; in spite of the theoretical sophistication of some of the theory, it relies mainly on the entities of 'text and subject' and 'text and State'. This is where Chatman's concept of filter, for example, is valuable:

The many ways by which perceptual filter can be effected - especially through eyeline match, shot countershot, the 180-degree rule, voice-off, voice-over, plot logic - are well known. Through these devices, films deftly lock an audience into a character's perception. But it is important to recognize - and not often enough urged - that character's gaze and narrator's representation operate on different sides of the story-discourse partition. The character's perceptual filtration of objects and events is always additional to the camera's representations; that is, the filter occupies a space between the 'naked occurrence' of the images and the audience's perception of them. The camera's slant remains in place, even when it is temporarily mediated by the character's perceptual filter (1990 p. 157).

false notion of the text's structure as a new 'subjectivity'. Further work on the failure of such theories might benefit from examining this misconception regarding the nature of the text in addition to general misconceptions about the construction of human subjectivity.

This is one level of narration in the text. In addition, film criticism has for many years recognized the concept of the 'pro-filmic event'; Paul Willemen writes

In cinema, the factor which mediates between the 'real' world and the diegesis is the pro-filmic event (what happens in front of the camera). In this strict sense, reality has to become a pro-filmic event before a fiction can be established (in Ellis 1978 p. 48).

Both of these concepts are valuable in theorizing narrative levels but their problem lies in the difficulty of translation across film and print. Chatman's idea of filter is clearly applicable to both enunciative dimensions in a loose way. However, in film, without even resorting exclusively to subjective shots in the manner of, say, *The Lady in the Lake* (1946), there is a difficulty with the concept of filter. In film, there can be frontal shots of the filter character which, although it can still be construed as a narrative act of filtering, may also be interpreted as an act of narration which originates elsewhere (for example, another character or an extra-diegetic narrator). This new space is very likely to be the site of the reader's own constructions and interpretations. In many instances in print (especially those which we will discuss in this chapter) the possibility of a space between narrator and filter does not always seem as evident; we will discuss this in more depth below. With regard to the idea of the pro-filmic event, there are similar difficulties. Initially, it would seem that the pro-filmic event is analogous to the idea of *fabula* in printed narratives. This is not the case - in print narrative, the *fabula* is the raw material of events which make up the story; in contrast, the pro-filmic event can be considered as beyond the *fabula*, it has already been organized and can be said to be in the realms of *sjuzet*. The pro-filmic event is always already a *fabula* that has been acted upon by *sjuzet*. What the theorizing of the pro-filmic event does do is to emphasize the complex web of determinations in the production of a cinematic narrative. In print narratives it would be possible to say that the entity responsible for providing the *fabula* bound to the *sjuzet* is the implied author. This is not possible in film. The idea of authorship in film is a vexed one as a result of the nature of the industry. Bordwell and Thompson explain that

studio film production delegates tasks for so many individuals that it is often difficult to determine who does what. Is the producer the author? In the prime years of the Hollywood sound system the producer might have had little or nothing to do with the shooting. The writer? Again, in Hollywood, the writer's

scripts might be completely transformed in filming. So is this situation like collective production, with group authorship? No, since studio division of labor denies film workers common goals and shared decision making. Moreover, if we consider not only control and decision making, but also 'individual style', it must be admitted that certain studio workers leave unique traces on the films they make. Cinematographers, such as Hal Mohr and Gregg Toland, set designers such as Hermann Warm, costumers such as Edith Head, choreographers such as Gene Kelly - the contributions of these people usually stand out within the films they made (1990 pp. 24-25).

On the grounds of these comments on real authorship, Bordwell is led to add

As for the implied author, this construct adds nothing to our understanding of filmic narration. No trait we could assign to an implied author of a film could not simply be ascribed to the narration itself: it sometimes suppresses information, it often restricts our knowledge, it generates curiosity, it creates a tone, and so on. To give every film a narrator or implied author is to indulge in an anthropomorphic fiction.

There is a fairly important theoretical choice involved here. Literary theories of the implied author, such as Seymour Chatman's, take the process of narration to be grounded in the classic communication diagram: a message is passed from sender to receiver. This has committed theorists to seeking out noncharacter narrators and implied authors, not to mention 'narratees' and 'implied readers'. These entities, especially the latter two, are sometimes very hard to find in a narrative text. I suggest, however, that narration is better understood as the organization of a set of cues for the construction of a story. This presupposes a perceiver, but not any sender, of a message. This scheme allows for the possibility that the narrational process may sometimes mimic the communication situation more or less fully. A text's narration may emit cues that suggest a narrator or 'narratee', or it may not. This explains the range of examples, and the asymmetrical structures that we often find: some texts do not signal a narrator, or a narratee, some signal one, but not the other On the principle that we ought not to proliferate theoretical entities without need, there is no point in positing communication as the fundamental process of all narration, only to grant that most films 'efface' or 'conceal' this process. Far better, I think, to give the narrational process the power to signal under certain circumstances that the spectator should construct a narrator. When this occurs we must recall that this narrator is the product of specific organizational principles, historical factors and viewers' mental sets (1988 p. 62).

Bordwell's comments are useful as they bring us back to the question of what happens in cinematic narration when it can be demonstrated that the narrative levels seem to be mere cyphers. These narrative entities, which, in the Lacanian/Althusserian formulation, are responsible for the work of interpellation are actually not as immutable as they seem. Instead, they are the result of an interaction between text and reader.

If we return specifically to the question of 'point of view' in the cinema the consequences of the mutability of narrative levels becomes clearer. No longer does narrative cinema constitute the reader in the process of reading; instead, it initiates a negotiation of a narrative space by potential readers. By using an example from a film by Nagisa Oshima, Edward Branigan demonstrates that the 'point of view' shot, far from necessarily inscribing the reader, can actually negate the readers as a supposed 'subject of the text'. It is worth quoting at length from Branigan's analysis:

Narration is a product of both a narrator and a reader; just as the text must create (inscribe) its reader, so a reader must create the text and its telling. Let us look a bit closer at the production of space by a reader - at the relation between spectator and spectacle.

One quite simple, static formulation of this relation is the hoary maxim that the spectator identifies with the lens of the camera. A broader concept of the production of space by a reader depends on the analysis of a pattern of successive camera placements through time and how such a focus of point-spaces describes, or rather circumscribes, a narrative scene for a particular kind of viewer. One such pattern often found in traditional films traces out space for a so-called *perfect* or ideal spectator. The perfect view, as described by one writer, means that a director

does not attempt to show it [the scene] through the eyes of one of the characters on the screen; that would mean keeping the camera still, showing all the time only the close shot of the opposite actor. Nor does he try to show it through the eyes of an impartial observer physically present at the scene; that would mean that he could only cut to shots which were all taken from a fixed camera position. Instead, the director's aim is to give an *ideal* picture of the scene, in each case placing his camera in such a position that it records most effectively the particular piece of action or detail which is dramatically significant. He becomes, as it were, a ubiquitous observer, giving the audience at each moment of the action the best possible viewpoint.

Other writers characterize this special production of space by asserting that the director must 'act for the spectator as the spectator would wish him to'; which is to say, the director must construct (inscribe) a certain kind of spectator for the text. Moreover, it is commonly held that the spectator must be constituted as an unseen observer viewing the space from possible locations in the fictional scene Oshima uses a 360 degree model of space to generate camera set-ups which skew eyelines and confuse screen direction and movement Impossible spectator positions are also related to impossible POV shots. When Motoki chases the police car through the streets and into a tunnel, we soon realise that the shots from his view are moving much too fast and it should be impossible for him to keep up with the car. When Yasuko is raped in the car there are a series of POV shots, interspersed with shots of the interior of the car, which progressively become impossible. First we see a classic POV shot from Yasuko's position out of a window of the car. A short time later there is a shot skimming along near the surface of the highway as if the viewer were tied to the front bumper of the moving car (we do not, however, see any part of the car). Somewhat later, we see approximately what Yasuko sees out of a window but the camera is *outside* the car angled upwards past a side view mirror showing street lamps and buildings moving by. Finally the scene ends with a repeat of the camera set-up from the front of the car bumper but now the camera is inverted so that the highway and the sky exchange places. At this point, there can be no possible spectator (1979 pp. 314 - 317).

One of the key point of Branigan's analysis is that the Oshima text demonstrates cinematic specificity. As we have mentioned, the Lacanian/Althusserian formulation of 'point of view' assumes that the realm of human subjectivity can simply merge with a notion of textual subjectivity and effect a virtual merging of text and subject. However, there are certain limit cases, as Branigan points out, which demonstrate that the mechanisms of cinematic narration are not to be understood as such; they are to be taken on their own terms which often involve a non-realistic reference to the world.

Branigan adds

Once we give up the idea that an object is simply part of the world or that narration is the statement of an author and recognise the crucial intervention of symbolic activity (what we know are symbols not the world) then a subjective point of view ceases to be a one place predicate (where characters are real persons) and instead becomes a complex, symbolic relation of at least four terms: camera, character, object, and perceiver. (Recall that 'camera' is a construct of the reader - a reading hypothesis about space). This formulation provides another way to measure the work accomplished by point of view in cinema. What is at stake in point of view is the recognition of an epistemological boundary. My contention is that for the classical text, at least, such a boundary derives from six elements of

representation. Subjectivity is a set of particular formation rules relating structural description (e.g. vision) to a surface or terminal symbol (e.g. the turn of a character's head - an instance of 'glance'). The rules are acquired by a reader through exposure to a relatively small number of films and used to decode a potentially unlimited number of films including films not yet made; that is, the rules are generative. The types of subjectivity reveal some of the deep presuppositions of classical discourse. As such they map not just a viewer's pictorial competence but our categories of thought which mark the very limits of what can be thought about character in that representational system (1979 pp. 359 - 360).

For Branigan the main point to be made is that cinema is specific in its textual mechanisms. However, what he is also arguing is that film contains an epistemological boundary; this is not unlike Frow's concept of a 'literary frame' which we encountered in Chapter 2 (above); it will be remembered that we discussed such an entity in terms of its engendering a recognition of textual specificity and, more particularly, a set of generic expectations. The competences that Branigan describes and which we have discussed in Chapter 2 are therefore not that dissimilar. Cinematic - or, simply, narrational - competence involves a specific *activity*; Branigan's argument is similar to the one that we have pursued in previous chapters when he writes

In film, though, it appears that formation and understanding are not quite on the same plane because very few spectators watch films and then pick up cameras to make their own films. I suggest, however, that viewers are a great deal more active in generating space than is normally recognised. Consider the dreams and daydreams of the viewer. More generally, I believe that understanding a scene entails the ability not just to recall the spaces of that scene but to project *new* spaces from *new* angles thus 'filling-in' gaps in the presentation of the scene. That is, a viewer, given a sequence of spatial fragments is able to imagine a *complete* space - one that has perhaps never been shown. A viewer can demonstrate this mastery by imagining being in the scene and moving about to assume new angles. Or the viewer might demonstrate mastery by drawing the scene from new angles (e.g. an overhead view) and describing where characters and objects must be located. (These diagrams should be understood not in relation to real space but as a record of the hypotheses and predictions made by a viewer. What is termed the 'classical' text is simply one way of systematising the predictions). In short, the viewer actively constructs the space of his or her understanding. The use of reading 'hypotheses' covers both the viewer's ability to form, and to understand, space (1979 pp. 361-362).

However, it is crucial for both Branigan and us to recognize that, in spite of the specificity of cinematic competence, it is not divorced from other competences to do with the real world. He adds,

It should be emphasised that the competence I described does not explain in an exhaustive way the understanding of a viewer (nor formation by an author). It is aimed only at certain structures internal to the text, not to the total meaning which is generated. It does not explain, for example, how a viewer knows what a fireplace is or what an American flag signifies. This should not be shocking: after all, we say that knowing a grammar or syntax is necessary for understanding a sentence, but never sufficient. Clearly, a major problem involves stating the referential link between text and world as well as how a viewer acquires a lexicon. The problem is not obviated by saying that the world is merely another set of texts and discourses, although that perhaps is an important first step (1979 pp. 362-363).

It can be seen that the formulations of this final statement from Branigan have very much been part of our project, albeit developed from different sources. Those analyses

of 'vision' in narrative which stress its constituting action on the reader have overestimated the powers of the text and have underestimated the vicissitudes of the text-reader interaction. We will now consider the question of how 'vision' operates in some 1970s thrillers, specifically how it might be negotiated by a range of other investments. Fortunately, there are some thrillers of the period which prove particularly amenable to such an analysis: the first is a private eye film, *Chinatown* (1974), the second is the crime novel as represented by two of its leading practitioners.

Chinatown

Chinatown can be read as a film which is very much about the development of vision. As the film's director, Roman Polanski, has pointed out (South Bank Show 1980) the camera is very close to the main character, Jake Gittes, throughout the film. Before we say anything about this a brief summary of the film's story is necessary. Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) is an L.A. private eye whose practice is mainly responsible for divorce work. He is hired by 'the wife' of Hollis Mulwray (Darrell Zwerling) to procure evidence which will prove the adultery of her husband and Gittes does this, whereupon the photographs of the 'woman' with Mulwray are published in a city newspaper. In his surveillance of Mulwray, Gittes notices that beside the 'adultery' Mulwray has been acting strangely: he is the head of the water authority in Los Angeles but he has still been spending an inordinate amount of time checking the water disposal pipes to the sea. Soon after the incriminating photographs are published, Jake returns to his office to find that Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) is waiting there to see him. Not only is she totally different in appearance from the previous 'Mrs. Mulwray' she is also threatening legal action. Soon after this, Hollis Mulwray is found dead in a largely dried out reservoir. After investigating the scene and almost getting his nose cut off by henchmen (Roy Jenson and Roman Polanski) Jake goes to meet Noah Cross who hires him to find the woman that Hollis Mulwray was seeing. While doing this Jake also

makes enquiries into the recent land deals in the area and finds that much of the fruit-growing parts of the valley near L.A. have been recently bought by people who he soon finds are either dead or in a specially run nursing home. The land has been sold very cheaply because there is no water; water is being temporarily diverted as Hollis Mulwray suspected. Jake is accompanied on these enquiries by Evelyn Mulwray and, after a fracas at the nursing home in which she rescues Jake, they sleep together. However, she is called away in the night and he follows, only to find that she is visiting the woman with whom Hollis had been photographed. Jake confronts her with this and she only tells him that it is her daughter. When he goes home he is awakened by a call which tells him to go and meet a woman whose name he has previously never heard, Ida Sessions (Diane Ladd). On entering the address that he was given, he finds the first 'Mrs. Mulwray' dead on the floor and the police, led by Lieutenant Escobar (Perry Lopez), an ex-colleague of Jake's, jump out and ask him why Ida had his phone number. Escobar sets Jake loose and he goes to see Evelyn again and she finally admits that the woman, Catherine, is her sister *and* her daughter, as a result of a union with her father, Noah Cross. The climax comes in Chinatown where Jake, Evelyn, Catherine, Noah Cross - who Jake has established has murdered Hollis Mulwray because the latter learned of multi-million dollar extortion plan - plus the police are involved in a multiple confrontation which results in Evelyn being shot through the head by the police. The plot is far more complicated than even this summary allows, but this much knowledge of the story at least is needed to understand a potential reading of the film.

As Polanski says, the film is shot almost exclusively from a position very close to Jake Gittes. In fact it is extra-ordinary how often the film uses hand-held over-the-shoulder (of Jake) shots from start to finish. It also signals its stress on the optical nature of Jake's work by constantly having him in the early part of the film looking through binoculars (at Hollis Mulwray on the beach), in a car wing mirror (at Hollis), at photographs developed in his office of Hollis and Noah Cross, through a camera on the boating lake (at Hollis and Catherine), through a camera from a villa roof (at Hollis and

Catherine) incorporating a shot of the camera lens which reflects what Jake is shooting and at photos of Hollis and Noah Cross in the office of Yelburton (John Hillerman) which establish a crucial link in the plot.⁶ Whether this necessarily entails that the film can only be read within certain rigid constraints is another matter. The very first shot in the film is of a series of still photographs of a woman having sex with a man outdoors; the camera zooms out from these to show that the photographs are being held by Curly (Burt Young) and that he is, with Jake, in the latter's office. Can we argue that the viewer is invited to take up the position of Jake in the viewing of the photographs, cynical and almost weary of the subject? Or is the viewer likely to be in a position similar to Curly's, outraged and humiliated? Or is it more likely that the viewer may be presented with a question by the photographs that s/he may desire to be answered? These are three likely possibilities for a reading of the sequence. Of course, as the narrative progresses, the camera stays with Jake throughout, cutting to the interior of rooms behind his back when he has closed and entered. Despite this, though, there are times when he is viewed from the front rather than over the shoulder, for example his meetings with Evelyn and with Noah Cross and, especially, where his nose is cut. As a result of this closeness to Jake, it is possible to learn about his character. As we have said, he does mainly divorce work and, perhaps as a result, can be interpreted as having quite a cynical outlook on human motives. This is signalled by Evelyn, for instance, when she tells him that

No question from you is innocent.

Moments later, when she asks him about his police work in Chinatown, she has to assure him that

It's an innocent question.

⁶ The discussion of motifs of vision in this film could continue for a considerable time; analyses of the key role played by spectacles, the magnifying glass in Hollis' office, the flawed iris of Evelyn which prompts her sexual union with Jake, the one tail-light on Evelyn's car that Jake leaves intact so as he can follow her, the blacking of Curly's wife's eye, the shooting out of Evelyn's eye, the covering up of Catherine's eyes by Noah Cross etc - all of these would contribute to an interesting thesis. However, they are not germane to our purpose.

Chinatown obviously means something for Jake and it is difficult for him to define what it is. It is here that he meets the limit of his knowledge and experience. Noah Cross says to him,

You may think you know what you're dealing with, but believe me you don't.

When Jake smiles, Cross asks

Why're you smilin'?

Jake replies

That's what the District Attorney used to tell me in Chinatown.

Jake indicates to Evelyn some of the reasons for his leaving the police department and why Chinatown has such a resonance for him:

You can't always tell what's going on . . . I was trying to keep someone from being hurt and I ended up making sure she *was* hurt.

In the final moment of the film when Evelyn has been shot by Loach (Dick Bakalyan) in Chinatown, Jake seems to be between catatonia and strangling Escobar. His colleague, Walsh (Joe Mantell), intervenes, saying,

Forget it, Jake, it's Chinatown.

Walsh utters this as if it represents the impossibility of understanding. What this amounts to, it seems, is that Jake is a character who embodies a seemingly all-knowing cynicism, yet he is still unable to understand many of the events that surround him.

Writers on the film have attempted to show how its specific narrative vision fuses with Jake's lack of ultimate knowledge to produce a profound statement about contemporary reality. This is the approach of Wexman (1985 pp. 91 ff), for example. Cawelti (1979) argues that *Chinatown* exploits a traditional hard-boiled framework and then subverts it in an ironic way which he labels "postmodernist" (p. 511). For him, the film belongs in a category with a clutch of films from the decade preceding it which he takes to be 'self-conscious' Hollywood movies. His grounds for this argument are that *Chinatown* subverts the traditions exemplified by the novels and films of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *The Big Sleep* (1946) and that

Chinatown places the hard-boiled detective story within a view of the world that is deeper and more catastrophic, more enigmatic in its evil, more sudden and inexplicable in its outbreaks of violent chance. In the end, the image of heroic moral action embedded in the traditional private-eye myth turns out to be totally inadequate to overcome the destructive realities revealed in the course of the story (p. 509).

Cawelti's analysis can be challenged on a number of points. The first is that he chooses Hammett and Chandler as the representatives of the hard-boiled while paying mere lip service to the "crudity" (p. 504) of Mickey Spillane. The fact that Spillane has sold over 150 million books (Van Dover 1984 p. 5) does not indicate to Cawelti that the hard-boiled myth might also be represented for the public in his works. He also takes it as a given that there is teleological evolution in the thriller with a greater awareness accruing to the hard-boiled story in later generations. As we saw in Chapter 2 (above) a quite powerful criticism is lodged at this kind of argument by Gallagher (in Grant 1986) who shows that the Western audience's competence in reading the conventions of the genre is far in advance of that of critics like Cawelti, or at least far in advance of what Cawelti et al. will allow. Cawelti's argument that the hard-boiled story is only able to incorporate a tragic vision in the 1970s as a result of a new 'post-modernist' outlook is dubious. Corruption is all pervasive in the works of Chandler and Hammett and the kind of corruption that rears its head in *Chinatown* can be read in a similar way. In the 1941 film version of *The Maltese Falcon*, what are we to make of Sam Spade's (Humphrey Bogart) final enigmatic comment that the black bird is the stuff that dreams are made of? In *The Long Goodbye* (19), Marlowe is apprised of the fruitlessness of his whole project of honour when it turns out that Terry Lennox, whom he has protected throughout, has concealed the identity of the murderer - his first wife. Marlowe has therefore seriously misjudged him. Palmer (1978) uses this as a prime example of what he calls the 'negative thriller':

What distinguishes *The Long Goodbye* from the positive thriller is the emptiness of its ending (p. 49). In the rest of the chapter on the negative thriller, Palmer discusses another hard-boiled novel, Hammett's *The Glass Key* and *Just Another Sucker* by the British hard-boiled

writer, James Hadley Chase.⁷ So there is a case for arguing that the degree of negativity and the putative subversion of conventions of *Chinatown* is not something new to the hard-boiled story. Moreover, if Cawelti had been concerned enough to place *Chinatown* in the tradition of the thriller as a whole he may have found his thesis problematized by the level of corruption and bleakness to be found in the works of Jim Thompson, Cornell Woolrich, and James Cain, or the level of psychological complexity in the world of Ross Macdonald. One point that Cawelti makes which is neat, but not sanctioned by the narration, is that Noah Cross' rape of his daughter is extended to the rape of the land (p. 510). This is quite a simple reading in many ways because, in the scene where Gittes interrogates Evelyn and ascertains the whereabouts of Catherine's conception, he assumes aloud that Evelyn has been raped. She emphatically and shamefully shakes her head. This is a much more disturbing proposition, especially for Gittes, and it rather invalidates Cawelti's belief that Noah Cross intends to repeatedly rape his grand-daughter. In light of this, if the analogy of Cross' intercourse with his daughter to his intercourse with the land is to be maintained, then a far different reading will result. Cawelti's whole argument would have been better served if, instead of insisting on a purely textually located innovation, he had paid attention to the possible organization of readings of *Chinatown*. Simon, for instance, makes essentially the same point as Cawelti when he writes of Jake that

Unlike the Bogartian hero, he is not coolly sure of himself all the way down the line. His wisecracks are more brittle, he is occasionally gauche, his aplomb muted by a sense of moral ambiguity. He can break up at other people's jokes as retold by himself, a childlike trait as remote from Bogey as the somewhat high-pitched voice and thinning hair, both of which render Nicholson's Gittes more fragile, as does his slightly ridiculous name: can you imagine Hammett calling a Spade a Gittes? (Simon 1974d).

⁷ It must be mentioned, however, that Palmer's evolutionary schema, which we discussed in Chapter 2 (above), culminates in the 'anti-thriller' which he counterposes to the 'negative thriller'. One of these is *Night Moves* (1975) in which, crucially for Palmer (p. 218), the conspiracy triumphs:

In Alan Sharp's *Night Moves* the crimes are not committed until the closing pages; the hero is so concerned with solving his own personal problems that he misunderstands the relationships between the people involved (who have appeared throughout the novel); and his clumsy, last-ditch attempt at being a 'proper detective' leads to the deaths of all the people involved, himself included (1978 p. 215).

If such works 'transcend the genre' they would not be included for analysis in works such as Palmer's or Cawelti's; as we argued in Chapter 2, 'textual innovations' cannot be objective and only exist as innovations in so far as they are recognized as such by an audience.

However, Simon makes these comments contemporaneously with the film's release, not as an analysis after the fact. Before we come to the implications of this, let us return to his comments. He writes of the leading female character that

The lovely but shopworn heroine, Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway), is also faintly off-center. Under the beautiful, battered exterior there lurks neither the untouched innocent who can settle down snugly into a happy ending, nor a fascinating wrongdoer for whom the electric chair is the fitting final seat (ibid.).

For Simon, the film says that

Life is a cracked bowl of mostly rotten cherries . . . [but w]hat really brings the film into the 1970's is the loss of innocence that permeates its world: the boundaries between right and wrong have become hazy even in the good - or better - people, and the two genuine innocents of the film are both, in one way or another, victimized . . . action and even suspense must take a backseat to atmosphere: a sense of general corruption far more unsettling than the conventionally localized evil of the standard genre film, however explosive it may be (Simon 1974d).

Now clearly we can subject Simon's assessment of the film to the same kind of criticism that we directed at Cawelti. Utilizing the arguments of Gallagher, once more, we could ask what is meant by a 'standard genre film' and whether it exists. However, Simon is a reviewer and not subject to the same kind of rigour as an academic such as Cawelti; Simon is in the business of making assessments of films from a standpoint that does not recognize some of the implications of its own enunciation and history. Where Cawelti may have improved his argument considerably would have been to have taken Simon's review and shown how it acted as an extra-textual cue to offer *Chinatown* to be read within this particular frame of reference involving "hazy" boundaries between right and wrong. That these boundaries have suddenly become hazy is not necessarily true; in the last chapter we have seen that Robert B. Parker closely equates the morality of the thirties with the "post-Vietnam" climate of the seventies. The point is that there is a *specific* haziness of the boundaries in the seventies hard-boiled text caused by the action of historical circumstances and the reading formation upon a potential reading of the hard-boiled genre. *Chinatown* cannot be said to simply possess a structure that is 'post-modernist' through and through; instead, it may be said to possess textual elements that will allow such a reading if sanctioned by the reading formation.

Although there were readings which resembled Simon's, the extra-textual cues to the film were not all of this sort. Penelope Gilliatt, for instance, located *Chinatown's* specificity in its depiction of avarice:

Because of its emphasis on greed, 'Chinatown' is a thriller for grownups (Gilliatt 1974c).

Gilliatt obviously believes that thrillers are not usually suitable for adults and her assessment of the thriller genre is therefore ambiguous. For Cocks, however, there is no doubt that the film is well within a certain thriller tradition:

Towne's script makes a nod to another Los Angeles mystery writer, Ross MacDonald [sic], most markedly in its use of familial trauma in the plot solution (Cocks 1974c).

Yet it is precisely the fact that it is a thriller which makes the film deficient for Cocks.

He asserts that

the script also raises moral questions and political implications that are never plumbed at greater than paper cup depth (Cocks 1974c).

The profundity (or not) of the film's statement on contemporary life is therefore mitigated in these assessments by the fact that the film is a thriller. For Cocks, this is a logical position to take; for Simon, however, he is surely contradicting his initial premise regarding *Chinatown* as representative of 'the way we see now' when he writes

The final question is whether a mystery film, however concerned with moral climate and psychotic overtones, can transcend its genre Still, the hold of the genre is so strong that, even with sensational plot twists kept at a minimum, there simply isn't room enough for full character development - for the richer humanity required by art (1974d).

We have dealt before with the oxymoronic nature of 'transcending genre' (see Chapters 5 and 6, above). Polanski does not shy away from mentioning that *Chinatown* was a potentially first-rate thriller showing how the history and boundaries of L.A. had been fashioned by human greed (1985 p. 352).

In the publicity for the film he says that the film is

a traditional detective story with a new, modern shape (Publicity Brochure for *Chinatown* 1974 p. 1).

What appears to have provided a site for debate among reviewers of *Chinatown*, then, is precisely the fact that Polanski stresses: that the film is modern. The semantic aspect of the film has therefore changed. Polanski added later

I saw *Chinatown* not as a 'retro' piece or conscious imitation of classic movies shot in black and white, but as a film about the thirties seen through the camera eye of the seventies. I wanted it to be evocative

of the world and period of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, but I wanted the style of the period conveyed by a scrupulously accurate reconstruction of decor, costume, and idiom - not by a deliberate imitation, in 1973, of thirties film techniques (1985 pp. 353-354).

And, on Jake:

The story was in the best Chandler tradition, yet its private eye hero, J.J. Gittes, was no pale, down-at-the-heel imitation of Marlowe. Robert Towne, the scriptwriter, had conceived of him as a glamorous, successful operator, a snappy dresser with a coolly insolent manner (1985 p. 351).

Simon also recognizes that the film is not a retro piece:

Chinatown is not just another *Maltese Falcon* or *Big Sleep*, to be dismissed as a contemporary painting that apes, however skilfully, an old master. It is, rather, a subtly updated version: an equivalent with significant albeit subcutaneous differences that puts Polanski, after the monstrous fiasco of *What?*, back into the running (1974d).

It is doubtful that any contemporary viewer of the film would fail to recognize that *Chinatown* was not made in the 1940s; in publicity for the movie and in the narrative, it is presented as new. The narrative of *Chinatown*, unlike that of *The Maltese Falcon*, for instance, allows characters to say 'fuck'. The role of any discernable narrator in either of the texts is different, therefore, as certain swear words are prohibited in *The Maltese Falcon*. So, what we can say about this aspect of *Chinatown* is that it is an adjustment to the semantic dimension of the text which allows a concomitant adjustment in the syntactic dimension, *as it is read*. As we have argued, the reading of the semantic dimension will be determined partly by extra-textual cues within a reading formation; implicit in this is the question of whether textual devices such as the 'point of view' shot function to engender a certain reading of the film. The manipulation of vision in the narrative of the film might invite a certain reading of the events depicted, but this is all we can say. We cannot suggest that the reader of the film adopts Gittes' subjectivity at all unless this is borne out by extra-textual cues in their entirety. There are also reasons to suggest that Gittes may even be a site of contradictory investments; in publicity for the film Towne said of Jake

This is a character who specializes in divorce work. When you do work like that you develop a fine contempt for people, because all you deal with are people cheating on each other, wives cheating on husbands, husbands cheating on wives.

He develops a fine contempt for women and he gets involved with a woman who he thinks is cheating on her husband, possibly plans to murder him or possibly has murdered him. It becomes a question in his mind throughout the film whether or not he is misjudging her.

On another level it deals with how a city is formed. It's a fictionalized account of how the city of Los Angeles was formed. It's set in the '30s not because of any love of wanting to recreate earlier cinematic tradition, nor out of nostalgia, but because that's when it happened and also because it's a great time

period for a guy who was sophisticated enough to be cynical about people who thought there were limits to how bad people could be - and that's naïve and is a nice balance (ibid p. 1).

Having this feature of Jake's character signalled in advance might encourage readings of *Chinatown* as a straightforward 'objective' narration depicting the folly of ordinary people. Moreover, Jake's involvement with threats to the family may be read in a less than sympathetic way. If the 'point of view' of *Chinatown* is to be read in the way that Cawelti and others claim it should, then the extra-textual cues at least need to be uniform in their assent to this. With regard to reviews of the film, it seems that this is far from the case. However, the adjustment to the corruption on view in the film could be effected by means of other sources: the conspiratorial nature of contemporary government activities in the Vietnam and Watergate era, the changes in sexual mores and attitudes toward the family in the seventies, rising crime rates, the plethora of contemporary paranoid texts (see Chapter 9), the depiction of criminal activities in crime novels (see below) and so on. All these might allow for specific readings of the text which might be able to negotiate the position of 'vision' that the text as objectively described might be said to offer, in addition to all those subsidiary positions which are a result of cinematic narrative being unable to successfully sustain a constant subjective viewpoint. The probability of such readings which always already fill the gaps that texts are unable to keep closed will inform our reading of the crime novel.

Elmore Leonard

Elmore Leonard reached the peak of his fame in the 1980s but his first crime novels were bestsellers in the 1970s after a career as a screenwriter and an author of Western novels. His Westerns include *The Bounty Hunters* (1979; originally 1953) and *Valdez is Coming* (1981; originally 1970). His thrillers in the seventies were *Mr. Majestyk* (1986a; originally 1974), *52 Pick-up* (1986b; originally 1974), *Swag* (1984; originally 1976), *Unknown Man No. 89* (1986c; originally 1977), *The Hunted* (1985a; originally

1977) and *The Switch* (1985b; originally 1978). Leonard's novels have quickly gained a reputation for a certain kind of realism:

Nobody, but nobody, on the current scene can match [Leonard's] ability to serve up violence so light-handedly, with so supremely deadpan a flourish.

- *The Detroit News*

He's so good, you don't notice what he's up to.

- *The Washington Post Book World*

He has a wonderful ear for the way the kind of people you'd never want to meet talk, and his own prose is lean and shiftily . . . He writes a love scene even better than he writes a murder, and when it comes to plotting, he had more moves than Bobby Fischer.

- *The Boston Globe*

A superb craftsman . . . His writing is pure pleasure.

- *Los Angeles Times*

When Mr. Leonard is observing, satirizing, plotting, working up suspense, thickening the air with menace, discharging it in lightning flashes of violence, exposing the black holes behind the parts people play . . . he gives us as much serious fun per word as anyone around.

- *The New York Times Book Review*

(from the inside cover of Leonard 1988; originally 1969).

These comments are the first indication that the focus of attention with regard to Leonard's novels is the style in which they are written. What is instantly apparent on reading any Leonard novel of the seventies is the proliferation of a number of different focalizations of the story events. By this we mean the kinds of narration which are very close to the character in the manner of a 'filter' as expounded by Chatman. The hard-boiled prose of the narrative discourse slips imperceptibly, even during close reading, into a discourse which is close to, and transmits some feelings of a character. In this way, Leonard's novels are seen to represent a true, authentic street discourse. Geherin writes,

In 1972, [Hollywood agent] Swanson suggested that [Leonard] read *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, a debut novel just published by George V. Higgins about a small-time Boston hood. Leonard was enormously impressed by Higgins' method of telling his story. 'I became more mature as a writer after I read Higgins', he acknowledges. 'I learned to just relax and tell the story. His casual use of obscenities and "true" dialogue impressed me'. From Higgins he learned that you could 'just jump into a scene from somebody's point of view. Nobody cares 'what the writer thinks' (1989 p. 10).

This moulding of a putative authenticity in the depiction of characters is intimately connected with the proliferation of focalizations. This is also true of the drawing of inanimate objects. Leonard has said,

I started to realize that the way to describe anywhere, *anywhere*, was to do it from someone's point of view . . . and *leave me out of it*. I'm not gonna get poetic about this street . . . That's not what I do (quoted in Geherin p. 10).

As Leonard implies, part of this kind of focalization entails an attempt to achieve impartiality. On the other hand, it also invites partiality; the specific kind of verisimilitude which requires almost photographic accuracy demonstrates how focalization justifies a fallible viewpoint. Geherin comments:

In an early scene in . . . *Fifty-Two Pickup*, Leonard had to describe a character walking across Woodward Avenue in Detroit. At first he worried about getting all the details of the description accurate so readers familiar with the location wouldn't be disappointed. It then occurred to him that if he described the scene from the *character's* point of view rather than his own, the reader would not only see the scene, he would learn something, he would learn something about the character through whose eyes the scene was being presented. By thus withdrawing from the page he could turn more of the storytelling over to his characters (p. 44).

Focalization therefore has more than one purpose in Leonard's novels and can sometimes even have contradictory purposes.

We mentioned earlier that the hard-boiled narrative prose of Leonard's novels sometimes slips into a discourse that is 'close to' that of a character; the choice of 'close to' is purposely made here as it is clear that on such occasions the prose is not exactly that of the character but, nevertheless, resembles the character's language in its choice of words, rhythms and so on. This phenomenon is often mentioned briefly in works on narratology but is not covered in any depth. Lubbock signals it as an area for exploration in 1926 when he writes

Suppose it were required to render the general effect of a certain year in a man's life, a year that has filled his mind with a swarm of many memories. Looking into his consciousness after the year has gone, we might find much there that would indicate the nature of the year's events without any word on his part; the flickers and the flashes of thought from moment to moment might indeed tell us much. But we shall need an account from him too, no doubt; too much has happened in a year to be wholly acted, as I call it, in the movement of the man's thought. He must narrate - he must make, that is to say, a picture of the events as he sees them, glancing back. Now if he speaks in the first person there can, of course, be no uncertainty in the point of view; he has his fixed position, he cannot leave it. His description will represent the face that the facts in their sequence turned towards *him*; the field of vision is defined with perfect distinctness, and his story cannot stray outside it. The reader, then, may be said to watch a reflection of the facts in a mirror of which the edge is nowhere in doubt; it is rounded by the bounds of the narrator's own personal experience.

This limitation may have a convenience and a value in the story, it may contribute to the effect. But it need not be forfeited, it is clear, if the first person is changed to the third. The author may use the man's field of vision and keep as faithfully within it as though the man were speaking for himself (Lubbock 1926 pp. 256-257).

As we will see, the last strategy that Lubbock mentions is precisely the one that is present in Leonard's crime novels. There is a constant use of the third person when it is fairly clear that the scene is focalized by a character. If we go back to 1955 we encounter an account of this kind of narration which is slightly less brief than that given by subsequent narratologists. Norman Friedman categorizes the kind of narration to be found in Leonard's novels as 'The Dramatic Mode'. He writes,

Having eliminated the author, and then the narrator, we are now ready to dispose of mental states altogether. The information available to the reader in the Dramatic Mode is limited largely to what characters do and say; their appearance and the setting may be supplied by the author as in stage directions; there is never, however, any direct indication of what they perceive (a character may *look* out of the window - an objective act - but what he *sees* is his own business), what they think, or how they feel. This is not to say, of course, that mental states may not be *inferred* from action and dialogue.

We have here, in effect, a stage play cast into the typographical mold of fiction. But there is some difference: fiction is meant to be read, drama to be seen and heard, and there will be a corresponding difference in scope, range, fluidity, and subtlety. The analogy, however, does largely hold, in that the reader apparently listens to no one but the characters themselves, who move as it were upon a stage; his angle of view is that of the fixed front (third row center), and the distance must always be near (since the presentation is wholly scenic). Hemingway comes into his own here (mainly in short stories such as *Hills Like White Elephants*), a mention might be made of James's *The Awkward Age* (1899), which is something of a tour de force - the gains in immediacy hardly compensating for the difficulties of sustaining a full-length novel within this mode (Friedman 1955 p. 1178).

We will come back to this after we have made a crucial distinction. This is to do with the concept of 'interior monologue' which is often related to the idea of a 'stream of consciousness', and is associated with the fiction of James Joyce. Chatman describes it thus:

In the 'Penelope' section of *Ulysses* . . . the ruminations are totally those of Molly Bloom, in her own words (or sounds). She is not functioning as narrator, not telling anyone a story after the fact, but simply carrying on normal thinking processes in the present story moment. The thought stream is simply quoted by the totally effaced narrator. The convention is exactly the same as quoted dialogue: hence the appropriateness of calling it 'free direct thought'. There is no particular reason to argue that the narrator, though silent, has left the discourse world (1990 p. 147).

While Chatman's assertion that there is no reason to believe that the narrator has left the discourse world seems true, his contention that interior monologue is the same as quoted dialogue seems faulty. The eradication of the quotation marks signifies an eruption of the character's subjective world into the world of the narrative prose. The position of the voice of possible authority is now occupied by the voice of a character. In the last chapter we discussed MacCabe's idea that the prose outside quotation marks effaces its production and poses as the voice of authoritative realism in texts. If this is

the case, then the eruption of characters' thought processes into this space may have far-reaching consequences.

One of the most lengthy discussions of this kind of narration is carried out by Dorrit Cohn (1966). Cohn refers to the phenomenon as 'narrated monologue' while making it clear that its long held designation in German - *erlebte Rede* - is most appropriate (p. 101). Cohn is at pains to point out that it is important not to efface the role of the narrator in the functioning of this phenomenon:

The arguments in favor of an internal angle of vision, so forcefully stated by Henry James, Percy Lubbock and Joseph Warren Beach, have led to the belief that the separate narrator is absent from the dramatized novel and that the 'central intelligence' is himself the narrator, in the same sense as the 'I' is the narrator of a story told in the first person. Lubbock may have started this misapprehension when he referred to the character in whom the vision rests by such names as 'dramatized author', 'spokesman of the author', or 'fresh narrator' (p. 102).

The demarcation of lines between the narrator and character become increasingly problematic in this mode of narration and the eruption of a character's discourse into the place of the narrative prose could entail the occupation of a position of potential authority by a protagonist. However, it must be remembered that the discourse is no longer solely the character's nor the narrator's; instead it is more subject to the vagaries of tense. Cohn's example is the translation of

He said: 'I did not come here yesterday'

to a report at a later time and place:

He said that he had not gone there the day before

and, again, into the mode of narration that we have been discussing,

He had not come here yesterday (p. 105).

Cohn's example is just about satisfactory as a preliminary example but it would have been much better for our purposes to use the verb 'to think' rather than 'to say'. This opens up the realm of processes not usually available to all narrators. The question of the presence of the narrator becomes clearer if we consider Leonard's novels: there, the discourse of his characters is often marked off as different from the narrative prose only by that quirkiness that makes up the personality traits of the individual character. So,

for example, events narrated through a discourse close to Bobby Shy in *52 Pick-up* will be manifest in prose as flat and as hard-boiled as that of the narrator. However, Bobby is such a coke-head that the surface appearances that are narrated when the focalization is close to him are in a language unmistakably meant to resemble his:

Bobby Shy was listening. He could blow coke and not miss a word; there wasn't any trick to that. He was dipping into the Baggy again: with his Little Orphan Annie spoon - little chick with no eyes or tits but she was good to hold onto and bring up to your nose, yeeeeeees, one then another, ten dollars worth of fine blow while Alan was talking out of his cut mouth, telling about the man coming to see him (p. 118).

Then, a paragraph later, it is very difficult to say whether a traditional external focalization takes place or a focalization close to Bobby is happening when a set of sentences as simple as the following is set out:

They were in Doreen's apartment because when Alan called he said he wanted to meet there. Alan, Bobby and Leo. It was one thirty in the afternoon. Doreen was in the bedroom asleep (p. 119).

And this is a difficulty that is constantly elided with consummate ease in Leonard's novels. What invariably happens in these narratives - and what marks them off from Higgins' novels, as we will see - is that it is often difficult to distinguish the narrator and focalizer. Cohn asserts that, in most narratives, this phenomenon is utilized in tandem with more conventional styles of narration:

With the narrated monologue we move closer to the possibility of rendering such thoughts and feelings of the character as are not explicitly formulated in his mind. Since the figural voice is not quoted directly, as it is in the interior monologue, this technique lends itself better to the twilight realm of consciousness . . . But as the narration departs from the character's formulated train of thoughts, the narrator's own voice is heard more and more frequently interjecting phrases of the type 'it seemed to him' or 'he barely heard' . . . (p. 110).

However, there are absolutely no phrases of the type "it seemed to him" in Leonard's thrillers. Consequently, it is very difficult to discern the actions of a narrator. All that we can be immediately sure of is that a character is involved in a monologue which is not perceived by the other characters, but it is narrated, nevertheless, in the third person. Rimmon-Kenan calls this kind of narration "indirect interior monologue" (1983 p. 115), a designation which, in spite of Cohn's reservations (p. 104), we will retain. This serves to indicate that an 'interior monologue' is taking place but that it is narrated indirectly, in the third person. There is no reason to assume that 'indirect interior monologue' in thrillers necessarily represents an instance of solely textually based

generic innovation; it crops up in a plethora of thrillers and has been present as a key narrative device since Jane Austen at least. However, as Cohn points out, indirect interior monologue

often sustains a more profound ambiguity than other modes of rendering consciousness; and the reader must rely on context, shades of meaning, coloring, and other subtle stylistic indices in order to determine the overall meaning of a text (p. 112).

In concordance with our previous arguments, then, we would certainly have to add to Cohn's "stylistic indices" the paramount importance of key reader investments in the rendering of the events and the consciousnesses of the characters in these novels.

The first result of the indirect interior monologue in Leonard's novels is the proliferation of focalizations. In *52 Pick-up*, Harry Mitchell goes to his girlfriend's home one day and is held by three masked men who show him a film of him and his girlfriend and announce their attention to blackmail him. Unfortunately for them, Harry does not have the money that they require and he first tries to tell them this and then, after revealing all to his wife, starts to fight back. The main characters are Harry Mitchell; his wife, Barbara; the head of the extortionists, Alan Raimy; and his two accomplices, Bobby Shy and Leo Frank. Each share in the array of focalizations in the narrative. A schematic look at *52 Pick-up* will give an idea of the relative complexity of the narration. Where the neutrality of the focalization is in question (as in the above example) I have designated the focalization a combined one comprising an external focalizer and one close to a character. Thus:

FOCALIZATIONS IN *52 PICK-UP*

Chapter 1 is focalized entirely (close to) by Mitchell (p.7)

Chapter 2 is focalized entirely (close to) by Barbara (p. 13)

Chapter 3 is focalized entirely (close to) by Mitchell (p.23)

Chapter 4:

Mitchell (p. 26)

external/Leo Frank (pp. 26-28)

Alan Raimy/external (pp. 28-29)

Mitchell/external (p. 30)

Alan Raimy (p. 30)

Bobby Shy/external (p. 31)

Doreen (p. 33)

Bobby Shy (p. 34)
 Alan Raimy (p. 35)
 Bobby Shy (p. 35)

Chapter 5:

Mitchell (p. 36)
 Barbara (p. 38 - one paragraph)
 Mitchell (p. 38)
 Barbara (p. 40)
 Alan Raimy (p. 42)
 Barbara (p. 43)
 Leo Frank (p. 43)

Chapter 6:

Mitchell (p. 45)
 external/Mitchell (p. 51)
 Bobby Shy (p. 55)
 Leo Frank (p. 56)

Chapter 7:

Mitchell/external (p. 57)

Chapter 8:

Mitchell (p. 65)
 Barbara (p. 66)
 Mitchell (p. 68)
 Barbara (p. 72)

Chapter 9:

Leo Frank (p. 74)
 Alan Raimy (p. 75)
 Mitchell (p. 75)
 external/Alan Raimy (p. 80)

Chapter 10:

Ross/external (p. 82)
 Barbara (p. 86)

Chapter 11:

Mitchell (p. 88)
 Barbara (p. 91)
 Mitchell (p. 91)
 Barbara (p. 93)
 Mitchell (p. 93)

Chapter 12:

external/Mitchell (p. 96)

Chapter 13:

Mitchell (p. 103)
 Leo Frank (p. 103)
 Mitchell (p. 106)
 Leo Frank (p. 107)
 Mitchell (p. 108)
 Alan Raimy (p. 108)
 Leo Frank (p. 109)
 Mitchell (p. 109)
 Alan Raimy (p. 117)

Chapter 14:

Bobby Shy (p. 118)
 Alan Raimy (p. 120)
 Bobby Shy (p. 120)

Alan Raimy (p. 121)
 Bobby Shy (p. 121)
 Alan Raimy (p. 123)
 Mitchell (p. 124)
 Alan Raimy (p. 125)
 Mitchell (p. 127)

Chapter 15:

Bobby Shy (p. 127)
 Alan Raimy (p. 130)
 Leo Frank (p. 131)
 Bobby Shy (p. 132)
 Mitchell (p. 134)
 Alan Raimy (p. 139)
 Bobby Shy/external (p. 141)
 Alan Raimy (p. 145)
 Barbara (p. 145)
 Alan Raimy (p. 146)
 Barbara (p. 148)
 Leo Frank (p. 149)
 Mitchell (p. 152)
 Ed Jazik (union man) (p. 156)
 Janet (Mitchell's secretary)(p. 157)
 Mitchell (p. 157)
 John Koliba (worker in Mitchell's plant) (p. 158)
 Mitchell (p. 160)
 Koliba (p. 161)
 Mitchell (p. 161)
 Leo Frank (p. 162)
 Bobby Shy (p. 165)

Chapter 17:

Mitchell (p. 165)
 Alan Raimy (p. 169)
 Mitchell (p. 170)
 Alan Raimy (p. 171)
 Mitchell (p. 172)
 O'Boyle (Mitchell's advisor) (p. 175)
 Bobby Shy (p. 178)
 Alan Raimy (p. 180)
 Barbara (p. 181)
 Alan Raimy (p. 181)

Chapter 18:

Mitchell (p. 183)
 Alan Raimy (p. 188)
 Mitchell (p. 189)
 Alan Raimy (p. 190)
 Koliba (p. 190)

As can be seen the bulk of the focalizations lie near the central characters we have mentioned. The immediate conclusion to draw from this schema is simply that the narrative is dense with different focalizations. However, it is also worth noting that there are a great number of instances where the focalizations close to characters are almost merged with those of the external focalizer. This is hardly surprising as they often amount to brief descriptions of actions - 'he said' etc. - or dialogue. On other

occasions, though, the external focalizer's appearance will be subtle, but on close reading, quite definite. In Chapter 6, for instance, the focalization is close to Mitchell in his meeting with his employee, John Koliba. Then Mitchell pours some drinks and walks round his desk; the point of the scene is that Koliba watches Mitchell intently *all* the time, throughout the interview. Presumably, Mitchell turns his back on Koliba at more than one stage and so, even if he 'feels' he is being watched, only what he 'feels' can be focalized from a position close to him. Yet, the narrative states that Koliba definitely *does* watch him. Leaving aside the unlikely possibility that there is a sudden switch of focalization to Koliba, we must conclude that this is an instance of subtle operation by the external focalizer.

This is an integral feature of the narration of Leonard's novels: a curious interplay of external and internal focalizations which marks a departure from the traditional hard-boiled depiction of low life. Instead of having a chivalrous hero who descends into the lower depths of American society, in Leonard's novels we have a group of central characters enmeshed in a criminal milieu. There seems to be little concern to create a distance between the focalizer and the focalized although, as we have just seen, a detailed scrutiny will detect the presence of the external focalizer. What this exposes, however, is the fact that we do not get the whole story; in the hard-boiled story the events are quite clearly narrated from the position of the heroic protagonist and, despite his laconic demeanor it is possible to build a reasonably in-depth character study, as many have with Philip Marlowe and as we have demonstrated to be possible with Spenser. In other words, the readers engaging with the text will supposedly find themselves too close to the events to identify with any one character's distance and cynicism. In the crime novels of Leonard (and Higgins) extensive knowledge of a character's motivations is not manifest; the narration may be executed by focalizations very close to the protagonists but, paradoxically, the reader does not get a great sense of what goes on in the character's mind, only their surface actions and most pressing plans. In *52 Pick-up*, for example, during the moments when the focalization is close to

Leo Frank, we do not know what is happening with the characters that are absent from the scene. This is true, of course, of many stories. Yet in Leonard's novels the reader has been offered a tiny amount of knowledge of each character with each switch of focalization which is possibly enough to tantalize but not to satiate. These switches of focalization are what we characterized as *detours* in the last chapter, delaying the swift and successful conclusion of the narrative. In addition, they are self-conscious detours, indicative of the *elements that are not narrated*. As we also mentioned, these are also quite ripe sites for specific investments. One could say that the always already filled gaps in a narrative which constitute what we have called potential indeterminacies are as important for analysis - if not more important - than the narrative that remains.

So the elements of the Leonard narratives that are not narrated, the bits that are left out, not told, are in question. It is difficult to place these potential indeterminacies in traditional narratological terms and the first answer to this problem that springs to mind is that what is missing is various parts of the *fabula*, the 'prior events' on which the *sjuzet* /plot depends. But can there be a *fabula*, conceived as it often is as a basic outline of events? Barbara Herrnstein Smith (in Mitchell 1981), for example, is critical of two-level, Platonic descriptions of narrative based on these static notions of *fabula* and *sjuzet*. When discussing the traditional hard-boiled story we mentioned that *fabula* refers to the chronological events which make up the raw materials of a story.

Herrnstein Smith points out that *fabula* can only really be conceived as always already a narrative and even then only one of an unlimited number of other possible narratives. The 'surface' narrative is also one possible narrative drawn from the almost unlimited number that constitute a '*fabula*'. These 'surface' narratives Herrnstein Smith characterizes as 'versions' in the same way that Kubrick's movie, *Barry Lyndon* (1975) is a version of the Thackeray novel, or a plot summary may be a 'version' intended to bring out, for instance, the sexual element in a story (p. 211). This is particularly useful when discussing Leonard's novels as the shifting focalizations quite obviously represent only one possible version of a potentially infinite number of

alternatives. The narration of Leonard's novels seems very haphazard, constantly flitting from character to character, scene to scene, not pausing to make value judgments. In fact, the majority of the focalization seems to be based on the 'objectivity' of the 'camera eye' - it is well known that Leonard found fame first as a screenwriter before this was superseded by his career as a novelist. But the mobile nature of the 'camera eye' in his novels is not geared to present multiple perspectives on one event as occurs classically in a film such as *Rashomon* (1950). Instead it is utilized to create a sequence of scenes in a linear chronological sequence. This 'objectivity' is therefore false; in fact it can be more accurately considered as 'subjectivity', for the narrative, while presenting multiple focalizations, presents only one version of the event as a whole. An example from *52 Pick-up* illustrates this. The initial focalization includes a phone call to his factory in which Mitchell's end of the conversation only is narrated (p. 7); for what follows the call it is essential that the narration remains in that scene, with Mitchell alone. The same happens again when Mitchell calls Barbara and the events that follow are to take place at his end of the phone (p. 97); later when Mitchell talks to O'Boyle (p. 168) both ends of the call are narrated and the scene ends with the call's conclusion. Similarly when Mitchell visits the Nude Models establishment the focalization, initially with him, shifts as he leaves the lobby allowing the 'camera eye' to stay with Leo as he phones Alan to voice his fears (p. 27). The 'camera eye' is therefore very limited; it is not omniscient. This is the extent of the efficacy of the 'camera eye' metaphor because, as we have argued, there is no real equivalent to indirect interior monologue in the cinema.

Shifting vision in these novels is not a device in the service of 'objectivity' as it is often understood in narratology. Focalization in Leonard's novels therefore has a different role to play. If we consider again the case of women in 1970s hard-boiled private detective stories the consequences of this argument become clearer. The presence of women in such stories and their ability to offer an alternative discourse to that of the hero constitutes a *detour*. The activities and ideas of women are an adjunct to the main

resolution in the story. It is possible, therefore, to say that women enter the genre as a narrative construct *already*: 'ideas' of womanhood rather than genuine exemplars of contemporary woman. So, in the old style, one would encounter, for instance, the dangerous female (Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*; Carmen Sternwood in *The Big Sleep*); in the 1970s this role is taken by the feminist. This is not to say that no rounded characters appear in genre fiction because, of course, they do. The statement bears on the relation of the characters to the exigencies of the plot and ideological verisimilitude, which are of specific importance in thrillers. Moreover it is a banal comment, not only with reference to genre fiction but also to fiction as a whole. However, it does help us to perhaps get a clearer meaning of the detours which are so frequent in, and such a trademark of, Leonard's novels. In terms of Herrnstein Smith's formulations regarding narrative, multiple focalizations and the specific potential indeterminacies they allow, have certain consequences; she argues that

It is important to recognize . . . that even in the narrow linguistic sense, narrative discourse may be composed of quite brief, bare, and banal utterances as well as such extensive and extraordinary tellings as might occupy 1,001 nights or pages. It is also important to recognize that narrative discourse is not necessarily - or even usually - marked off or segregated from other discourse. Almost any verbal utterance will be laced with more or less minimal narratives, ranging from fragmentary reports and abortive anecdotes to those more distinctly framed and conventionally marked tellings that we are inclined to call 'tales' or 'stories'. Indeed, narrative discourse is, at one extreme, hardly distinguishable from description or simply assertion. That is, 'telling someone that something happened' can, under certain circumstances, be so close to 'saying that something is (or was) the case' that it is questionable if we can draw any logical rigorous distinction between them or, more generally, if any absolute distinction can be drawn between narrative discourse and any other form of verbal behaviour (in Mitchell 1981 p. 228).

If one compares crime novels with some elements in the 1970s hard-boiled novels there are similarities in the mechanism by which crime exists in the text in relation to its existence outside the narrative discourse. In the latter genre, family problems almost always play an integral part in the narratives. But before 'entering' the actual story (insofar as such an element can *enter* given that it is always already in a narrative, enmeshed in it) the notion of the threat to the family which existed in the 1970s overlaps with the notion of conspiracy. Both can be said to be narrative constructs. As we have shown, concerns about the family in the 1970s were circulated predominantly through narratives: in social science journals, Sunday supplements, the Moynihan report and the other places that we have identified in Chapter 3 (above). At its outer

limit such a narrative may manifest itself as a simple conspiracy tale: for example, 'previously the family was a stable institution but now some conspiratorial forces are threatening it'. This is a very simple narrative based on the idea of a conspiracy, components of which appear in numerous ways with regard to the main story. These components - for example, the threat of homosexuality - are often the focus of novels.

This is the way in which the idea of criminality is narrativized in crime novels. Any set of 'prior events' involving a group of characters in a 'criminal setting' deals with a narrativization of criminality. In *52 Pick-up* there is a focus upon one particular attempt among many possible others (of perhaps a more petty, less fraught nature) to get easy money, in large amounts, outside the law. Here, the key elements are the actual focus on one particular scam but also the way that Mitchell - hard-working, respectable, law-abiding - is narrativized in relation to the idea of criminality. To be sure, he is implicated in events but the reader is invited also to scrutinize him against the backdrop of criminal activities and their setting, the Nude Models establishment, for instance. The plurality of focalizations seem appropriate for depicting the criminal milieu: the pornographer, the embittered union rep, the coke user, hard-worker, thief, snitch, entrepreneur - all are given their say however distasteful it may seem. This is the aspect of Leonard's work which most frequently receives attention; Jonathan Yardley of the *Washington Post*, for instance, writes

Leonard is the real thing . . . He raises the hard-boiled suspense novel beyond the limits of genre and into social commentary (p. 15-16).

The critical distance and cynicism of the hard-boiled investigator are no longer present. What we can say, then, is that 'objectivity' in Leonard's novels is therefore abrogated, or as Friedman puts it

when an author surrenders in fiction, he does so in order to conquer (1985 p. 1184).

One of the effects of this is to present a potentially convincing picture of an amoral world. It is the world of urban Detroit: Dodge Main, Ford's Rouge Plant, Polish workers from Hamtramck, hustlers, dudes, DeHoCo, Wayne County and a host of

other signs rendered potent in the narrative by the existence of identical signs in the real world. It is now well known that Leonard, as an author of crime novels, relies heavily on both his own research and that of his assistant, Gregg Sutter (see Geherin 1989 p. 79; Arena 1990). Clearly, the extent of this research is utilized to achieve a level of that ideological verisimilitude specific to the thriller which also allows fictional discourse and non-fictional discourse to have areas that overlap. In 1978, for instance, Leonard spent a great deal of time researching the homicide squad of the Detroit Police Department. The fruits of this research were, in the first instance, a factual article for the *Detroit News Magazine*, plus the novel, *City Primeval* (1982; originally 1980)(Arena 1990). That Leonard divides his writing between fictional and non-fictional modes, both of which are tropologically very similar, gives further credence to the verisimilitude of his novels. The fictional narratives take the contemporary and more visible criminal milieu as their subject, and events in such a milieu as *fabula*. As they draw heavily on the discourses of the criminal milieu it is inevitable that they are working with a *fabula* that is always already narrativized. Any set of 'prior events' involving a group of characters in a 'criminal' setting deals with a narrativization of criminality. A 'criminal setting' entails 'people who act outside the law' and this has a narrative potential: 'people who will act outside the law', 'people who will commit crimes'. The characters are not blank sheets ready to be enacted in a set of events - they are already implicated in their setting. So even a character that does (almost) nothing at all has a narrative existence, and moreover, a narrative existence in relation to its setting. For instance, the central character in a crime novel who commits no criminal act has narrative potential with regard to the setting, e.g. going straight, shunning crime from the start, etc. And here I have only been referring to central characters; minor characters have all manner of possible relations to the criminal setting. None of this is new of course; as we saw in the last chapter, narrative theorists have constantly worked with this idea of character which is often referred to as an 'actant'. Usually the 'actant' is described as a bearer of narrative functions. What is crucial and specific to the crime story, however, is that characters are not so much enmeshed in a series of events - as is

classically taken to be the case in the Propp's analysis of the folk tale, for example - but are implicated in an 'idea' of criminality. It is this idea of criminality, which also exists in the world outside the text, which allows investments. This may lead us to ask whether the idea of criminality in Leonard's novels can be more or less specifically characterized and the extent to which this might invite certain contemporary investments.

The key theme running through Elmore Leonard's thrillers in the 1970s is also the title of his 1978 novel, *The Switch*. In this novel, two petty criminals - Louis and Ordell - decide to kidnap a middle class housewife - Mickey - and make their fortune by ransoming her to her husband, Frank. Unfortunately for them, Frank has become tired of Mickey and has been planning to divorce her so that he can live with his mistress, Melanie. He is therefore quite pleased that the kidnappers have taken Mickey off his hands and refuses to pay. The narrative is concerned with working out this plot until the final pages where Louis and Ordell, after having established a friendship of sorts with Mickey, decide that all three of them should kidnap Melanie and hold her to ransom. This last part of the narrative is the 'switch', but a switch of this kind takes place in all of Leonard's seventies crime novels. In *The Switch* and the other novels there is often a paraphrasing by a character of the Bob Dylan song, 'The Ballad of a Thin Man' (1965):

Something's going on but you don't know what (1985b p. 146).

Mickey says this to Louis. His outlook on life is that

Nobody's *absolutely* sure of anything (p. 146).

In all the novels, the ability to recognize that there is a lack of certainty in the criminal world and the world at large is accompanied by a resolve on the part of the central character to "turn it around". In *The Hunted*, Rosen has been hiding out in Israel after having testified against some gangsters in Detroit. When his picture appears in a newspaper, the gangsters come to get him and he is aided by a U.S. Embassy marine

guard, Davis. At what can be considered as the pivot of the narrative, Rosen and Davis are involved in the following exchange:

'You're thinking, I can't reason with Val but maybe I could make a deal with him'.

'Unh-unh'.

'Pay him off'.

'No, I was thinking you could kill him', Davis said. 'Turn it around, hit him before he hits you' (1985a p. 105).

Similarly, in *Unknown Man No. 89*, Jack Ryan has been offered some money by Francis Perez to convince a woman with whom Ryan has become romantically engaged to sign away the fortune of her dead husband. It is a proposition that comes, once more, at a pivotal point in the narrative and in Jack's life. An interior monologue and an indirect interior monologue follows the proposition:

Do it and take the money.

Don't do it. Forget the whole thing.

Go to the police. Call Dick.

Tell Denise everything and leave.

Or-

Christ, he saw it coming. He had seen it in his mind before, glimpses of it, but not as clearly as he saw it now.

-tell Denise everything and don't leave. Turn the whole thing around. Ace Mr. Perez (1986c pp. 134-135).

The 'switch' theme quite clearly has a central role to play in Leonard's novels. A possible reading of it is offered by the final pages of the novel which bears its name. When Louis, Ordell and Mickey kidnap Melanie in the last paragraph of the novel they are all wearing Richard Nixon masks (p. 184). The idea of the switch in this context is therefore quite specific: to double-cross someone is not necessarily the sole prerogative of 'traditional' criminals. Morality takes a back seat. One of the reasons for this is the specificity of 'turning it around'. As Perez says in *Unknown Man No. 89*,
Never shit a shitter (p. 148).

This is also characteristic of Leonard's novels; in *Swag* when Stick has just robbed a supermarket he is assaulted by two men who try to rob him and, despite the apparent

absurdity of being robbed of his ill-gotten gains - an attempt to 'shit a shitter' - he shoots the two guys (1984 p. 112-115). This serves in all the novels to fix the generically specific terrain of gunplay, violence, retribution and fatalities that make up the criminal world. All of these are probably at work most clearly in *52 Pick-up*. Harry Mitchell is an ex-Dodge Main blue-collar worker who, by way of the American ethic and post-war credit consumerism in conjunction with clean living, has elevated himself to the level of modest business owner. His one lapse, in the realm of clean living - with Cini, a girl the age of his own daughter - has brought him into contact with the lower depths. Bobby, Alan and Leo are young and corrupt; they are involved in a range of narcotics and pornography deals. They are also innocent in terms of their amateurishness. One of them (Alan) is also quite privileged in that he is a business graduate. They think that they can pressurize Mitchell, but he effects the switch. His strength derives from being a lone operator but also from an inner ruthlessness which is narrated by his wife as she almost embarks on an affair with Mitchell's friend, Ross:

'Did you know he was in the Air Force?'

'No, I didn't. What was he, a mechanic?'

'See?' Barbara said. 'No. He was a fighter pilot. Everyone thinks he was a grease monkey. But at twenty-seven years old he was a first lieutenant. He flew a P-Forty-seven'.

'That's interesting', Ross said.

'You know what's more interesting?' Barbara waited a moment. 'He shot down seven German planes in less than three months'.

'No kidding?' Ross seemed interested now. 'He's never mentioned it'.

'He also shot down two Spitfires'.

'Spitfires?' Ross frowned. 'Those are British planes'.

'I know they are', Barbara said. 'Mitch was returning to base. I think he was over France. The two planes dove at him, firing cannons, thinking for some reason he was German. To protect himself, Mitch turned into them. He fired and with two bursts - he says it was pure luck - he shot down both of the planes'.

Ross was intent now. 'My God, really?'

'There was a hearing', Barbara went on, 'an official investigation. Mitchell explained the situation as he saw it and, because of his experience and record, he was exonerated, as they said, of any malicious intent or accidental blame. The general, or whoever it, was closed the hearing. Mitch stood up and said, "Sir, I have a question". The general said, "What is it?" And Mitch said, "Do I get a credit for the Spitfires?" He was held in contempt of court and sent home the next week, assigned to an air base in Texas' (pp. 87-88).

This passage is notable once more for that imperceptible sliding of the narrator into the focalizer. Barbara is telling Ross the story for effect, illustrating to him why he should perhaps think twice before trying to get her into bed. When the narrative signals that "Ross seemed interested now" and "Ross was intent now" it is unclear whether the external focalizer is in operation here; equally it could be argued that Barbara, because she has sought this response, is the source of these two observations. The other thing to note about the passage is the implication of Mitchell's exploit. Clearly, what this anecdote signifies in terms of Mitchell's conflict with the blackmailers is not so much his bravery and efficiency in the air force but his potential ruthlessness and lack of compassion. The importance of this aspect of the narrative must be stressed: it is notable that, in the film version of *52 Pick-up* (1986), the motivation for Mitchell's retaliation is the need to save his wife's budding political career. In the novel, the switch metaphorically enacts all the sterling values that built a nation (thrift, hard work, family loyalty) and couples them with a sense of vengeance and retribution which, as Geherin (1989 p. 45) and others have pointed out, derives from Leonard's Western heroes. Harry Mitchell is forced into taking the actions he does to protect the well-being of his wife and livelihood. The fact that his wife and his livelihood take a battering and that some criminals and not criminality as a whole are eradicated mitigates the sense of resolution in the narrative.

Returning to the aspect of the switch which is to do with the imperative "never shit a shitter", it can be said to effect the centrality of discourses outside the law. As we have seen, *52 Pick-up* is characteristic of these novels in respect of its multiple focalizations. Yet there is no doubt that the distribution of these focalizations reveals a heavy bias towards Harry Mitchell. If one wanted to frame Mitchell as the hero of the narrative, then, in these terms it would be very easy to do so, and one might even posit that he represented a dominant discourse in the text. On the one hand, one could say that Mitchell, and characters in the other novels, have very strong motivations for effecting

the switch. For instance, Vince Majestyk is deep in thought when he is handcuffed in a prison bus after assaulting a labour racketeer:

The chance of going to prison again. Could that happen? No, he said to himself, refusing to believe it. He could not let it happen, because he could not live in a prison again, ever. He couldn't think about it without the feeling of being suffocated, caged, enclosed by iron bars and cement walls and not able to get out. He remembered reading about a man exploring a cave, hundreds of feet underground, who had crawled into a seam in the rocks and had got wedged there, because of his equipment, and was unable to move forward or backward or reach the equipment with his hands to free it. Majestyk had stopped reading and closed the magazine, because he knew the man had died there (1986a p. 35).

Majestyk's hatred of prison serves to validate his actions against mobster, Frank Renda. A combination of circumstances and long term convictions helps to push various characters into making the decision to switch. In the examples which we have already cited, Stick acts to save himself and his booty (in *Swag*), Mickey needs to escape the dreariness of her life imposed by husband Frank (*The Switch*) and Ryan needs to escape the life of alcoholism which has afflicted him (*Unknown Man No. 89*). These are all the deep seated reasons which accompany a specific instance of criminality which forces the protagonists to act. However, the other feature of this which needs to be addressed is the necessary resolution of the plot within the space and codes of the criminal milieu. These characters may have cogent motivations, but they are all forced into the realm of criminality. If they are to be considered heroes in the traditional sense, it is clear that their need to work within the criminal world will lead to some adjustments in the status of their characters and/or those of the already established criminals. In certain circumstances then, the texts may offer the possibility of a reading of the criminal which is more sympathetically invested. If the reading formation for these texts was one where a sufficiently problematized view of criminality existed, then it is possible that the traditional boundaries separating heroes and criminal villains might not apply. David Geherin writes of *The Switch* that

in contrast to *52 Pick-up* where the action was presented largely from Harry Mitchell's point of view, in *The Switch* the reader sees things both from the kidnappers' perspective as they try to salvage their plans and from the kidnap victim's point of view (1989 p. 66).

As we have seen, the focalizations in *52 Pick-up* are very biased towards Mitchell; in *The Switch*, they are also heavily concerned with the kidnap victim - Mickey - and the kidnappers - Louis, Ordell, and to a lesser extent, Richard Monk. However, the crucial

point to make is that these are not the whole of the focalizations by any means.⁸ The focalizations which are close to the conspiracy offer a reading of it as lacking in evil, especially given the presence of the neo-Nazi Richard. At the same time, there is no reason to suggest that this distribution of focalizations will *necessarily* engender sympathy from readers. In the amoral world of criminality in these narratives, new codes of social conduct apply. As we have briefly mentioned, the switch is instrumental in making manifest certain qualities of characters which might effect a Western style scenario such as a showdown. This is certainly true in the case of Mitchell: he can be read as a character pushed into becoming an outlaw. The most explicit example of this, however, is in Leonard's 1980 novel, *City Primeval*, a novel which is saturated with cowboy references and which has the subtitle - curiously absent from the British edition - 'High Noon in Detroit'. At one stage, the villain, Clement Mansell (a.k.a. the Oklahoma Wildman), is the subject of an indirect interior monologue:

What was the quickest, surest way to get money off a person? Stick a gun in their mouth and ear back the hammer. Your money or your life, partner. Hell, that's the way it's always been done throughout history and around the world. Take it and git (1982 p. 156).

The Western references could not be clearer and they demonstrate one more aspect to the possible reading of the theme of the switch in these narratives. Moreover, this opens out onto questions of the hero who necessarily goes outside the law in order to conduct business. Clearly this was not a new phenomenon in genre fiction. Yet in the seventies it was invested in a very specific manner, as we will see in Chapter 10 (below). However, the flavour of the questions conjured up by outlaw action is given by another crime writer, George V. Higgins:

Good guys are people who believe in Due Process of Law. Bastards are people who care not a whit for Due Process of Law. Bastards get results. Wyatt Earp would shoot people in the back with a twelve-bore. He scratched a lot, too, because he was dirty and needed a bath and wouldn't take one. Wyatt Earp was a Bastard. When the commotion at the O.K. Corral developed, the Good Guys retained Wyatt as their Bastard, and commissioned him to go get his friends. He did as any conscientious mercenary would do: he put on his badge, loaded his shot gun, and went out and ambushed his adversaries. Strong, courageous and bold he may not have been, but he was sensible and crafty, and his tale lives long and

⁸ The following focalizations in *The Switch* are neither Mickey's nor the kidnappers': Chapter 1: Frank/external (p. 7); Chapter 3: external? (pp. 18, 19); Chapter 4: Marshall Taylor (p. 32); Chapter 9: external (p. 62); Marshall Taylor (pp. 65, 67); Chapter 13: Frank (whole chapter); Chapter 14: Frank (pp. 105, 108); Chapter 15: external (p. 113); Chapter 16: external (whole chapter); Chapter 17: Detroit patrolman (p. 127); Chapter 20: Randy Dixon (p. 149); Frank (p. 156); Melanie (p. 157); Chapter 23: Melanie (p. 181).

his legend is told because he got results, not because he advised his enemies of their rights before he blew their kidneys out (1972 p. 348).

The most immediately distinct feature of Leonard's novels is the way in which they accommodate multiple focalizations by way of indirect interior monologue. These focalizations are of the events which make up what we have called the switch, and if this is to be subsumed under a general narrative dynamic then we must add that it is one which offers a range of different potential investment points. Higgins' comment is, perhaps, quite suggestive in this respect in that the possibility of a sympathetic investment in criminality tends to carry an ulterior motive. This may even be a paradoxical motive, for example, the restoration of law and order. The range of investments to do with criminality that the switch motif allows will therefore differ between distinct reading formations. If a historical reading of Leonard's novels is to be posited, then, the multiple focalizations and the switch must be assumed not simply to 'constitute' readers eternally in a certain political way, but to offer the possibility of an interaction with the text's generic specificity which is moulded by the reading formation.

If one were to describe the novels of Leonard very simply, then, they offer a space for a response to crime in the modern world. On the one hand, the 1960s saw the banning of LSD (Stevens 1989 p. 394), for instance, as its use reached a peak. On the other, the early 1970s saw the struggle for legalization of abortion in the U.S. as forces mobilized to oppose it. These are just two examples of how the boundaries of the law in the period were shifting; but more importantly for the writing of fiction, this shift allowed the proliferation of previously marginal discourses which were now available for narrativization. So if we go back to our early example of Sam Spade and Wilmer we can now see one social factor involved in the constant utterance of expletives by the characters of these 1970s novels. Expletives in the post-war period were democratized and no longer the sole public domain of the denizens of the lower depths. Crime novelists could use the criminal classes as prime exemplars in the use of expletives but, at the same time, of course, the mere presence of words like 'motherfucker' in fiction

attests to its new found currency. With regard to the wider picture, as we discussed in Chapter 3, the seventies saw a great concern over crime rates in the sixties, especially following the inner city riots in places such as Watts. It was very high on the agenda of public concern. In addition, though, discourses on crime in general had become more prominent in the wake of the failure of the 'Great Society' programme and the picture of crime that characterized the 1970s seemed to be based far more than hitherto on various socio-economic determinants rather than on theological formulations of the nature of evil. This is not unconnected to the fact that a large proportion of taxes were helping in the late sixties to pay for the expensive war in Vietnam. It is also intimately connected to the problematization of the identity of the criminal as a result of the high profile criminality reported in the seat of government. Large-scale corruption is not an unfamiliar theme for the thriller but in an age when the government employs burglars, the question of who deserves the authority to speak is thrown into relief. In this way, the multiple focalizations in Leonard's novels could provide as one of the potential investments in the narrative a possibility of reading the contemporary state of crime in the social formation.

George V. Higgins

As we have seen, Elmore Leonard's crime novels were mainly inspired by the writing style to be found in the novels of George V. Higgins. However, there is a vital differences in the modes of narration of each corpus of work. The 'Dramatic Mode' of narration outlined by Friedman (above) and which we used as the preliminary grounds for a discussion of Leonard's mode of narration must be further distinguished. In Leonard's narratives, the 'Dramatic Mode' of narration, in which it seems that only the characters' actions are presented, is supplemented by the device of indirect interior monologue. As such, then, Leonard's narratives are not conducted in the Dramatic Mode proper. The act by which the narrative allows the thoughts of the character to

become manifest can be said to reveal the presence of a narrator. In Higgins' narratives it could be said that the narrator is concealed more often than in Leonard's. If either of the two corpuses of works approximates to a proper Dramatic Mode it is Higgins': in a novel such as Higgins' second, *The Digger's Game* (1988; originally 1973), for example, we can estimate that only about three or four per cent of its length is taken up with narrative prose, including such phrases as 'he said', etc. As Friedman says, in this mode, dialogue dominates and narrative prose seems to serve merely as a stage direction. This can be shown to be the case with all of Higgins' novels dealing with crime in the seventies: *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973; originally 1971); *The Digger's Game*; *Cogan's Trade* (1975; originally 1974); *A City on a Hill* (1985; originally 1975); *The Judgment of Deke Hunter* (1986; originally 1976). Put in its briefest form by Higgins himself, these novels are like news, in that they are narrated in a mode where

The quotes make the story (South Bank Show 1987).

This will be the focus for the brief analyses of Higgins' work that follows.

Like the consensus over the putative efficacy of hard-boiled prose which we discussed in the last chapter, there appears to be a similar agreement on the purposes of the mode of narration in Higgins' novels. Hughes et al. (in Keating 1982) write of Higgins that

His extraordinary ear for the words people actually use, for the hesitations and back-tracks in the way they actually use them, stood him in good stead over several similar books in the years immediately following 1972. This rediscovery of actual speech is a necessary process of literature, necessarily repeated at intervals, although each time the words that get onto paper are not exactly the words used on the street. They can never be. If they were they would read appallingly dully. But they are each time a better stylized approximation. Dashiell Hammett contributed to this process in the twenties and thirties. Higgins did it again in the seventies (p. 178).

Notably, Hughes et al. are careful to avoid any inference that the depiction of street language represents a direct reflection. However, their argument regarding a teleological development of the depiction of 'actual speech' is similar to the claims of greater realism made for hard-boiled prose. Higgins says of his work

I try to write contemporary reality (South Bank Show 1987).

Clearly, Higgins' novels are often commented upon in terms of an advance in the accurate depiction of reality and this reality is the result of a putatively exact recording of actual speech with few, if any, modifications. In a sense, though, this can simply be understood as a new model of reflection in which the work of authorial, implied authorial and narratorial organizing principles is effaced. A motto which Higgins offers as an instruction to budding writers is

First: Know thyself
 - Plutarch
 Then: Try to keep it to yourself
 - Higgins

(Higgins 1991 p. 31).

Implicit in this motto is the idea that the author should remain absent from the narrative. Elsewhere, Higgins has made this clearer; speaking of the sexism, racism and general unpleasantness of some of his characters he says

It's not my job to clean up their act; it's my job to tell you what they did (South Bank Show 1987).

It is worth examining Higgins statements on his own work, not only because he is a world famous author and a respected teacher of creative writing at Boston University, but because they sometimes unwittingly provide the grounds for an understanding of possible readings of his work. He compares fiction to the writing of news, an apt comparison given his admiration for Hemingway's incorporation of journalistic modes, and given our arguments about non-fictional and fictional discourses and the hard-boiled style. Higgins writes

What we call 'news' - truthful reports, whether published in print or by broadcast, of facts about people and interesting events of major or minor importance - consists of presumably unembellished observations kindly provided by someone who had the good or evil fortune to be present at the scene where the people either caused the event, or the event happened to the people. In other words, it is gossip, but *important, verified*, gossip. It is also uncensored: the reporter obedient to the rules is restricted to snide innuendo when it comes to suggesting the actual - if nefarious - motives and probable veracity of the parties to the occurrence.

Good fiction is *unverified*, uncensored gossip (Higgins 1991 p. 33).

So far we have encountered statements which bear on the 'objectivity' required in writing and it would have been imagined that a reference to news such as this would once more emphasize a certain kind of verisimilitude in narration. However, what is

notable about this statement is that it makes clear that even a mode of narration as 'objective' as that required by news can accommodate "snide innuendo" without breaking the rules. Discourse other than that of the characters is at work despite the seeming dominance of the characters' discourse in the narrative. Before we consider the implications of this we must note that there is another aspect to the narrative that Higgins finds to be important which is once more connected to his desire to let the characters speak. He says

I try to keep judgments out of all my stories. What I think of the characters I don't think is germane to the story. That's for the readers to decide. I realize that I'm asking quite a bit from the reader. I'm not providing pure escapism. I require participation (South Bank Show 1987).

The participation that Higgins requests is quite clearly a part of all readings of all fictional texts as a result of the phenomenon of potential indeterminacy; however, what he may mean here is that there are no moral statements whatsoever made outside the discourse of characters in the narratives and that those moral statements that are made by characters will have only a slight resemblance to conventional morality. Yet Higgins uses an even more telling metaphor to characterize the reader's participation in the realization of his texts:

I prefer to think that the reader going through them is marshalling the evidence himself and reaching his own conclusions about the morality and the courage and the behaviour of the people (South Bank Show 1987).

It is well known that Higgins was the State Prosecutor for Massachusetts before becoming a full-time writer and he had also been a journalist. In both professions, the presentation of quotes is a far from neutral activity. What is omitted, for example, might be as important as what is narrated. The terrain of argument for assessing Higgins' novels therefore is not dissimilar to that for assessing Leonard's. As Higgins suggests, his narratives allow for a multiplicity of readings, but we must also consider the possibility of more specific ones.

We will use Higgins' second novel, *The Digger's Game*, to illustrate some of the ways in which the narrative mode functions. Jerry 'Digger' Doherty is a family man who has a habit of getting into financial difficulties as a result of his weak character. He owns an

inn which provides most of the income for his wife and family but it is there that he meets shady characters. At the opening of the narrative he has returned from Las Vegas after a gambling trip during which he lost \$18,000, a sum he owes to 'the Greek'. The narrative concerns the Digger's growing consternation over the money that he is unable to pay the Greek and the attempts he makes to procure the money. It also concerns the Greek's involvement with Torrey and Schwabb who are allied to an ageing Mafioso and who decide that the Greek is a liability and needs to be killed. What is clear is that the plot of the narratives constitutes only a small amount of the potential enjoyment of the novels for Higgins' (and Leonard's) fans (see the interviews in *South Bank Show* 1987 and *Arena* 1990). Much of the narrative combines instances of 'local colour' or one-liners with plot progression but there are numerous instances where plot progression seems absent. In the following example from *The Digger's Game*, Jerry Doherty is questioned by a driver who wants him to do a 'breaking and entering' job:

'Speaking of which, I assume you're not a shitter or anything'.

'No', the Digger said.

'You know you're not a shitter, too, don't you?' the driver said.

'Well, I'm pretty sure', the Digger said. 'I never done much of this but when I been in some place, I never did, no'.

'Well, in case you get the urge', the driver said, 'wait till you get home or something. I had a real good guy that I always used, and he was all right. He could get in any place. You could send him down the Cathedral and he'd steal the cups at High Mass. But Jesus, I used him probably six or seven years and I never have the slightest problem with him, and the next thing I know, he's into some museum or something they got out there to Salem, and he's after silver, you know? And he shits, he turned into a shitter. Left himself a big fuckin' pile of shit right on the goddamned Oriental rug. Well he wasn't working for me or anything, and hell, everybody in the world was gonna know the next day he was in there, because the silver was gone. But that was the end of him as far as I was concerned, I didn't have no more use for him. The thing is you don't want nobody to know you've been in there until you're ready, okay? So no shit on the desks or anything. Keep your pants on' (pp. 3-4).

The information on criminal procedure is negligible and the sequence is one of many that offer substantial diversions into potentially interesting sub-narratives. If any part of Higgins' narratives can be singled out as the location of 'realism' then it is probably here: characters seem to have an unbounded discourse of their own and speak of matters which are not apparently germane to the plot.⁹ In this way it can be said that

⁹ There are numerous examples of this in Higgins novels but one which particularly stands out comes near the climax of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* and involves Foley and Waters:

Higgins has a famous antecedent in American literary history. Valerie Shaw writes of Washington Irving

That narrative was secondary among Irving's aims is clear: 'I consider a story as merely a frame on which to stretch my materials' he wrote to Henry Brevoort on 11 December 1824 . . . (1983 p. 159).

The comparison of Higgins and Irving must be qualified; Shaw adds

In a sense, Irving's essayistic stories lead eventually to such sociologically motivated sketches as Arthur Morrison's 'A Street', published originally in 1891 and later collected along with other working-class stories in *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894). Where Irving's outlook in a piece like 'Little Britain' is basically optimistic, and his manner a blend of realism and fancifulness, Morrison offers a bleak picture of 'an oppressive, all-pervading monotony'; but neither writer pretends to give more than his own view, the result of his personal quest among communities about which he expects his readers to be ignorant (p. 165).

What Irving and Higgins can be said to have in common, then, is a potential perception of their work as representing a 'slice of life'. Both rely to varying degrees on extended discourses or detours which mitigate against the unfolding of narrative, as also does Morrison. It would seem that the comparison between them must end here, however: Irving's sketches rely heavily on description and narrative prose whereas Higgins are far different, being made up almost entirely of dialogue. Yet we can also detect a common ground with regard to 'view' or 'vision'. Shaw (above) chooses to refer to the 'view' of the authors, Irving and Morrison; if we adjust this and discuss the 'view' offered by the organization of the fiction then it becomes clear where this is applicable to Higgins. It is worth adding also that, although there has been commentary on how

'He didn't show up', Foley said. 'I sit there for about half an hour, and I have a cheese sandwich and a cup of coffee. Jesus, I forgot how bad a thing a cheese sandwich is to eat. It's just like eating a piece of linoleum, you know?'

'You got to put mayonnaise on it', Waters said. 'It's never going to have any flavour at all unless you put some mayonnaise on the bread before you put the cheese on'.

'I never heard of that', Foley said. 'You put it on the outside, do you?'

'Nah', Waters said, 'you put it on the inside. You still put the butter on the outside and all. But when the cheese melts, there, it's the mayonnaise that gives it the flavour. You got to use real mayonnaise, though, the stuff with eggs in it. You can use that other stuff that most people use when they say they're using mayonnaise, that salad dressing stuff, you can use it. But it isn't going to taste the same. I think that other stuff scalds or something. It doesn't taste right, anyway'.

'They don't go for those refinements in the Rexall's anyway', Foley said. 'What the hell, you go in there and order a cheese sandwich, and they got a whole stack of them, already made up, probably since last Wednesday, and they take out one of the goddamned things, big fat piece of this orange cheese in it, and throw on some grease, they pretend it's butter but I sure don't believe that, and then they go and they fuse it all together with a hot press there. My stomach's trying to break that thing down into something I can live on, just like a big piece, two big pieces, of bathroom tile with some mastic in between. Served hot. I get sick, you're gonna have to give me a pension (p. 146).

the novels of Higgins appeal to readers who are reasonably close to the depicted milieu - for example, Bostonians (see South Bank Show 1987) - there is also a sense in which the novels are offering a picture of specific communities about which one can expect the "readers to be ignorant". We might suggest, therefore, that this aspect of revelation which Shaw skirts around, is precisely what contributes to narrative. By ultimately providing information, the fiction incorporates the narration of a resolution. These would be two ways to argue, perhaps, that Higgins' novels are very much narratives: by their specific organization of passages of dialogue and by their provision of information which may hitherto have been unavailable. Yet, any such argument should also bear in mind the extra-textual organization of the texts. This might be varied; for example the *New Yorker* comments on *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*

A brilliant thriller . . . The No. 1 Fast Read of the Winter (quoted in Higgins 1973 p. 2).

Such comments frame a possible reading in terms of a heavy emphasis on narrative resolution coupled with a set of expectations about what the thriller genre at that moment implies. In addition, most bookshops file Higgins' novels in the crime/mystery section (see South Bank Show 1987). On the other hand, there is a heavy emphasis in textual cues on the studied realism, as opposed to narrative thrust, of the Higgins novels. For example

'Digger is so real that the next time you order a drink from a bartender, you'll look at him hard, wondering what he does on his days off'. - *Los Angeles Times* (quoted on the back cover of Higgins 1988)

'Reeking of authenticity . . . chilling . . . the most penetrating glimpse yet into the real world of crime'. - *New York Times Sunday Book Review*

A real find . . . tough, authentic, down to the last gritty detail of language used by the crooks and the police - this short novel reads like something ripped out of an actual case history of crime. - *American Publishers' Weekly* (quoted in Higgins 1973 p. 2).

The last claim, of course, is somewhat absurd in that no police report contains as much dialogue as a Higgins novel. However, it is possible that it has a certain rhetorical force in drawing potential readers' attention to the putative realism of the texts. What all of this implies is that, whether Higgins' texts can be demonstrated to be 'simply' thrillers, or 'realistic', or whether they can be shown to have a certain 'point of view' which is

either manipulative of the reader or objective and non-interfering, even within the frame provided by extra-textual cues there is room for negotiations and a range of possible readings. Let us examine this a little further.

One chapter of *The Digger's Game* is devoted to narrating the exchange between Jerry Doherty and his older brother, Paul. Paul is a Catholic priest who lives in a rectory in Weston and Digger approaches him for money to pay off the Greek. In the course of the dialogue there are two similar interjections of narrative prose; when Jerry criticizes the practice of confession a separate paragraph occurs before Paul replies:

The clock ticked several times (p. 59).

A few pages later Paul asks Jerry how much money he owes, Jerry tells him he owes \$18, 000, and another separate paragraph occurs:

The ship's clock ticked several times (p. 64).

These paragraphs seem to offer the possibility of a number of interpretations. Both follow Paul's last words and can be said to represent his dismay. As such, they add to the Dramatic Mode, allowing the possibility that they are pregnant with meaning. They could also be said to be detours in some sense: rather than stating the pause in the conversation they add an extra possibility of atmosphere, implying the quietness of the rectory and the ticking of the clock. In addition, they lend an aura of old-fashionedness and antiquity to the rectory which has already been described in an uncharacteristically long piece of narrative prose at the beginning of the chapter (pp. 48-49). In short, the paragraphs can be interpreted in numerous ways even though they are very blunt quasi-objective statements. These occasions during which the narrative prose can be seen to lend a significant amount to the interpretation of the narrative as a whole are rare, but they are significant given that the narrative prose is so minimal generally. It is therefore demonstrable that the small amount of narrative prose in these novels is often manifestly open to a great deal of interpretation. Another example of this is when the Digger's wife, Aggie, is questioning him over his car and he is trying to defend what she sees as an unnecessary luxury. An isolated paragraph of narrative prose follows:

The Digger drove a 1968 Olds Ninety-eight convertible. It was dark grey and had a red leather interior. It had factory air conditioning (p. 42).

What this might mean is difficult to say. Is the narrative prose presenting an argument in favour of Jerry? Or is it vindicating Aggie's concern? Or neither? The only thing that can be said with any degree of certainty is that such passages reveal the presence of a narrator whose role is very close to that of an implied author. In Chapter 1 (above), we discussed the potentiality of a narratee whose existence would be most observable in an epistolary novel. What needs to be considered here is the role of the implied author in an epistolary novel. If we can say that the role of the implied author in such a novel is to place the 'documents' of the narrative in a specific way then this sheds some light on the similar role that is enacted in Higgins' novels. The Dramatic Mode dominated by dialogue which we have said to characterize Higgins' crime narratives entails that an implied author is responsible for the specific instances of dialogue in the narrative that are allowed to be narrated. All those potential conversations in the narrative that are not narrated are rejected by the implied author; all those conversations that are incorporated into the narrative have been sanctioned by the implied author. The clearest example of this is towards the end of *The Digger's Game* when a very short chapter (pp. 162-163) narrates Harrington's call to the police after the narration has almost constantly been close to Jerry, Torrey, Schwabb and the Greek. That the narrative prose gives information about Jerry's car or the ticking clock suggests that the narrator has been allowed to narrate by the implied author but this narration is so tied to the implied author's role as to make the work of the narrator seem negligible. What we are trying to suggest here is that there does seem to be a way of analysing the text in order to detect a measure of intentionality in the narrative prose. However, it seems that the measure of intentionality in these texts is much more difficult than the formulations of Iser would allow. Given that extra-textual cues present Higgins' narratives as texts to be read in the way that they do and given the tiny amount of narrative prose that appears, it would be impossible - or at the least very difficult - to objectively observe the intentional sentence correlatives that Iser believes to make up narratives (1974 pp. 276 ff).

Another place where one might therefore seek a textually located contribution to the production of meaning would be in the events narrated in the dialogue. Early in *The Digger's Game* Torrey and the Greek are having a conversation about Torrey's recent extensive sexual activity. This includes Torrey's claim that he has recently felled a young woman whom he has picked up at a club; what he feels to be of note is that the young woman was an insurance clerk and that she had evidently applied a strawberry flavoured spray to her vagina immediately prior to meeting Torrey for the first time that evening (pp. 23-24). The only comments on this episode are the Greek's:

I'm not gonna bring up kids in a world, people walking around with vanilla pussy, hot fudge cocks. This country's going to the dogs, you know that, Richie? Guys like you (p. 24).

The reader's reaction does not have to be identical to the Greek's. However, given that the dialogue is responsible for the narration of events in the narrative, vital information is left for the characters to offer. Soon after this, a paragraph lends some perspective to Torrey's character which might enable a reader to assess him:

I look good because I want to look good and I work at it', the Greek said. 'Not because I want to go around like a goddamned pervert. You want to go around in those yellow things, shirts, pants, the white shoes, it's probably all right, you look like a nigger pimp. Don't matter to you. I got some self-respect' (p. 24).

The Greek is suggesting that there is a link between the clothes and character of Torrey and, although it does not necessarily follow that the reader will make the same equation, the reader is required to attend closely to the characters' words in order to construct certain meanings. Moreover, of course, these words are by no means determinate. What is at stake becomes clearer if we mention an element of the narratives that is close to the hearts of both Leonard and Higgins: location realism (see Arena 1990 and South Bank Show 1987). Both writers have stressed that they are at pains to reproduce in writing exact locations that exist in real life. In *The Digger's Game*, for example, there is a long sequence of narrative prose which describes a building in Hancock Street (p. 115); the most famous description of a Boston location in Higgins' narratives is probably the one that occurs in Chapter 6 of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (pp. 30 ff) which originally appeared as a short story entitled 'Dillon Explained That He

Was Frightened' in *North American Review* (Fall, 1970). As we have seen (above) Elmore Leonard has employed Gregg Sutter to research numerous locales and technical details for his novels. Higgins', on the other hand, declares that

I don't have to do any research (South Bank Show 1987).

What Higgins means by this is that he knows the locations of his narratives so well that it is unnecessary for him to do extra work. But, in a real sense, there is no need for such work to be done given that the bulk of Higgins' readership probably will not detect any inaccuracies in the depiction of Boston. What we can conclude - despite the claims to maximum verisimilitude by both Leonard and Higgins - is that the information offered in the text acts only as a suggestion for reading. It does not matter whether Higgins or the Greek are expert witnesses, the reader can construct a picture of Torrey or the streets of Boston which does not necessarily correspond to that which might be intended by the narrative. It is just about worth stating the very banal point that the Common depicted in Chapter 6 of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, its depiction in the film of the novel (1973) and its appearance in real life are all vastly different. What is important is that the reader invests such a feature of the text according to its logic as a text to be read. That the text may be arranged in the reading formation as a realistic narrative about criminals and/or as a thriller is of consequence - along with Higgins' claims of photographic accuracy - in the establishment of the narrative's verisimilitude. It might therefore be posited that the potential realism for readers in the depiction of the criminal milieu is imported from without. The specific mechanism for rendering that air of realism may therefore be, in a sense, secondary, merely offering a way of working out certain investments with regard to the text rather than engendering a specific viewpoint. In this way, what is of importance in assessing possible readings of the text is the way crime is presented by its perpetrators.

In the film version of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, the main character is played by Robert Mitchum. He is the only star of the film although there are other actors who went on to achieve a modicum of prominence in the seventies, among them Peter Boyle

(who plays Dillon), Richard Jordan (Foley) and Alex Rocco (Scalisi). In terms of the novel, however, it might be considered a travesty to suggest that there is a main character. Eddie 'Fingers' Coyle lends his proper name to part of the narrative's title but one could also say that the text is about his 'friends'. In fact, the bulk of the narrative that is concerned with Eddie is when he meets with Jackie Brown, and whenever this is the case he is referred to as "the stocky man". Clearly, the film, through Mitchum, offers Eddie as the central character or hero, to be invested by the audience and its extra-textual cues organize this (see Publicity Brochure for *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* 1973). The book cannot be said to do this and is as much about Jackie Brown, Dillon and Foley.¹⁰ One feature of the novel connected to this is played down in the film version and that is the question of who set up Jimmy Scal and Artie Van. Both the film and the novel have scenes where Eddie sends his wife upstairs so that he can call Foley and offer a tip on the bank robberies perpetrated by the Scalisi gang, and these take place after it has become clear that Foley has already received a tip which has led to his capture of the gang which renders Eddie's information redundant (see p. 139). The film leaves just one possibility regarding the identity of the informant - Dillon. However, the capture of the gang in the novel could have come about not just as a result of Dillon's information but as a result of information bequeathed by Scalisi's air hostess girlfriend, Wanda, or even - at one stage of the narrative - Jackie Brown. The universe of crime in Higgins' narratives, although centred on individuals is very much a social world in which individuals attempt to save their own livelihoods but they do so by means of a conventionalized amorality that they do not recognize. There are numerous cues in the novels which might allow for a reading of the actions of the characters as fuelled almost entirely by personal weakness. This is so with regard to the

¹⁰ Sarris (1973) writes of the screenplay

Paul Monash has retained the sharp flavour of the Higgins dialogue (Sarris 1978)

It must be noted that the film's degree of fidelity to the book in this area is even greater than Sarris allows as long swathes of dialogue from the novel are reproduced throughout the film.

double-crossing in *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*: the message on the poster for the film, for example, reads

It's a grubby, violent, dangerous world. But it's the only world they know. And they're the only friends Eddie has.

The world in which Higgins' characters live allows no recourse to the strength that might derive from a personal moral code. In this way, the characters can often be read as the victims of circumstances; making an oblique reference to the models he uses for his characters, Higgins has said

I have never met a criminal. Not a person who subjectively believes himself to be a criminal (South Bank Show 1987).

This is essentially what Foley says somewhat more ambiguously to Eddie when he tells him

The only one fucking Eddie Coyle is Eddie Coyle (pp. 117-118).

One way in which this can be applied to Higgins' characters is that they usually integrate their family and other aspects of their everyday lives into their criminal business despite their attempts to keep both aspects of their lives separate.¹¹ Eddie Coyle sends his wife upstairs while he calls Foley, but it is his worry over the fate of his children and his wife that makes him dread a possible sentence of two years' imprisonment that hangs over him. As publicity for the film suggested

Coyle is a hood, but he is first of all a family man (From the synopsis in Publicity Brochure for *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* 1973 p. 2)

Similarly, the Digger is lured into the robbery of a fur warehouse in order to get not just the Greek off his back but to curtail Aggie's worries and nagging. The Digger also has the added difficulty of appeasing his brother, Paul, whom he has taken money from, lied to and, as a result, brought FBI suspicion to rest on the priest. In the final scenes of the novel, Jerry manages to send Paul away and, having successfully committed the fur robbery, recommence sexual relations with his wife. However, these concerns with

¹¹ c.f. Geherin (1989) on Leonard

Leonard's uncanny ability to impersonate so many different characters demands great empathy on his part. He finds it helps to imagine all his characters, good and bad, as human beings; his heavies have to face as many of the same problems (what to wear, when to eat, how to get along with their wives or mothers) that his good guys do (p. 129).

the family are not just connected to the plots of the narratives; there are sections in which seemingly unimportant details regarding narrative resolution are given. For example, in *The Digger's Game*, Jerry argues with Aggie over their adolescent son who is continually masturbating in the toilet and they both blame each other for his behaviour (p. 43). Clearly, crime permeates everyday domestic life in the milieu of the Higgins novels and no boundary between the two realms is made clear. The Digger and Harrington switch from criminal plans to sport almost imperceptibly, in a manner which reflects the casual paradox enacted in the scam they discuss:

'We take them furs out of the place that the guy owns, and we turn them over to a guy runs another place, and the guy that owns the other place is gonna sell them and the first guy howls like a bastard, all his furs're gone. Then he's gonna get the insurance, and he keeps his stock up, he's gonna buy from the guy we sold it to, with the insurance money. Nice, huh?'

'Jesus', Harrington said, 'I'd rather know him'n you. He's doing better'n any of us'.

'No', the Digger said, 'he don't want to do this, you know. He's gotta'.

'Shit', Harrington said.

'You see the Super Bowl', the Digger said.

'Yeah', Harrington said. 'Shitty game, I thought. Baltimore' (p. 106).

If crime is to be considered as a practice in these novels that is no more or no less legitimate than any other practice in these novels then the criminal milieu can, perhaps, be summed up in terms of economics. For example,

'Some guys', the driver said, starting the Jaguar, 'some guys need more'n they have, some guys have more'n they need. it's just a matter of getting us together, Dig, that's all it is' (p. 6).

If we are to look for indications of an eternal structure of the text in the view of crime to be found in the novels of Higgins, then, we find that crime is very much open to interpretation. Unlike the Spenser narratives that we discussed in the last chapter, the discourses of crime and domesticity in Higgins novels can be said to be constantly interwoven. It is difficult to really find a difference between the way characters speak about their homes or their crimes or other aspects of their lives.

For commentators on the crime novels of Leonard and Higgins it is often important to show how they mark a radical departure. The novels are discussed as if they embodied

dramatic textual innovations and these are usually centred around the conflated notions of 'vision', 'point of view' or 'focalization'. A secondary issue is the changing nature of crime in such novels. It will be clear by now that this is insufficient for our purposes to explain generic innovation. If we begin with focalization, we can assert that it has comprised a key feature of numerous texts in literary history; we have already mentioned that the novels of Jane Austen are particularly renowned for the incorporation of such a narrative mode, but one might also trace a more recent lineage of explicit experiments with focalization techniques from the novels of Henry James through those of Stephen Crane, William Faulkner, Graham Greene, Eudora Welty and Ernest Hemingway, to name only a few. The last named of these is particularly pertinent, because what characterizes Hemingway's narratives is not simply experimentation with different focalizations but also hard-boiled prose. In early stories such as 'Hills Like White Elephants' and 'The Killers' from *Men Without Women* (1955; originally 1928) or novels such as *Across the River and into the Trees* (1966; originally 1950), there is to be found not only hard-boiled prose but multiple focalizations and domination of the text by dialogue. Higgins, as we have mentioned, is a great admirer of Hemingway and Leonard is a great admirer of Higgins. This is mentioned just in passing as a possible component of extra-textual cues. What is important for us, however, is not the possibility of any objectively observable innovation within the text or any suggestion of innovatory talent or genius on the part of an author, but the work carried out in the process of reading within a specific regime or formation.

As we discussed in Chapter 1 (above), Foucault has identified the way in which certain notions of authorship act to limit the possible meanings of a text. In the case of Leonard and Higgins in this chapter we have retained proper names in order to refer to a corpus of work but we must not let this get in the way of our assessment of the potential multiplicity of the texts so designated. In one sense, the 'innovation' which these texts could be said to represent is not really innovation as such; Leonard and, particularly,

Higgins could equally have been said to have been pre-empted by numerous authors, especially Hemingway. In fact, if one wanted to take this further, one could suggest that the only textual innovation that the novels of Leonard and Higgins represent is their wholesale incorporation of obscene language. This is a feature of the texts which often receives comment (see Arena 1990 and South Bank Show 1987). However, extra-textual cues regarding the crime novel as exemplified by Leonard and Higgins invariably use a preamble about obscenities to open up and illustrate issues to do with the realistic rendering of crime and street life in the novels. The process that may be discerned when we consider the seventies crime novel's extra-textual cues is the creation of grounds for specific investments in the texts. Clearly, this ground is partly constituted by discourses which stress authorial and textual innovation: that Higgins, Leonard and their crime texts represent a new realism and a new burgeoning of skill in the rendering of street life. This is explicitly connected to the mechanism by which the text incorporates multiple focalizations or some kind of stress on focalization to enhance a particular 'vision'. This vision is one which is also implicitly stated by commentators to represent a blurring of conventional morality; however, as we have witnessed with *Chinatown*, focalization cannot be said to simply determine a reader's position. If Hemingway's narratives from the twenties onwards contained focalization techniques almost identical to Higgins' then we must posit a specific and possibly transient interpretation of the meaning of focalization in the texts of the seventies.

That this mode of narration was focussed on crime is significant: the Great Society programme and the awareness of social problems that it brought especially in the wake of the Watts riot meant that crime was not only high on the agenda of public concern but that it was a problem with no easy solutions. One of the reasons that there were no easy solutions was that its source was not always easily identifiable in conventional terms; political chicanery and illegality in Washington, for example, received the kind of publicity that could contribute to a new picture of the criminal in the public mind. There had been fears of a crime wave before; there had also been political corruption in

Washington for many years. There had even been periods in American history when a blurring of conventional morality was assumed to be taking place. What determines the reading of crime novels in these terms is the publicity and availability through other discourses of details of crime and corruption in the period in conjunction with a series of extra-textual cues which might refer to these details. We cannot say that multiple focalizations in the crime novel of the seventies prove that authors were seeing political reality in a different way; nor can we say that the presence of multiple focalizations in texts manoeuvred the reader into sharing this vision of political reality. However, we can suggest that a conjunction of events filtered through other discourses plus a series of extra-textual cues which draw attention to both these cues and 'objective' features of the fictional texts might produce the grounds for the specific reading of the texts we have discussed in this chapter. It is on these grounds of reading that innovation is to be found: in so far as the seventies crime novel (or focalization in films such as *Chinatown*) is 'syntactically different' from its counterparts in other decades - and, contemporaneously, within the larger thriller genre - it is because it is designated as such. This designation comes partly from outside the text but it can also be considered inside the text as part of its 'semantic' dimension. Innovation can be seen to reside, therefore, in the reading of texts with seemingly new semantic elements as well as the reading of these texts within a formation that signals them as novel and innovative in some respects.

It is no coincidence that George V. Higgins not only wrote crime novels in the seventies but also wrote two texts set in Washington. The first was a novel, *City on a Hill*, whose events took place in 1973 and which involved Senators, aides and journalists in the nation's capital. The second was a non-fiction book about Watergate called *The Friends of Richard Nixon* (1975b) which involved the same. Like the crime novels these books were peopled by mean-spirited and weak-willed characters who dominate the narratives with their dialogue. In one sense, one could say that the cut-throat world of Higgins' crime novels was displaced to a slightly different milieu; in

another sense, the opposite could apply: the corruption of Washington was to be read into Higgins' crime novels. If the latter is to be considered in any measure true then it is necessary to look in detail at those texts adjacent to the crime novel in the thriller genre which so directly invoked references to the reality of Watergate in their fictional world.

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CHAPTER 9

The Meaning of Paranoia

**Bureaucracies are quick to embrace paranoid fantasies because they justify the accumulation of power.
The world in which all dangers are possible is a world in which all means of defense are permitted
(Barnet in Haward 1974
pp. 104-105)**

**Only a profoundly sick society can see the world as dominated by manipulation, with hardly anyone
able to determine or control their convictions, let alone actions, and with everybody becoming the
puppets of mysterious 'agencies' (Mandel 1984 p. 74).**

**We have no word, as yet, for justifiable paranoia - that is, for the sane person's perception of a world
become crazily menacing - and in terms of behaviour there may not be much difference between living
in terror of actual enemies and living in terror of imaginary enemies, particularly if the natural enemies
represent the whole system of authority (Kael 1973 p. 107).**

Just because you're paranoid it doesn't mean they're not out to get you . . . (Anon.)

Introduction: The Meanings of Paranoia

Although paranoia is a complex psychological affliction it is probable that most people could suggest a reasonably strict definition of the word. Nevertheless, the preceding quotes illustrate the fact that paranoia is not a stable phenomenon with a fixed meaning; rather than being a highly personal character trait, paranoia can be seen to be applicable to organizations or to represent a general mindset. If we look to psychoanalysis for a definition of the term we find that it is similar to that given by most dictionaries: a mental disorder characterized by systematic delusions (see Laplanche and Pontalis 1988 p. 296). The classical psychoanalytic account of paranoia upon which such a definition is based can be found in Freud's consideration of the case of Schreber (1984) where Freud identifies the origin of the phenomenon in a homosexual wish (pp. 196 ff). However, Freud was to modify his formulations in the Schreber case quite subtly in his essay entitled 'A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytic Theory of the Disease' (1979) which appeared five years later. He writes,

The view had already been put forward in psychoanalytic literature that patients suffering from paranoia are struggling against an intensification of their homosexual object choice. And a further interpretation had been made: that the persecutor is at bottom someone whom the patient loves or has loved in the past (1979 p. 149).

In the latter essay Freud considers a case of paranoia in which a woman focusses on an object of paranoid delusion from the opposite sex; although Freud accepts that this contradicts the prior, homosexual, theory of paranoia he points out that the root mechanism at work involves a member of the same sex. The object of the female patient's paranoid delusion is a male lover who she has witnessed in conference with a mother figure in their place of work. It is the female patient's attachment to this mother figure which originally suggests to patient that the woman and her object of delusion are conspiring. This fact subtly alters the originally posited relationship between paranoia and object-choice, making it more flexible. So, the source of paranoia, even in the most personal of cases, is not as fixed as it might seem. Yet, if we wished to examine an even more flexible version of paranoid phantasies in classical psychoanalysis we could consider the work of Melanie Klein. For her, paranoia always

has its origin in the pre-Oedipal stage before object-choices proper are made. It is here that the infant is caught up in a series of object relations which include persecution; she writes,

It would appear that the pain and discomfort he [the infant] has suffered, as well as the loss of the intra-uterine state, are felt by him as an attack by hostile forces, i.e. as persecution. Persecutory anxiety, therefore, enters from the beginning into his relation to objects in so far as he is exposed to privation (in Klein 1988 p. 62).

In another essay she notes that these fears are the site of the 'paranoid position' which, if worked through sufficiently, gives way to a 'depressive position'. However, if the persecutory fears are very strong they made impede the working through of both positions; if this is the case, it may

lead to a regressive reinforcing of persecutory fears and strengthen the fixation points for severe psychoses (that is to say, the group of schizophrenias) (in Klein 1988 p. 2).

A great deal of work on the phenomenon of paranoia has taken place since Freud and Klein were writing. Nevertheless, this brief consideration of conceptions of paranoia in classical psychoanalysis has a purpose. It suggests that even the most fundamental considerations of the *mechanism* of paranoia delineate it as the site of numerous 'fixation-points'. This is an important fact to be aware of when dealing with the sub-genre of thrillers that is thought by many to actually characterize the American 1970s, the 'paranoid' thriller. If paranoia has a number of specific fixation-points at a given time psychoanalysis can contribute to an explanation of the *mechanism* of paranoia but its objects will be *historically* situated and subject to change.

The work of Ernest Mandel which we encountered in Chapter 2 serves as a good example of the pitfalls inherent in a static and immutable conception of the meaning of paranoia as it is depicted in thrillers. As the quote at the beginning of the present chapter shows, Mandel clearly insists that any manifestation of paranoid tendencies, whatever their political complexion, are basically symptoms of a deep sickness in society. Mandel himself points out that the targets of such paranoia in the 1970s thriller are widespread:

Here the central theme is conspiracy, often with a generous spicing of 'revelations' offering inside dope on what really goes on behind the scenes in world politics. Especially since Watergate, the conspiracies portrayed often involve hypothetical presidents of the United States of America, whether thinly disguised real ones, or imaginary creations. But we also encounter reincarnations of the late Shah of Iran; Saudi Arabian politicians, oil sheikhs, and their Lebanese go-betweens; Israeli ministers, generals or Mossad chiefs; international terrorists; greedy Swiss bankers; German politicians with plans for a fourth Reich; Italian tycoons plotting military coups, with or without Mafia assistance; innumerable agents of the KGB or the Chinese secret service; and so on (1984 p. 118).

The crucial thing for Mandel, however, is that the targets of these thrillers' paranoid disdain are castigated as representatives of late capitalism without an explicit rejection of the economic formation as a whole. He writes,

While individual giant corporations, or even by implication all such organizations, are indeed indicted, sometimes in terms sharper than any Marxist would use, the overall system never is (p. 110).

Clearly, there are a number of problems with Mandel's formulation. Firstly, he sees conspiracy in the thriller as a mechanism akin to paranoia in that an irruption into a previously ordered world takes place as a result of the actions and schemes of one or more individuals. This need not be a problem, except that he does not use the term 'conspiracy' in a unitary sense. For Palmer (1978), conspiracy is an all-embracing concept which covers the actions of the murderers in the country village of Mayhem Parva, the heist planned by Auric Goldfinger, the attempted assassination of President de Gaulle, the machinations of corporations against individuals and, arguably, the deranged logic of the serial killer. Mandel sees the country house murder and the conspiracy of big business as qualitatively different. He discusses both subgenres in his book, and therefore implies a connection, but he has not been even-handed in his approach: by considering the former as 'Paradise Lost' (p. 30) he effectively denies it contemporary social significance, consigning it almost to the realms of 'pure puzzle'. The paranoid thriller of the 1970s is, on the other hand, overburdened by Mandel with social significance and asked to do things which may not lie within its remit. In short, Mandel is once more ahistorical in his approach to the whole corpus of texts. However, leading on to a second point about his approach, it is very useful that Mandel emphasizes the connection between contemporary capitalism and the paranoid thriller. The historical events of the 1970s, particularly Watergate, lend a new dimension to the reading of the conspiracies that appear in thrillers and the range of discourses

surrounding contemporary political events, as we have seen, provide the grounds for specific readings of texts. Needless to say, Mandel does not pursue this line of reasoning: instead, he involves himself in a depth analysis from an historical position posterior to that of the texts of what he believes to characterize late capitalism and what he believes to be the implications of the general mechanism of paranoia that it engenders. Sites of possible contemporary meaning-formation are abandoned in favour of exposing supposedly immutable structures. The irony of Mandel's failure to consider the specificity of 1970s paranoia in thrillers and its possible interpretations is that his analysis is based on his own personal conspiracy theory. In the section where he is concerned with mass market diversification of the thriller, Mandel writes,

The attempt by American bourgeois society to rationalize and justify its original sin - the genocide of the continent's indigenous population - laid an ideological foundation for that society's self-justification for its current sins: its systematic defence of private property, regardless of the cost in human misery or the consequences for the fate of humanity, and its labelling as criminals of all violators of that property. Millions who, as children, had been trained to see things in red-or-white terms by the 'Injun' pulp magazines would, as grown-ups, readily accept the black-or-white polarities of the crime story. It took the full impact upon American society of the colonial revolution (especially as viewed through the prisms of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement in the sixties) before the cowboy/Indian relationship - with its cops-and-robbers reflection in the mass-market detective story - was fundamentally reversed for millions, with the Indians becoming the true heroes (Mandel p. 76).

As this passage indicates, Mandel's whole analysis relies on theories of mass manipulation which can only be classified as a variant of conspiracy. In this case, the conspirators comprise American bourgeois society and capitalism, represented by the agent 'ideology'. Contrary to his stated intentions, then, Mandel implicitly puts forth here the notion that the fear of conspiracy and paranoia are not simply unitary mechanisms of mental illness, but varied, having an explanatory efficacy at given times. The general principle of paranoia's variable meanings and its more specific applications at given times will inform the discussion of the thrillers in the rest of this chapter.

A ready-made way to think paranoia in American political life is provided by Richard Hofstadter. In one of the most famous essays in the field of American political science, he envisages the role of paranoia in politics in the following way:

When I speak of the paranoid style, I use the term much as a historian of art might speak of the baroque or the mannerist style. It is, above all, a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself . . . In the paranoid style as I conceive it, the feeling of persecution is central, and it is indeed systematized delusions of persecution in grandiose theories of conspiracy. But there is a vital difference between the paranoid spokesman in politics and the clinical paranoiac: although they both tend to be overheated, oversuspicious, overaggressive, grandiose, and apocalyptic in expression, the clinical paranoid sees the hostile and conspiratorial world in which he feels himself to be living as directed specifically *against him*; whereas the spokesman of the paranoid style finds it directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others (in Hofstadter 1964 p. 4).

In respect of the last part of the statement it is, perhaps, worth stressing that our formulations of political paranoia in thrillers will be slightly different from those Hofstadter makes for political life. In the thriller it is clear that the perceived conspiracy is a threat to the nation as a whole; however, for the purposes of fiction, it is played out in the realm of the lives of individuals. Nevertheless, it is crucial that the paranoia that Hofstadter identifies is connected to the fate of the nation. He illustrates the paranoid style in American politics by using a quote from a 1951 speech of Senator Joseph McCarthy, a 1895 statement of the Populist Party, a Texas newspaper article on Catholicism from 1855 and a 1795 Massachusetts sermon on the threat to Christianity that resides in Europe (pp. 7-10). What is crucial to Hofstadter's analysis is that paranoia, although often politically right-wing, is a strategy which can be employed by a number of actors within the breadth of the political spectrum; the threat envisaged in the paranoid style is always one concerning the core of American life. As we saw in Chapter 3, the Constitution and the definition of what was legal became a site of a struggle for hegemony in the 1970s as a result of Vietnam and Watergate, and especially the media's role in public life as set out in the First Amendment. At this particular moment of crisis in American life the location of the paranoid style underwent a shift; a further extract from Hofstadter points out

the fact that movements employing the paranoid style are not constant but come in successive episodic waves suggests that the paranoid disposition is mobilized into action chiefly by social conflicts that involve ultimate schemes of values and that bring fundamental fears and hatreds, rather than negotiable interests, into political action. Catastrophe or the fear of catastrophe is most likely to elicit the syndrome of paranoid rhetoric (in Hofstadter 1964 p. 39).

Clearly the war in Vietnam and its aftermath, coupled with the Watergate scandal and the resignation of the President constitute a major catastrophe in American political life. As a result of this joint catastrophe the paranoid style can be found in use for some time by both opponents and supporters of the Nixon administration. As we have seen on

numerous occasions in Chapter 3 the employment of White House plumbers, the activities of CREEP and the Administration's assault on the press in general, not to mention Nixon's personal fear of protest and the campus 'bums', represents a severe utilization of a paranoid style based on fears of persecution. Equally, though, the employment of tactics of surveillance and so on, elicited a paranoid response from opponents of the Administration which, probably because of more convincing proof of the existence of persecution, came to far outweigh the paranoia of White House operatives. Both sides feared a catastrophe, but as evidence accumulated that the catastrophe was caused to a great extent by the unconstitutional actions of the Administration, paranoia became the property of Nixon's opponents. Much of the flavour of this dynamic is captured by Daniel Ellsberg; one of the high points of the plumbers' campaign against him - apart from the burglary of his psychiatrist's office - came as he gave a speech about the bombing of Haiphong on the Capitol steps. Bernard Barker - one of the Watergate burglars - was sent to attack him physically, although he did not succeed. Commenting on this and the campaign against him in general, Ellsberg writes

We come back to the question, Why did they care so much? To take all this trouble? The answer is complex. On the one hand, they say that my behavior was honestly puzzling and incomprehensible to them. I think that they were sincerely puzzled that someone who had been so privileged to work with the president, and so forth, could be willing to go to jail to expose his policy. If I did it, others might do it. The administration had a lot left to keep secret; the bombing of Cambodia that I had learned about in September 1969 was still at that point on a very small scale, but by 1971, almost 500,000 tons of bombs had been dropped secretly on Cambodia and Northern Laos, unreported to the Congress which had been unwittingly voting appropriations for those bombings during that period. Now, 500,000 tons of bombs is the exact amount that we dropped in all of Asia in World War II. We dropped that much *secretly* in Cambodia and Northern Laos.

So what the Nixon administration had to fear in terms of exposure in 1971 was a bombing campaign, a secret bombing campaign, as large as the air war in Asia of World War II. It was as if Roosevelt and Truman had never let the American people ever in on the secret that we had bombed Asia at all, dropping 500,000 tons of bombs, including both atom bombs, in World War II. It was as if we had denied what we did all of those years, saying that claims of bombing were Japanese propaganda. Perhaps such deception couldn't have been done in 1945; but we have been building a secrecy system for twenty-five years since that war, a system that now consists of procedures, safes, clearances, access, and oaths. Above all, it consists of an attitude in the minds of bureaucrats that fits them for conspiracy and for an invisible war.

We have trained a conspiratorial bureaucracy, generations of it, in fact, that now puts in the hands of the American president (not just Nixon, but any president) the instrumentality for carrying out a World War II-scale operation in secret from the American public, and for hiding from us the effects of that operation.

We must face the fact that when in December of 1972 - after an election in which the American people had voted overwhelmingly for a man who had promised them a settlement in hand (not the settlement that he had tried to get four years earlier, but essentially a true compromise settlement), after the American People had voted their enthusiasm for that settlement in an unprecedented landslide election - when those B-52's went over Hanoi, the American people had as little influence over the conduct of their foreign policy as the Russian people had over the invasion of Czechoslovakia. That is where twenty-five years of cold war, twenty-five years of secrecy, and the resulting twenty-five years of executive growth and usurpation had brought us (Ellsberg in Haward p. 72-73).

This is a very clear statement of how conspiracy and paranoia in this period cut both ways. However, it is also evident in Ellsberg's analysis that the conspiracy of government bureaucracies is far more menacing in terms of its power. If we are to consider the paranoid thrillers of the 1970s it is important to bear in mind this general flexible concept of paranoia which might inform contemporary readings as well as a number of more specific formulations of the phenomenon.

Clearly, the paranoid style could become fixated on diverse aspects of the contemporary social formation. However, there are a number of specific points of emphasis in the period which must be taken into account: these involve notions to do with McCarthyism, the assassinations of the 1960s, residual Nazism, the invasion of privacy entailed by the growth of surveillance, and the general undermining of individual freedom by agents of corporatism. On a number of occasions we have come across the charge of McCarthyism in the 1970s and it is worth mentioning here as it illustrates not only that paranoia has more than one potential political focus but that there are aspects of history to be struggled over in characterizing the present. To begin with, McCarthy's own statements - such as the following from 1951 - set a general tone of paranoia in their positing of hidden enemies:

How can we account for our present situation unless we believe that men high in this government are concerting to deliver us to disaster? This must be the product of a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man. A conspiracy of infamy so black that, when it is finally exposed, its principals shall be forever deserving of the maledictions of all honest men . . . What can be made of this unbroken series of decisions and acts contributing to the strategy of defeat? They cannot be attributed to incompetence . . . The laws of probability would dictate that part of . . . [the] decisions would serve the country's interest (quoted in Hofstadter 1964 pp. 7-8).

Yet, within the general parameters of such a paranoia there is room for specific fixation points. Richard Nixon is a case in point: his first claim to fame before becoming Eisenhower's vice-presidential running-mate in 1952 was as a member of the House

investigating committee. It was here that he displayed his diligence in attempting to expose Alger Hiss, an ex-State Department official who had been denounced by an ex-Communist Party member called Whitaker Chambers in 1948. Through Nixon's work, Hiss was finally convicted of perjury in 1950 although the question of Hiss' membership of the Communist Party remained open. But McCarthyism could also be used as a bogey man by the Nixon Administration. As we witnessed Chapter 5, during our discussion of *All the President's Men*, Charles Colson was one member of the White House staff who was quick to level the charge of McCarthyist smear tactics at the press following the 1972 election. This was understandable in some ways: muckraking stories about the fitness of officials for office had the effect of inflating what might be only minor or unsubstantiated allegations. One need only read *Fear on Trial* (1976 rev. edn.) by John Henry Faulk (which was made into an Emmy award-winning TV movie in 1975)¹ to realize that this was a feature of McCarthyism. However, for opponents of the Nixon Administration during the Watergate period, McCarthyism came to signify a general American tyranny in political life rather than the use of smear tactics in the press. For example, writing on Nixon's attacks on the press, Hentoff cites W. Bradford Wiley, the Chairman of the Association of American Publishing who stated in September 1971 that

it is a critical fact that we are now faced with defending the First Amendment. Nothing like this has happened since the days of Joseph R. McCarthy (in Gartner 1973 p. 217).

Clearly, the spectre of McCarthyism was often invoked in this period for different ends. Colson's use of the term, it could be argued, was less legitimate than, say, Hentoff's; for Colson, McCarthyism signifies smear tactics in the press while Hentoff sees it as a limitation of freedom emanating crucially from the government itself. As the Watergate scandal unfolded such views as Hentoff's came to possess greater rhetorical power. That the Administration was involved in an ideological crusade against its opponents, often involving 'innocent bystanders' (for example in such equations as campus protestors = 'bums'), gave more and more credence to the charges of

¹ See the 1977 TV film *Tail Gunner Joe* starring Peter Boyle as McCarthy, which also demonstrates the 1970s American media's interest in re-assessing McCarthyism.

McCarthyism levelled at it. Writing on Watergate in 1973, Mankiewicz utilizes an imaginary scenario to illustrate the logic of the Nixon Administration which emphasizes that while the government is prone to paranoia it is also the source of much potential fear for the nation's citizens:

Imagine this dialogue between a perplexed but well-meaning outsider and a knowledgeable White House insider in 1971, as the outsider seeks to understand the reasons for the widespread wiretapping which had been directed against past and present White House employees, journalists and perhaps others. It was done, the outsider is told, to find the source of serious leaks of information. Very well, he asks, but what information has been leaked? Why, he is informed, the plan for the U.S. delegation at the disarmament talks with the Soviet Union. And why, he wonders, is such a leak so dangerous? Because the Russians will learn about our 'fall-back' position. And if they do? Then they will be in a stronger position at the talks, and perhaps manoeuvre us into accepting an agreement that will leave us weaker. And why then, he asks, should we fear a situation in which the Soviet Union has a stronger military position than it now has? Because, the triumphant answer comes, it might then prevail against us in a test of arms. The outsider remains unconvinced. What then? he asks. Then, says the insider sternly, they could impose their will upon us, and we would have a Communist system here in America. That would be bad, agrees the outsider, finally. Of course it would, says his friend. If that were to happen, the government would be free to burglarise your home and to tap your telephone. None of us would be safe (1973 p. 123).

For Americans in the contemporary period the link between such a scenario and the situation in Vietnam would not go unnoticed. For example, the following statement, which is a paraphrase of a statement we have encountered in *Dispatches*, displays the same logic as Mankiewicz's imaginary dialogue and contravenes what Hellman considers to be American myth:

It was necessary to destroy the city to save the city (Hellman 1986 p. 89)

As Hellman suggests, such scenarios and such statements do not correspond to the myth America ascribes to itself. In this way, McCarthyism is a label to be fought over in the establishment of what is legal, constitutional and American in the face of the crisis of government.

Another aspect of contemporary American life which can be seen as the site of conspiracy and paranoia as well as a crisis in American government is the spate of assassinations of political figures in the 1960s. Stemming from the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, there have been numerous theories of why assassinations took place and who the hidden actors in the drama might be, the most famous of which at the time of writing is that of Jim Garrison as depicted in the film

J.F.K. (1991). However, without going into any detail about such conspiracy theories it is worth mentioning that they were not only connected to the early 1970s in terms of their aptness but also because this was when a number of the documents relating to the Kennedy case became available. Such items as the Zapruder film of Dealey Plaza had been considered at length already (see Meagher 1967), but a number of new investigations also took place in the early seventies. As Scott et al. point out,

The U.S. Congress might never have sanctioned any reopening of the Kennedy assassination had it not been for Watergate - the crime that made cover-up a household word and showed that conspiracies are indeed a part of political reality in Washington (in Scott et al. 1978).

In fact, this statement comes from the introduction to a collection of articles, extracts and documents relating to the assassinations of President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King originally issued in 1975, and makes note of a number of new government commissions on the various assassinations (see pp. 11 ff). Moreover, this was not the only major book on the assassinations in the period; one might also consider Roffman's *Presumed Guilty* (1975) or Noyes' *Legacy of Doubt* (1973). The main point for our purposes, though, is that contemporary conspiracies in Washington are directly related in such work to the conspiracies that are thought to underlie the assassination. This can take the form of a re-assessment of documents relating to the case in the light of contemporary knowledge about general corruption in government or the positing of a direct relationship between Watergate and the cover-ups involved in the assassinations. Scott, for example, is very explicit about such a link's existence although less specific about the details:

In my opinion it is no coincidence that the key figures in Watergate - Liddy, Hunt, Sturgis, Krogh, Caulfield - had been drawn from the conspiratorial world of government narcotics enforcement, a shady realm in which the operations of organized crime, counter-revolution, and government intelligence have traditionally overlapped. Nor is it a coincidence that one of these men - Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis - played a minor role in the cover-up of the Dallas assassination ten years ago. On the contrary, I believe that a full exposure of the Watergate conspiracy will help us to understand what happened in Dallas, and in a criminal war in South-east Asia. Conversely, an analysis of the cover-up in Dallas will do much to illuminate Watergate and its ramifications, including the Miami demi-monde of exiles, Teamster investments, and Syndicate real estate deals with which Nixon and his friend Bebe Rebozo have been involved (in Scott et al. 1978 p. 341).

It is evident from this statement that there are the grounds for building a grand conspiracy theory in which a number of disparate links can be drawn together to make a complex whole. This is not to say that Scott is necessarily wrong; but what is important

about his uncovering of such evidence about Sturgis is that the connections between his roles in Watergate and in the Kennedy assassination, while tangible, require a certain political atmosphere in order for them to be perceived to constitute parts of a larger conspiracy. A further demonstration that a political climate allows for certain relations to be made between different covert activities is offered by *All the President's Men*. In the midst of their Watergate researches, Woodward and Bernstein allow themselves to narrate details of the attempted assassination of right-wing Governor Wallace:

Wallace had been shot by Bremer in a Maryland shopping center on May 15, 1972, at about 4:00 P.M. By 6:30, a *Post* editor had learned the name of the would-be assassin from White House official Ken Clawson. Clawson had said that it was clear from literature found in Bremer's dingy Milwaukee apartment that the assassin was connected to leftist causes, possibly the campaign of Senator George S. McGovern. Woodward had been working on the story, and he had rejected the idea. There had, in fact, been both left-wing and right-wing propaganda in the apartment. But several reporters from Milwaukee had told him they had been permitted to enter Bremer's apartment during a 90-minute period right after the shooting in Maryland. Many reporters had carried off papers and other effects. Two reporters for Milwaukee papers had told Woodward that they had gone into Bremer's apartment after FBI agents had been there once and left. An hour and a half later, the agents had come back and sealed off the apartment. The FBI never offered any explanation as to why they had permitted Bremer's belongings to be looted (Woodward and Bernstein 1974 p. 326).

This episode is tangentially related to the activities of Howard Hunt, but it is not clear what direct relevance it has for the uncovering of the Watergate plot. However, what it does do is to tie Hunt to a range of clandestine activities which become incorporated into the blanket term 'Watergate'. Essentially, the preoccupation with assassinations in this period does the same thing: it bonds, often with evidence, a string of clandestine activities which, following their exposure, have hitherto been considered unrelated.

If the relation between Watergate and the assassinations looks, at first glance, somewhat tenuous, then there is a further aspect of paranoia in the 1970s which may be considered to be built on even less sturdy foundations. This is the fear of the resurgence of Nazism and/or its unseen role in the unwritten political and economic history of post-war America. Now although this theme was worked out in fiction more than anywhere else in the period there were also real precedents for linking Nazism with the corporate power structure in America. Fictional thrillers approached the theme of Nazism by showing how developments in World War II posed a threat to the future of post-war civilization (Frederick Nolan's *The Ritter Double Cross* [1976; originally

1974] for example) or how a threat to the same had survived the war and secretly grown in strength until a decisive moment (e.g. Ira Levin's *The Boys from Brazil* [1977; originally 1976]). This, of course, was not a topic which was confined to American thrillers; probably the most celebrated fictional exposé of residual Nazism was a British novel, Frederick Forsyth's *The Odessa File* (1973; originally 1972). In the realm of the non-fictional it became widely known that Nazis had fled to South America after the war, probably the most famous of whom - Eichmann - was kidnapped by Israeli agents in Buenos Aires to stand trial in the following year (see Arendt 1983). In the seventies, an international non-fiction bestseller told of a Nazi-hunter's penetration of 'the Fourth Reich' in South America which led to meetings with Hitler's secretary, Martin Bormann, and the genetics obsessed doctor from Auschwitz, Josef Mengele (Erdstein with Bean 1979; originally 1977).

But for America there was a far stronger link between Nazism and contemporary events. One of the most analysed post-war American novels, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1975; originally 1973) was a story of monumental paranoia and phallocentrism manifested very often in terms of the development of the V2 rocket, the role of corporatism (I.G. Farben) and their relation to the subsequent American space programme (on this topic see, for example, Carter 1987 especially Chapter 2).

Furthermore, there was a basis for this in fact. It is worth stating this at length because it is an aspect of the contemporary reading formation which may have been common knowledge at the time, but has become less so since. The American space programme had had a potential foundation in the work of Robert H. Goddard, the Massachusetts scientist who successfully demonstrated the first liquid fuelled rocket in 1926.

However, a number of circumstances prevented his work from being fully developed in the 1930s (see DeWaard and DeWaard 1984 p. 11). Towards the end of World War II 'Project Paperclip' was enacted by the U.S. Army with the aim of transporting over 100 rocket specialists from the defeated Germany to America. Most of these were from Peenemünde where the Nazis based their work on the V2 rocket (Goebbels' Vengeance

Weapon No. 2), and among them were Werner von Braun and Walter Dornberger (see Logsdon 1970 p. 49; Dewaard and DeWaard p. 13). In the immediate post-war period, then, the development of rockets was a thoroughly military offensive operation and von Braun worked for the Army which developed its own programme and administration in 1956 in the form of an Army Ballistics Missile Agency (ABMA). Logsdon points out that there was a great deal of high level wrangling and dissension between various agencies involved in rocket development during this period exacerbated by the presidential support for the establishment of a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958 which promptly poached von Braun and his team from the Army (op. cit. pp. 32 ff). From this point onwards von Braun became a national figure, prompting a film biography of his life directed by J. Lee Thompson in 1960, and writing the definitive history of space travel (von Braun and Ordway 1967). The consequences of this are laid out by Murray and Cox in their study of the Apollo missions:

Von Braun was the only non-astronaut in the space programme who became a household name. In Congress, his prestige was enormous. Movie-star handsome, with an expansive smile and European charm to which he added a touch of Alabama folksiness, he could dominate a congressional hearing as he dominated the media. Other senior people in NASA envied him and in some cases resented him ('That damned Nazi', one was known to mutter when he had had several drinks), intimating that von Braun spent too much time worrying about his public image and that the real work at Marshall was done by others. What was hard for some of his NASA peers to swallow was that von Braun was a natural. He was exceptionally good at being a public person, and none of the other engineers of Apollo could compete.

With the fame came a price. In some circles, von Braun was assumed to be a Nazi who had escaped judgment only because of his value to the United States. No such charges were substantiated. On the contrary, his history reveals a man who from his teens had a passion for rockets and space travel, as oblivious to politics in the 1930s as America's Apollo engineers were oblivious to politics during the 1960s. During the height of the war, von Braun was briefly jailed by the Gestapo for insufficient ardor in making weapons. But even among those who bore him no ill will, jokes were inevitable, given the contrast between von Braun's activities during the war and his transformation into an American hero. When a movie about von Braun was entitled *I Aim at the Stars*, the underground version of the title quickly became *I Aim at the Stars but Sometimes I Hit London* (1989 pp. 51-52).

As this quote suggests, the accusations of Nazism could be refuted. Yet, at the same time, it was clear that the brave world of President Kennedy's 'New Frontier', clearly exemplified by the space programme, was underpinned by a scientist whose main claim to fame had been the development of a deadly weapon which wreaked havoc on civilian communities in World War II. Such knowledge may not necessarily lead to accusations

of residual Nazism; however, von Braun's visible profile in what had become a highly invested feature of American public life in the late fifties and through the sixties² allowed for an interpretation of public institutions as built on a foundation of crime and corrupt opportunism. This interpretation might seem even more likely in the light of developments in American politics following the moon landing in 1969.

One of the most growing public concerns of the early 1970s that Watergate helped to crystallize was the fear of surveillance. As the quote from Mankiewicz (above) suggests, the interference with individual freedom, no matter what aim it has in mind, fundamentally contravenes the American way of life even when it professes to be preserving it. It is evident that there was an increasing consternation among the population at large that espionage techniques were being used against ordinary citizens whose credentials would usually be accepted as unimpeachable. In 1970, *Newsweek* uncovered a massive military surveillance operation against a wide variety of American citizens:

It sounded for all the world like a page out of 'Nineteen Eighty-Four': a 'blacklist of potential U. S. enemies on the home front; some 1,000 U. S. Army plain-clothes men keeping track of them; a nationwide Teletype network linking the agents to every major Army command - and plans to tie the whole system to a computerized data bank at Fort Holabird, Md. But four months ago, word leaked out in Washington that the Army's Orwellian surveillance operation was all too real. It's target: a broad cross-section of the nation's political activists from armed militant groups like the Minutemen and the Revolutionary Action Movement to such reformist organizations as the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union ('Looking for Trouble' *Newsweek* 4 May 1970 p. 35).

If this provides the grounds for a sense of public outrage at the time one can imagine the kind of feeling that the Watergate revelations of widespread wiretapping engendered. Daniel Ellsberg demonstrates some of the flavour of the fear of surveillance:

Before the Watergate Committee Howard Hunt testified that, 'In my twenty-one years of serving this country, I had learned to follow orders unquestioningly, never to question the legality or the appropriateness of orders that were given me'. That was his justification for what he had done. he went on to say, the reason for going into my psychiatrist's office and the reason for generating my psychological profile by the CIA was that 'in the White House' my actions were 'incomprehensible; we could think of no reason' why I had taken 'such drastic action'. In their view I was, to quote Mr. Hunt,

² The launch of Sputnik I against the backdrop of the Cold War in October 1957 had a profound impact on the American public; a famous discussion of this occurs in Wolfe (1980 pp. 56 ff) but see also King (1982 pp. 22 ff) and Kovic (1990 pp. 44-48).

an unstable man, who had in effect led a bifurcated life. Our feeling was that Ellsberg was not entirely competent, let's say, in the terms of the generality of the American public. We had availed ourselves of data that had been provided by government agencies on Doctor Ellsberg, his life and his travels abroad, his contacts in Vietnam, summaries of his writings, details of his divorce, of his personal conduct, his experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs, and the rather bizarre life that he led in Malibu, California.

I cannot really guess what Mr. Hunt found bizarre in my personal life; personally, I find his professional life pretty bizarre. But what was the government doing spending so much time finding out the details of my divorce and my personal life? What was it doing collecting evidence, for example, from my 15-year-old son, who was served a subpoena at 7-30 one morning to appear at 9 o'clock before the grand jury in order to testify for some three to four hours. What was it doing collecting a great deal of testimony under a forced grant of immunity, from my former wife? Why did the government make all this effort?

I must say it would appear they thought about me more than was good for them. Somehow, they should not have been so interested; why were they? We know that they gathered some of the information about me illegally. They violated the civil rights of my former psychiatrist, they wire-tapped; why was it so urgent? What was the threat that my action, or that I, represented to them that earned my place on the enemies list (along with Barbra Streisand and Joe Namath)? (Ellsberg in Harward 1974 p. 66).

If one wished to downplay Ellsberg's fear of surveillance one could, perhaps, suggest that the Pentagon Papers had made him an obvious target, although his main sense of outrage is at the tactics involved. At the same time, though, Ellsberg's reaction to the invasion of his private life has enough of a personal touch to prevent his position from seeming remote to the general public. Another example of the fear of surveillance is manifested in a conversation between James Reston and Tom Wicker of the *New York Times*; talking of the Pentagon Papers case in December 1971 Wicker says,

Scotty called me from Washington. I was in New York and something had come up about the Sheehan case. I said, 'I don't think we ought to talk about this on the phone'. I don't know if they were listening. But if they can make us feel that way, hell, they've won the game already (in Wise p. 247).

Essentially, these examples illustrate how two aspects of life under the Nixon Administration that we discussed in Chapter 3 are fused in the service of paranoia: a general fear of conspiracy and the role of the press. Now, if this fusing of contemporary themes was to be recast in such a way that would make it relevant to those who are not necessarily closely involved in American political life it could be considered as a contest between corporatism and the individual. This is not to envisage an ideological split between notions of individualism and collectivity so much as a common fear of a rampant bureaucracy which is hostile to the citizen. A clear demonstration of this dimension of paranoia is to be found in columnist Jack Anderson's statement on the Dick Cavett Show, in February 1971, that he had been leaked various information and that a race had taken place to find his source:

the authorities selected as the sacrificial lamb a bespectacled, \$13,500-a-year Pentagon employee named Gene Smith. He was hounded, badgered, threatened and cursed until his health was affected. His neighbors were asked nasty questions about his loyalty, his associates, his drinking habits. At last, hauled before a grand jury in Norfolk, Virginia, and questioned under oath, U. S. Attorney Brian Gettings concluded from the inquisition, however, that Smith was the wrong man (Anderson with Clifford vii).

Once again this statement demonstrates in a high profile manner that tyrannous tactics are employed in government surveillance; in fact, the innocence of the target is added almost as an afterthought. As Schorr points out, the targetting of the press, although serious, was part of a wider Administration campaign:

Now we know the full dimensions of the antipress conspiracy, from the memoranda coming out of the White House; and let me tell you I've never seen an administration that piles up paper the way this administration did, apparently because the only way to reach President Nixon is by memo. He doesn't like talking to people, this is an administration where you reach the president by putting things down on paper. He'll read memos when he won't speak to the underlings. so we have a pile of memoranda for history. And some of those memoranda are about how to subdue the press. How do we use 'rifle instead of shot gun' was one of the memoranda. Antitrust action, internal revenue against the television networks - its the same kind of conspiracy against the press that there were against all the other institutions that they were conspiring against, and for a good reason.

The press was the only thing they were afraid of. They weren't afraid of the FBI. They had Pat Gray there. They weren't afraid either of the CIA or Department of Justice, or the prosecutors - everything was taken care of. But not the press. They had to do something to control the press if the rest of the conspiracy was to succeed. They even came up with a new criminal code that was sent to Congress. One paragraph provided that you could go to jail if you committed the crime of reporting anything that came from a classified piece of paper. If you've ever gone to Washington and walked through the halls of the government, everything, almost everything, is classified, everything from top secret down to 'official use only'. In fact, there are classifications that are so classified that even the names of the classifications are a secret. That is literally true. But the FBI reports that were so useful in exposing the Watergate were also kept confidential. Imagine a situation in which it can be shown that some report of yours originated in a piece of paper that somebody stamped confidential, then you go to prison. It would have been very useful for people who were trying to keep the lid on. Well, it didn't work, and the press did expose a lot. And a lot of things happened - some of them that wouldn't have happened if it weren't for the press (in Haward 1974 p. 87).

Schorr's conclusion is not that the press were immune from tyrannous tactics but that it had the power in the early seventies to fight back. Similarly, Marchetti and Marks, who demonstrate the splintered nature of American intelligence, imply that this leaves the press in a position to provide insights into the working of the CIA:

The unfolding of the Watergate scandal has also opened up the agency to increased scrutiny. Reporters have dug deeply into the CIA's assistance to the White House 'plumbers' and the attempts to involve the agency in the Watergate cover-up. Perhaps most important, the press has largely rejected the 'national security' defense used by the White House to justify its actions. With any luck at all, the American people can look forward to learning from the news media what their government - even its secret part - is doing. As Congress abdicates its responsibility, and as the President abuses his responsibility, we have nowhere else to turn (Marchetti and Marks 1974 p. 346).

Clearly, then, paranoia engulfs individual citizens in the face of corporate power; but at the same time there is a final court of appeal. The murky world of residual Nazism,

surveillance and conspiracy has a stark contrast in the truly public arena of the press. In this way more than any other the paranoid style of the 1970s distinguishes itself from that of the 1950s. Rather than the public sphere being used in the service of the government to expose, smear and vilify innocent citizens, it is the device whereby innocent citizens are saved from the conspiracy hatched in the very seat of government. The role of the press since the McCarthy hearings has therefore undergone an almost complete political turnaround. The conception of the role of the press at this time represents a transformation of the whole notion of paranoia as it can be applied to American political life. The same can be said for the contemporary thriller, only more so: rather than merely incorporating these aspects of paranoia into its narrative develops some of their implications. As we discussed in detail in Chapter 3, a great many problems engendered by the events of the early 1970s were generally felt to have been left unresolved. In the paranoid thriller the narrative potentially leaves the reader either in no doubt about the source for a possible resolution or with an explicit rendering of a resolution of paranoid fears. This is not to suggest that such thrillers serve as an ideological palliative; but it *is* to suggest that there are strong grounds for a contemporary *political* reading of such texts.

The Paranoid Thriller

In the following section we will discuss novels and films dealing with different aspects of a general sense of paranoia in the period. There are a number of possible texts which could be discussed in this area. The limited number that we will consider were either bestsellers (films or novels), specific illustrations of the meaning of paranoia in the period or, more often than not, both. Curiously, the genre as a whole has received very little critical attention. As we noted in Chapter 2, various huge selling novelists such as Dennis Wheatley, Alistair MacLean and Desmond Bagley are omitted from histories of

the thriller. The first set of texts that we will discuss have also been largely ignored by commentators despite their popularity.

Robert Ludlum: *The Scarlatti Inheritance*, *The Osterman Weekend*, *The Rhinemann Exchange*, *The Holcroft Covenant*

One of the few critics to devote any amount of time to the work of Ludlum is John Sutherland. Along with Mandel, he sees Ludlum's novels as belonging to an international genre of bestsellers with a transient appeal. Sutherland specifies two international genres, both of which we could argue would accomodate Ludlum's novels:

The first is the 'secret history of the Second World War', the second 'fantasies of Nazism resurgent'. Both formulas are heavily imbued with a paranoid suspicion that the *real* course of events and state of things are very different from what the authorities and their 'official' histories would have us believe (Sutherland 1981 p. 167).

It is evident that a number of Ludlum's novels, including those that we will discuss, fall into both categories, often simultaneously - a factor for which Sutherland does not make allowance. What Sutherland does do, however, is to speculate on the determinants of the 'secret history' genre. The major determinant of the genre is the ineradicable popular belief that the *real* facts of history are never given (p. 173).

Unfortunately, Sutherland gives no evidence whatsoever that such a belief exists and that it may have a specific foothold in the 1970s. His second contention is that the thirty year rule relating to historical documents meant that a great many secrets about the war period were yielded in the 1970s. This does not, of course, account for American secrets. In fact, Sutherland makes no attempt to historically and politically situate the work of Ludlum et al. beyond this. If we reconsider the words of Hofstadter it becomes apparent that the paranoid style evinced by Ludlum's narratives falls into an American tradition. Hofstadter writes,

The central image is that of a vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic and yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy a way of life. One may object that there *are* conspiratorial acts in history, and there is nothing paranoid about taking note of them. This is true. All

political behaviour requires strategy, many strategic acts depend for their effect upon a period of secrecy, and anything that is secret may be described, often with but little exaggeration as conspiratorial. The distinguishing thing about the paranoid style is not that its exponents see conspiracies or plots here and there in history, but that they regard a vast or 'gigantic' conspiracy as the *motive force* in historical events. History is a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power, and what is felt to be needed to defeat it is not the usual methods of political give and take, but an all-out crusade. The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of this conspiracy in apocalyptic terms - he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values. He is always manning the barricades of civilization. He constantly lives at a turning point: it is now or never in organizing resistance to conspiracy. Time is forever just running out (in Hofstadter 1964 pp. 29-30).

This passage could almost be a tailor-made description of the world of Robert Ludlum's thrillers. An actor/producer who retired from his profession to write novels, Ludlum began his career with *The Scarlatti Inheritance* (1972) in 1971. This was followed in the 1970s by *The Osterman Weekend* (1972), *The Matlock Paper* (1973), *Trevayne* (1989; originally 1974, under the name 'Jonathan Ryder'), *The Rhinemann Exchange* (1976; originally 1974), *The Road to Gandolfo* (1982; originally 1975, under the name 'Michael Shepherd'), *The Gemini Contenders* (1977a; originally 1976), *The Chancellor Manuscript* (1977), *The Holcroft Covenant* (1979a; originally 1978) and *The Matarese Circle* (1979b). The entire corpus of this work explores the manifold nature of paranoia in the 1970s, although there are certain areas of preoccupation. As Sutherland points out,

Robert Ludlum's sequence of bestsellers insist that the underlying *casa belli* of the Second World War were economic. Big business and private fortunes were what the fighting was really about (1981 p. 175).

The economic, then, is the conspiratorial motive force of history in Ludlum's novels that Hofstadter refers to in the paranoid style. Yet within this rubric Ludlum's narratives manage to incorporate thrilling sequences rather than disquisitions on relative currency values. We will look briefly at the first four Ludlum novels and then, in more depth, at the novel which established him as a superseller, *The Holcroft Covenant*.

The review blurbs that accompany *The Scarlatti Inheritance* emphasize that Ludlum is a 'master storyteller':

Robert Ludlum has the storytelling gift

proclaims the *Times Literary Supplement* on the inside cover of the British edition.

Mario Puzo's views are aired in the same space:

Robert Ludlum is a genius storyteller with a wonderful and convincing imagination

While the *Chicago Tribune* suggests that

What he writes about never happened, but is so vividly done that the reader believes it could have.

This last statement is worth considering a little further. The story is continually emphasized in the extra-textual cues to Ludlum narratives, suggesting that other attributes of the prose take a back seat. Yet, at the same time, the *Chicago Tribune* review insists that the storytelling is so vivid that it convinces the reader of the narrative's veracity. However, a close look at the narrative of *The Scarlatti Inheritance* reveals that the events overwhelm the details in all the novel's scenes. Unlike, say, a Balzac novel, there is very little description of milieux, environment or even characters' appearances. The novel is set in different period of history, incorporating the establishment of the Scarlatti empire at the beginning of the twentieth century up to the end of the World War II, and the movement of history is accomplished by means of other devices rather than description, chief among which are dated chapter headings. As far as the novel's iconography goes the story could almost be set in any place at any time; but these devices help to anchor it within a certain period in history. If one were to look for the credibility of *The Scarlatti Inheritance*, then, the 'classic realism' of the narrative prose would not furnish any answers. What is notable about the narrative, though, is its opening pages. They consist of four quotes from the *New York Times* from 1926, 1937, 1948 and 1951, all of which begin a story and then drift off into ellipsis after a few sentences. Moreover, above the quotes are printed decorations in the manner of an illuminated manuscript. With each quote the decorations are extended until the 1951 quote reveals a full swastika. This corresponds to the organization of the book as a whole: each of its four sections is prefaced by the same decoration culminating in the final section with a full blown swastika. It should become clear to the reader that what the first few pages consist of are what Rimmon-Kenan (1983 pp. 46 ff, following Genette) calls a 'prolepsis'. That is to say that these pages narrate details that have not yet been reached within the time-scale of the narrative, details which are out of sequence and conventionally would be expected to come later in a

straightforward linear narration. Yet while one may consider the opening pages of *The Scarlatti Inheritance* to be a prolepsis it is clear that the matter is far from this simple. To begin with, the stories mentioned in the news clips are actually different *versions* of what will be narrated *again* later in the text; but the sequence has a further function. In Chapter 7 we have seen how suspense can be created by *detours* on the way to a narrative's denouement and resolution; however, this Ludlum text does not offer suspense by recourse to this device alone. The opening sequence actually tells the reader what the story is about and what will happen at the novel's close; it does not give the full details, admittedly, but it is clear that the suspense of the story will revolve as much around *how* the story is revealed rather than what is revealed. This is the logic of the hidden history impulse in Ludlum's novels that Sutherland has identified and it is apparent that the text plays on notions of its own verisimilitude to enhance the suspense involved in revealing how events in history are secretly linked. In *The Scarlatti Inheritance*, for example, the knowledge that Ulster Scarlett is not a war hero but is actually corrupt is offered to the reader from an early stage with the account of events during the Meuse-Argonne offensive (pp. 48 ff). This is the starting point for the main story, although the first *New York Times* clipping appears to believe in his bravery (p. 7); in this way, the narrative in the main part of the novel serves to furnish the reader with the very information that the clippings can only replace with ellipsis. This is one level upon which the logic of hidden history works. At the same time, though, one can expect that the reader of the whole narrative will have sufficient knowledge of history to recognize the outcome of World War II and thus recognize that this is a story about the war that has not been told. The reason the story has not been told is clear: the story is fictional. However, the nature of the prolepsis in the first few pages is such that the contents of the prolepsis do not simply direct the reader's attention to a hitherto unfulfilled knowledge about the text that is to follow but also to the real historical events to which the narrative will refer. By promising to pad out the details of fictional clippings from a real newspaper (the *New York Times*) the narrative almost implies that it will pad out details of the historical events in which the newspaper clippings are more

widely implicated. In this way, then, the narrative drive (the desire to know more of what the initial prolepsis omits) is coupled with the vividness and believability (the connection to real events outside the narrative in history) that the *Chicago Tribune* invokes. Ludlum's vaunted storytelling skills are therefore entwined with the suspected verisimilitude of his texts.

What stands out in *The Scarlatti Inheritance* besides the story are some features which will recur in Ludlum's work. The first of these is Nazism and particularly the picture of the individual deranged Nazi. Once again, Hofstadter suggests the potency of Nazi figures when he writes of the paranoid style's adversary:

This enemy is clearly delineated: he is a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman: sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving. Unlike the rest of us, the enemy is not caught in the toils of the vast mechanisms of history, himself a victim of his past, his desires, his limitations. He is a free, active, demonic agent. He wills, indeed he manufactures, the mechanism of history himself, or deflects the normal course of history in an evil way. He makes crises, starts runs on banks, causes depressions, manufactures disasters, and then enjoys and profits from the misery he has produced. The paranoid's interpretation of history is in this sense distinctly personal: decisive events are not taken as part of the stream of history, but as the consequences of someone's will. Very often the enemy is held to possess some especially effective source of power: he controls the press; he directs the public mind through 'managed news'; he has unlimited funds; he has a new secret for influencing the mind (brainwashing); he has a special technique for seduction (the Catholic confessional); he is gaining a stranglehold on the educational system (in Hofstadter 1964 p. 32).

This kind of characterization of Nazism in general as well as a specific Nazi villain can be found in a number of Ludlum's novels. For Sutherland, it represents a denial of Hannah Arendt's contemplation of the Nazi as essentially banal (Sutherland 1981 p. 179); but to assert this is to deny the novels of Ludlum their historical specificity. As we have seen, blockbuster texts allow for a reading of key aspects of American life in terms of an individual menace, for example the Devil in *The Exorcist*. But at the same time, such a reading also holds in tension a less individualistic formulation of that menace by emphasizing the corporate nature of conspiracy. *All the President's Men* is a crucial example of this tendency, narrating the effects of a group of hidden enemies. This must be borne in mind when considering Ludlum's work. As an example of the deletion of the banality of Nazi evil and the use of the Nazi as a superhuman bogeyman Sutherland cites the following evidence from Ludlum himself:

I believe the world is going infinitely beyond conservatism and communism to fascism - it's the child of the Nazi. In my own modest way I'd like to proclaim it to the whole goddam world I'm paranoid. I hope it doesn't interfere with my stories (quoted in Sutherland 1981 p. 179).

Yet, manifestly this is a statement not about individual Nazis but about extreme right wing politics. The interpretation of the role of the Nazi villains in Ludlum's work cannot proceed without reference to other aspects of the text as well as the period in which the text was received. The economic theme of *The Scarlatti Inheritance* can be read as directly related to the theme of who is fit to rule; at a late stage in the novel Elizabeth Scarlatti meditates on power:

. . . I wanted that power because I sincerely believed that I was equipped for the responsibility. The more convinced I became, it had to follow that others were not equipped . . . The quest for power becomes a personnel crusade, I think. The more success one has, the more personal it becomes. Whether he understood it or not, that's what my son saw happening . . . There may be similarities of purpose, even of motive. But a great gulf divides us - my son and me (p. 254).

This quote basically opposes the democratic and the tyrannous use of economic resources but it also interlocks with another theme. The ruthless arch-villain in the book is her son, Ulster, who has adopted the Nazi identity of Heinrich Kroeger. The father of Ulster, the grand patriarch Scarlatti, is absent from the narrative having died some years before and the implication of the narrative is that there is a crisis in determining who is fit to inherit the mantle of leadership. Given the preëminence of the family as a theme in the early seventies, the concern over the young generation and the fact that such a situation occurs again in Ludlum's narratives, it is more than possible that a reading of *The Scarlatti Inheritance* might be made with reference to contemporary American crises of leadership. While the Nazi with a dual identity is unremittingly evil and enmeshed in a conspiracy which involves the Third Reich and international corporations, the hero - Canfield - is the subject of little description and is significantly called "the field accountant" throughout the narration. We will come back to the possible readings of the Nazis and the hero shortly when we consider *The Holcroft Covenant*; before this, however, it is worth looking at other texts by Ludlum which might enhance the readings of his 'hidden history' novels.

In the two novels that Ludlum published after *The Scarlatti Inheritance* the narratives were set in the present day. *The Osterman Weekend* deals with a television presenter called John Tanner. With his wife, Tanner plans to share a weekend, as he has been doing regularly, with two other couples with whom they have been friends for many years. Just before this weekend is to commence he is approached by a CIA operative, Fassett, who informs him of a Soviet plot codenamed Omega which is to be enacted by Tanner's two friends who Fassett claims are really Soviet spies. Tanner spends most of the narrative in a state of terrified uncertainty realizing that the actions of his friends seem to hide hostile motives. Intruding into his life now is an awareness of the tactics of espionage: Fassett puts Tanner and his family under close surveillance and insists on using them as bait, with Tanner initially willing in the name of patriotism. However, it becomes clear that Tanner is increasingly caught up in the contest of the normal world of his home in Saddle Valley, N.J. and the world of espionage which constantly underpins it. This is summed up when one of Fassett's operatives, a man called Cole, briefs him on the consequences of the murder of a surveillance agent near the Tanner home:

'The people who conceived Omega realize what's happened. And they're beginning to see that they may be helpless. They want the man responsible to know that they'll be back. Sometime. A severed head means a massacre, Mr. Tanner. They took his [Fassett's] wife. Now he's got three kids to worry about'.

Tanner felt the sickness coming upon him again.

'What kind of a world do you people live in?'

'The same one you do' (p. 100).

As a result of what Fassett has told him, Tanner increasingly inhabits a paranoid world in which every action has another meaning; but as his inquiry about the world indicates, it is one that is omnipresent yet invisible to the general public in the same way that the television programmes that Tanner makes efface the mechanisms of their production. The final twist in the story is that Omega simply does not exist in the form that Tanner believes it does; his friends are not the Soviet agents that he thought they were and the whole plot was merely a paranoid fantasy dreamt up by the embittered Fassett, driven presumably by the murder of his wife. The story therefore dramatizes the

metamorphoses of paranoia: into the unsuspecting world of John Tanner comes the realization of a massive conspiracy involving those close to him; this is followed by a period when he over-interprets all events involving his friends; this is followed in turn by paranoid fears about the man who has alerted him to the initial conspiracy; then the narrative reveals that Tanner was right to feel paranoid owing to the intense paranoid fears of Fassett which so threatened him. It would be easy to read into this narrative a history of the Nixon Administration and the American citizen; even though *The Osterman Weekend* was published two years before Nixon resigned, like other thrillers that we have mentioned, it allows for a reading of itself as prophetic. A similar reading could be based on a wider view of paranoia in American life, charting the vicissitudes of the phenomenon since McCarthyism until it was found to reside in the delusions of figures in authority. However, the main point of the possible reading of *The Osterman Weekend* in this period - and by implication, the other Ludlum thrillers - is that their contents are orientated towards an understanding of them as manifestations of a justifiable paranoia.

Ludlum's next novel, *The Matlock Paper*, is as equally concerned as *The Osterman Weekend* with the thin veneer of civilization that covers a far more seedy, self-serving and complicated world beneath. James Matlock, an English professor at Carlyle University, Connecticut, is enlisted by the government to penetrate a drugs operation emanating from his campus. Apart from this image of crime in a seat of learning, the narrative also paints a more explicit picture of the nature of Connecticut life:

As were most adults not wedded to the precept that all things enjoyable were immoral, Matlock was aware that the state of Connecticut, like its sister states to the north, the south, and the west, was inhabited by a network of men only too eager to supply those divertissements frowned upon by the pulpits and the courts. What Hartford insurance executive in the upper brackets never heard of that string of 'Antique Shoppes' on New Britain Avenue where a lithe young girl's body could be had for a reasonable amount of petty cash? What commuter from Old Greenwich was oblivious to the large estates north of Green Farms where the gambling often rivaled the vaguer stakes? How many tired businessmen's wives from New Haven or Westport were really ignorant of the various 'escort' services operating out of Hamden and Fairfield? And over in the 'old country', the Norfolks? Where the rambling mansions were fading apotheoses to the *real* money, the blooded first families who migrated just a little west to avoid the new rich? The 'old country' had the strangest diversions, it was rumored. Houses in shadows, lighted by candles, where the bored could become aroused by observation. Voyeurs of the sickest scenes. Female, male, animal - all types, all combinations (p. 173).

Many other elements in the novel finally reveal themselves as other than they originally appeared. The novel opens with a scene involving the FBI man, Ralph Loring, which fills Chapter 1 and establishes the assignment of an innocent professor to an important job. Before too long, Loring has been killed and dispatched from the narrative. At another point in the narrative, Matlock has to visit an eminent Romance languages scholar called Lucas Herron:

He was a friend to many, a dependable refuge for the troubled, often the deeply troubled. And beneath his placid, aged, unruffled surface, Herron was a strong man, a leader. A quarter of a century ago, he had spent countless months of hell in the Solomon Islands as a middle-aged infantry officer. A lifetime ago, Lucas Herron had been an authentic hero in a vicious moment of time during a savage war in the Pacific. Now over seventy, Herron was an institution (p. 76).

Beneath Herron's surface reputation lies a life of narcotics dealing which throws his other attributes into crisis.³ The narration of this sequence utilizes a point-of-view technique close to Matlock, for example in such statements as

The explanation had to lie somewhere in Lucas Herron's immense capacity for sympathy (p. 76).

Unlike the narratives of Elmore Leonard, however, the items that go unnarrated are not left in abeyance. A reading of Lucas Herron's character is amply supplemented by the subsequent story. In fact, the narrative as it progresses is very much concerned with new realizations of the implications of changed social mores and the tarnished nature of authority. Matlock has a relationship with a graduate student, Patricia Ballantyne, whose father was a translator wrongly blacklisted by McCarthy (with the help of the FBI) in the 1950s (p. 116). Later in the narrative she finds out that Matlock is part of an FBI operation:

The girl had hammered away - quietly, acidly - at Matlock's cooperating with the government in particular and specifically the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She claimed not to be reacting to a programmed liberal response; there was simply too much overwhelming evidence that such organizations had brought the country ten steps from its own particular police state.

She knew firsthand. She'd witnessed the anguished aftermath of one FBI exercise and knew it wasn't isolated (p. 141).

For Patricia Ballantyne, the government agencies are all potentially corrupt, although her view has been weaned specifically on McCarthyism. The narrative of *The Matlock*

³ The kind of investment by the academic community in its celebrities and the sense of confusion created by the precarious cult of personality that surrounds them is demonstrated in the Paul de Man case (see Lehman 1991 especially pp. 141 ff; Polan in Robbins 1990; Prendergast in Robbins 1990 and Stern 1990).

Paper adopts a similar stance but in a different way. Before the denouement it becomes evident that the FBI has shamelessly used Matlock for its own ends, endangering his life on occasion. The arch-villain revealed at the end of the narrative is Carlyle University's "brilliant" president (p. 13) whom Matlock liked "immensely" (p. 19), Dr. Adrian Sealfont. The turnabout in loyalties is crucial:

Matlock found himself lurching forward toward the man he'd revered for a decade. Lunging at him with only one thought, one final objective, if it had to be the end of his own life.

To kill (p. 376).

That Sealfont is the villain is one thing, but the real proof of the duplicity of modern life is played out in the epilogue. Matlock has taken a holiday in the Carribean at the end of the whole business and one day buys a newspaper. On opening it he finds the story of the breaking of the narcotics ring at Carlyle: however, it is billed as a bizarre motiveless mass killing and no mention is made of the fate of Sealfont beyond the fact that he is missing (pp. 380-381). The end of the novel finds Matlock and Pat on the brink of returning to the United States in order to reveal the true story of the events described in the newspaper. Quite clearly this is where two strands of Ludlum's narratives can be shown to meet. The theme of uncertainty over where to place trust and the transformation of loyalties could be said to characterize a possible contemporary reading of *The Matlock Paper*. Wedded to this, though, is the duplicity entailed by the 'official version' of the facts in the narrative. It is crucial in these narratives that the untrustworthy authorities consolidate their position by means of access to the writing of history. *The Matlock Paper* serves as a demonstration, then, that a reading of the Nazi as the ultimate semantic element of the text to be decoded as 'untrustworthy' is always intimately connected with a reading of the Nazi as a representative of a hidden history. We will return to the inseparability of the semantic and the syntactic aspects of the paranoid genre at the end of this chapter, but for now it is worth noting that the Nazi as a semantic element is not simply interchangeable with, say, the Soviet agent in a spy story within the matrix of an immutable syntactic dimension of conspiracy.

If we consider the narratives of a couple of further Ludlum novels, the notion of conspiracy in them and the grounds for a specific 1970s reading become clearer. Ludlum's fourth novel, *The Rhinemann Exchange*, is set in the later years of the Second World War and involves the movements of Colonel David Spaulding between Europe, the United States and South America where he is assigned to undertake a deal with a German Jew residing in South America. This man is Erich Rhinemann and he possesses details of I.G. Farben/Nazi plans for rocket production. Towards the end of the narrative, following much uncertainty and bloodshed, it is revealed that Spaulding has merely been the puppet of three interested American businessmen who care nothing about the war but are interested in financial investments. Confronting them in the final pages Spaulding threatens them not with violence but with exposure:

David put his right hand into his arm sling and pulled out an envelope. It was an ordinary business envelope; sealed, thick. he placed it carefully on the table and continued.

This is the history of "Tortugas". From Geneva to Buenos Aires. From Peenemünde to a place called Ocho Calle. From Pasadena to a street . . . Terraza Verde. It's an ugly story. it raises questions I'm not sure should be raised right now. Perhaps ever. For the sake of so much sanity . . . everywhere (p. 431).

Once again, the hidden history theme takes centre stage. In these narratives which are set in the past the theme can be read as 'safe' owing to the fact that it is isolated in a historical moment long gone. Yet at the same time it can also be read as very much pertinent to the present: in *The Osterman Weekend* and *The Matlock Paper* the equivalent of the hidden history theme is the recurrent dual world metaphor.

This can be read as very 'unsafe': set in the present, it dramatizes the precarious nature of surface existence and the turbulence of another world with which it coexists.

Moreover, the revelation of a world underlying the recognized one is made all the more startling by the fact that it does not occur in an explicit war scenario. Like the Mafia in *The Godfather*, it is part and parcel of American life. As a result, in *The Osterman Weekend* and *The Matlock Paper*, the threat of corruption reveals itself in preëminently domestic situations: at the heart of the family in the former and amidst the surrogate family that makes up a campus community in the latter. In a later novel, the above mentioned themes all become significantly fused. *The Holcroft Covenant* deals with the

coming to fruition of a Nazi plot hatched in the closing stages of the war and although the narrative does not deal with all the participants of this plot they are made omnipresent actors in the story both by the extra-textual cues and the opening pages of the text. The back cover of the first American paperback edition of the novel (Ludlum 1979a) is dominated by large red letters which proclaim

THE FOURTH REICH
IS WAITING TO BE BORN.
THE ONLY MAN
WHO CAN STOP IT
IS ABOUT TO SIGN ITS
BIRTH CERTIFICATE

The opening prologue is set in 1945 and features a scene in which children are transported ashore from a German submarine; one of the men involved in the transportation says,

The Third Reich is dying. These are its rebirth. These are the *Fourth Reich*. Unencumbered by mediocrity and corruption. These are the *Sonnenkinder*. All over the world (p. 2).

Apart from these two cues, the massed children do not really feature explicitly in the narrative at all. Instead, it is the story, set in the 1970s, of Noel Holcroft, an American businessman who was the son of the deceased Nazi, Heinrich Clausen. Clausen is mentioned in the narrative as the

master strategist of the Third Reich, the financial magician who put together the coalition of disparate economic forces that insured the supremacy of Adolf Hitler (p. 4)

As an infant, Holcroft was taken to the United States by his American mother, Althene, who renounced both her husband and Nazism in general. After marriage to Richard Holcroft, she reared her son as an American citizen. In the opening pages of the book, Noel Holcroft is aware of this when he is summoned to a meeting with a Swiss banker. The banker tells him that his real father not only renounced Nazism himself and was involved in a plot to depose Hitler - Wolfsschanze - but that he has arranged for a sum of money now totaling \$780 million dollars to reside in a Geneva bank. Clausen decreed that his son should be responsible for distributing this money amongst Jewish families throughout the world as a means of reparation from the German people. In order to do this he must first find two other ex-German families who are entrusted with the same task in tandem with him; having made contact, they can then proceed to

release the money for charitable purposes. At this preliminary stage of the narrative, Holcroft believes he is charged with a worthy crusade on behalf of his honourable father. However, certain obstacles lie in his way.

Another key aspect of the text which is foregrounded by extra-textual cues is the high level of incident that accompanies Holcroft's quest. The reviews of the book think that this is worthy of note even for a five-hundred page novel; the first page inside the cover of the first American paperback is presented as follows:

#1 BESTSELLER
"A RIVETING, SUSPENSE-FILLED READ!"
 - Los Angeles Times

"SURPASSES LUDLUM'S EARLIER TRIUMPHS . . . A BOOK YOU CAN'T PUT DOWN BY A MASTER PLOTTER". (*King Features Syndicate*) "EXCITEMENT AND SUSPENSE ON EVERY PAGE". (*Milwaukee Journal*) "A SPELLBINDING TALE OF VIOLENCE AND EVIL". (*Cleveland Press*) "A ROLLERCOASTER OF CONFLICT AND CONSPIRACY . . . EVOKING THE SPECTER OF A MILITARISTIC GERMANY REBORN". (*John Barkham Reviews*) "LUDLUM GETS THE READER HOOKED FOR THE WHOLE CAREENING RIDE". (*Pittsburgh Press*) "A HYPNOTIC STYLE THAT LURES US ON, PAGE AFTER PAGE AFTER PAGE". (*Washington Star*) "THE POUNDING TENSION NEVER FALTERS". (*Cosmopolitan*) "IT GRABS THE READER BY THE THROAT AND NEVER LETS GO". (*Houston Chronicle*) "A COMPELLING, FRIGHTENING HAIR-RAISING CLIFF-HANGER". (*Chicago Sun Times*)

The reviews draw attention to a feature of the narrative which characterizes it from an early stage. When Holcroft returns to his New York apartment after his meeting with the Swiss banker he receives a call from a man called Peter Baldwin who is staying in the St. Regis hotel opposite Holcroft's apartment and who implores him to avoid the Geneva deal at all costs. Baldwin postpones his communication while he answers his door. Before taking this call, Holcroft has spent some time puzzling over why all the furniture in his apartment has been rearranged by unknown persons who have gained access to his rooms even without the the building's porter noticing. Holcroft finds his

second telephone suspended from a ceiling and a thirty year-old note in his bath which warns him that he is involved in a serious matter; part of the note reads

NOEL CLAUSEN-HOLCROFT
NOTHING IS AS IT WAS FOR YOU. NOTHING
CAN EVER BE THE SAME . . . (p. 43).

He then sees a blonde woman in what should be Baldwin's room in the hotel opposite. After making enquiries he finds that the woman has been dead for a month. Turning on the radio an announcement reveals that an Englishman named Peter Baldwin has been garroted in the St. Regis hotel. The telephone rings and Holcroft accepts a call from Geneva which tells him that the Swiss banker he met with regard to the \$780 million has committed suicide. Still reeling in shock, the doorman of his building calls Holcroft's apartment and begins to tell him that he *did* recently let some locksmiths into another part of the building. Before he can finish the message, Holcroft hears a gun being fired at the other end of the telephone and rushes down to find that the doorman has been shot through the throat. All this action takes place in the space of thirteen pages (pp. 37-50) and virtually no explanation is offered for the sequence of events until quite late in the narrative. The acute Hitchcockian sense of unknowing on the part of the protagonist only heightens the feeling of paranoia in the novel. Holcroft is continually in the dark until the late stages of the story; the narrative gradually furnishes information about the conspiracy but Holcroft receives precious little of this information until the end. In fact, the narrative reveals that the paranoia inducing is purposely executed by the villains. In Buenos Aires, soon after the death of Baldwin, Holcroft goes to meet a man named Graff whom he believes will help him in his quest. On hearing Holcroft's purpose Graff orders his servants to eject him from the grounds, implying that Holcroft is filth. In the midst of these sundry orders to his men, the narration is conducted from a point of view close to Graff:

One must follow the other in rapid succession until Holcroft has no judgement left. Until he can no longer distinguish between ally and enemy, knowing only that he must press forward. When finally he breaks, we'll be there and he'll be ours (p. 91).

At this stage, the narrative has not provided any information on who Graff really is and his attempts to induce paranoia in Holcroft do not have any clear purpose. Later, the arch-villain behind the Geneva plot makes a statement in the same vein as Graff's:

Holcroft must be convinced that Wolfsschanze is everywhere. Prodding, threatening, protecting . . . (p. 281).

This is the feeling that Holcroft seems to have for a great deal of the narrative, although by this time the narrative has provided information on the villain's intentions. When Helden (a woman with whom Holcroft falls in love) is abducted and he is attacked in a French village, Holcroft barges into a residential building to look for her and his assailants. Whilst in there,

Holcroft kicked the door in front of him; the lock broke, the door swung open, and he rushed inside.

It was empty, had been empty a very long time. Layers of dust were everywhere . . . and there were no footprints. No one had been inside that room for weeks (p. 223)

Although there is nothing unusual about this scene it does reveal the working of paranoia. All Holcroft's deductions have led him to believe that Helden is being held behind the door and he does not hesitate to break in; yet he finds no mark of her presence. This echoes a scene from *All the President's Men* that we have mentioned in a previous chapter in which Woodward is convinced he is being followed after a meeting with Deep Throat. He begins to run and then turns to face those who he imagines are pursuing him, only to find an empty street. All that has happened to Holcroft (like Woodward) convinces him that the most innocuous of objects is a tool of his persecution. This is because he is no longer living in the world he has known. Repeatedly, throughout the narrative, the words from the note in his apartment come back to haunt him:

Nothing is as it was . . .

That Holcroft has entered another, parallel, world is continually emphasized. Even when he sleeps with Helden he is aware of this:

He lay awake for a while, his arm across her shoulders and wondered how a girl who'd been entranced by *The Wizard of Oz* had grown up to become so skilled a practitioner in arts of deception and escape. She was from another world and he had entered that world with alarming speed (p. 246).

Not only Holcroft is dealing with otherworldly metaphors. It is very telling that Helden has been captivated by the story of *The Wizard of Oz*, which many readers will recognize as a tale of a land which is somehow like Kansas but is 'over the rainbow'. The crucial thing about this other world for Holcroft, however, is that it is where the Nazis have sovereignty.

One of the families with which Holcroft must make contact is made up of two brothers named Kessler; Holcroft meets Erich Kessler whom he finds to be a jolly academic. However, Kessler is in league with Johann von Tiebolt, the prime mover behind the Nazi plot. Von Tiebolt is, in fact, a member of the second family that Holcroft must meet. Holcroft is seduced in Portsmouth by the first sister of this family, Gretchen, and then falls in love with the other sister, Helden Tennyson, in Paris. However, the brother, Tennyson/Von Tiebolt, as well as being a Nazi is also a ruthless international assassin known as 'the Tinamou' who uses as his cover the fact that he is a foreign correspondent for the *Guardian*. Throughout the narrative there are examples of Von Tiebolt's ruthlessness: among others he kills his brother-in-law; an assassin partner; his sister, Gretchen, with whom he has enjoyed an incestuous relationship; and finally he attempts to kill Holcroft after having disposed of Althene. If he has not already been depicted as sufficiently ruthless, sadistic and perverse, the physical description of Von Tiebolt when Holcroft meets him suggests that there is something unusual about this character:

It was a face like no other that Noel had ever seen. It was an artist's rendering, the feature's too idealized for actual flesh and blood. And because it did not accept blemish, the face was cold. It was a face cast in marble, topped by glistening light-blond hair, perfectly groomed, matching the stone (p. 309).

Looked at in another way, Von Tiebolt is simply an example of a Nazi neo-classicist art object, numerous examples of which have survived from the Third Reich. Not only can he be said to represent evil incarnate but also he is the chief demonstration in the novel that a perfect surface almost always implies corruption beneath. This can be counterposed to Gerhardt, the Nachrichtendienst stalwart, who has been silently

opposing Nazism without being active until he is approached by Helden. Gerhardt is then shown to embody the ultimate deception: he is a senile old man in a French village who seems to care only for the pigeons he talks to in the square (p. 390). The contrast with Von Tiebolt is further emphasized as Gerhardt is the only man who reveals the reason why "The coin of Wolfsschanze has two sides":

There was another group of men who wanted Hitler killed. But for an entirely different reason. These men thought he had failed. They saw his weaknesses, his diminished capacities. They wanted to supplant the madness that *was* with another madness, far more efficient. There were no appeals for peace in their plans, only the fullest prosecution of the war. Their strategies included tactics unheard of since the Mongol armies swept through Asia centuries ago. Whole people held as hostages, mass executions of the slightest infractions, a reign of abuse so terrible the world would seek a truce, if only in the name of humanity (p. 407).

The whole novel is arranged around such formulations of the dual nature of the world. Before killing her, Von Tiebolt informs Althene Holcroft of FBI/CIA files on her son, adding

We are everywhere, Mrs. Holcroft (p. 469).

In this way the conspiracy clearly shows itself to have some roots in American soil. In fact the connotations of Geneva, as the \$780 million deal is referred to throughout, could almost be read as America. The most important thing about Geneva as a Swiss city is its isolationism and the freedom it affords, especially for financial purposes. Yet when the Israeli agent Ben-Gadíz buys arms at the end of the narrative, the city is referred to as

Peaceful Geneva, where such arsenals were available in quantities smaller than terrorists believed but greater than the Swiss authorities thought conceivable (p. 488).

The important fact about the double-sidedness of such inanimate objects as towns is that they are counterposed to the source of duality in humans. This is where the theme of families is important. As with *The Scarlatti Inheritance*, *The Holcroft Covenant* climaxes with the arrival in Europe of the grand matriarch, in this case, Althene Holcroft. In an almost comical scene during this part of the narrative, Kessler realizes that Holcroft is not telling the truth about a number of things and worries that Holcroft's deviousness is deeprooted. In the narration close to Kessler, the following occurs:

This was not a man in panic. It was a rational man with a deadly purpose . . . It was what Erich Kessler had feared. But for the arrangement of genes - and a headstrong woman - the man on the phone might be one of them. A *Sonnenkind* (p. 420).

Shortly after this the narration continues:

The chromosomes of Heinrich Clausen were in the son (p. 434).

Kessler is, underneath, every inch the Nazi. As a result, his assessments of character are based on racial and genetic theories; what makes Kessler's view almost comic is that he does not even consider that Holcroft's recent experience, rather than inherited characteristics, may have been the sole contributor to his (Holcroft's) new cynicism.

What is also interesting - although one may not wish to press this point too far - is that the Kesslers and the Tennysons have lived most of their lives without fathers. Holcroft, on the other hand, has had a step-father whom he has always loved, as the narrative reveals when Richard Holcroft is murdered (p. 191 ff). There is room for a reading of the effects of a father's absence (although this is not to say that single-parent families necessarily enhance fascist tendencies in individuals). The main point is that the genetic evaluation of character is invalidated as soon as it arises in the narrative. Although they are all of the same family, Johann and Gretchen are both corrupt Nazis, but Helden is not, and she even collaborates in the necessary assassination of her brother in the final pages. In fact, the final pages are crucial in drawing this strand of the narrative to a conclusion: a number of news clippings demonstrate the surface manifestations of Wolfsschanze; one of these is a *Deutsche Zeitung* article about "rehabilitation centers" for people guilty of crimes against (p. 498) the German Republic. Clearly these are training/indoctrination camps for the *Sonnenkind*, which is to imply that a thoroughly planned programme rather than natural aptitude is required for the establishment of the Fourth Reich.

Possible readings of *The Holcroft Covenant* and Ludlum's work in general in the 1970s have a wealth of material to assist them beyond the roller-coaster nature of the narrative as mentioned by the critics. The intrusion of a hidden, co-existent world upon another, surface world, as we have seen, is often couched in terms of the public sphere

disrupting the domestic world. The paranoia that this entails is very much a seventies phenomenon, as Ellsberg's comments on surveillance operations point out. In this period, also, surveillance is carried out less by foreign forces than by government agencies and internal security operatives; the Watergate building was burgled and bugged not by the Soviets but by an organization working for the incumbent President. This must be borne in mind before any flip assertions about beastly Nazis are made with regard to Ludlum's work. As we have seen, *The Holcroft Covenant* is one example of a Ludlum text which features a ruthless Nazi villain with a number of distinguishing characteristics. However, the Nazi is also part of a larger conspiracy called Wolfsschanze; as Gerhardt shows in his explanation of the two sides of the coin (above), Wolfsschanze does not stop with the demonic power of Hitler but goes beyond it to a much wider base. For Ludlum's texts, as we have seen, the most important battleground in society is the economic one. Ernest Mandel has interpreted this fact in a manner which suits his own thesis but does not suggest a historical reading:

In *The Road to Gandolfo* (1976), Robert Ludlum breaks the golden rule: crime does pay. And what a crime: nothing less than the kidnapping of a consenting pope, funded by a mafia boss, a British tycoon, and an Arab comprador sheikh! In this novel, the borderline between legality and illegality, high society and the underworld, the state apparatus and organized crime, diplomacy and treachery, has entirely disappeared Has the wheel now turned full circle? Has the systematic recourse by monopolists to illegal methods, the corruption of themselves and the state apparatus that defends their interests, reached a point where the universe of the crime story has been turned upside down and the criminal is once again, as at its origins, become an object of sympathy? (1984 p. 129).

Mandel's central idea is that the thriller as a genre began with Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and that its original intent has been distorted by the growth of bourgeois society. However, to pick *The Road to Gandolfo* as representative of Ludlum's work and of Mandel's thesis is misguided. The novel was actually issued under the name of 'Michael Shepherd' in 1975 and the reason for this is that Ludlum clearly thought of it as a caper novel. In fact, Ludlum adds, tellingly,

After all, it was the time of Watergate, and nobody could invent *that* scenario! I mean it simply wouldn't play in Peoria. At that point-in-time, that is (in 1982 p. 8).

Clearly, Ludlum's reading of his own work is more historical than Mandel's. This does not mean that an author's intentions necessarily define the meaning of a work for all

time. However, certain of Ludlum's statements delineate the frame of reference for possible contemporary readings of his texts far more cogently than the work of Mandel and Sutherland, for instance. Writing in 1988, Ludlum states that

For me, one of the truly great achievements of man is open, representative, democracy, and the greatest of all the attempts throughout history to create such a system was the magnificent American experiment as expressed in our Constitution. It's not perfect, but to paraphrase Churchill, it's the best damn thing on the block. But wait.

Someone's always trying to louse it up.

that's why I wrote *Trevayne* nearly two decades ago. It was the time of Watergate and my pencil flew across the pages in outrage. Younger - not youthful - intemperance made my head explode with such words and phrases as *Mendacity! Abuse of power! Corruption! Police State!*

Here was the government, the highest of our elected and appointed officials entrusted with the guardianship of our system, not only lying to the people but collecting millions upon millions to perpetuate the lies and thus the controls they believed were theirs alone to exercise. One of the most frightening statements to come out of the Watergate hearings was the following, delivered, in essence, by the nation's chief law enforcement officer:

'There's nothing I would not do to keep the presidency . . . '

I don't have to complete the exact sentence, the meaning was clear. *Ours*. The presidency and the country was *theirs*. Not yours or mine, or even the neighbours across the street with whom we frequently disagreed about things political. Only *theirs*. The rest of us somehow neither relevant nor competent. *They* knew better, therefore the lies had to continue and the coffers of ideological purity kept full so the impure were *blitzkrieged* with money and buried at the starting gates of political contests (Ludlum 1989 vii-viii).

The rest of this text makes it clear that Ludlum is still very much of the same opinion with regard to American politics. He also emphasizes that *Trevayne*, despite its original issue under the nom de plume of 'Jonathan Ryder', is very much a Ludlum text. The pseudonym in this case was imposed by a publisher who believed that bestselling authors should not have more than one book per year (Ludlum having already published *The Rhinemann Exchange* in 1974). The final sentences of the quote are probably the most illuminating for a reading of Ludlum's narratives; it is notable that he moves from talking about American politics to an almost imperceptible introduction of terms loaded with Nazi connotations. One need only take into account such words as "purity" and "*blitzkreig*" to realize that they are made to combine with "coffers" and American politics with consummate ease. The theme of Nazis here, as in the novels, cannot be considered without taking into account their relation to a view of contemporary American politics. Our discussion of this is not intended to serve the purpose of an exercise in validating our reading by reference to manifestations of an

authorial intention. However, the paranoid impulse spurred by corruption in government that, as Ludlum says, provides the wellspring of his early novels, should not be dismissed. Clearly there are grounds for suggesting that many readers shared similar views to Ludlum at the time his novels were first published. This is one way of conceiving the political character of these texts. It does not mean that the narrative thrust that leads reviewers to hail Ludlum as a storyteller can be ignored; but narrative thrust is not, by the same token, divorced from political considerations. Nor does this mean that we may find the area for possible contemporary readings of texts in the realm of authorial intention. In the case of Ludlum, the fusing of contemporary readings and his view of what the text is about is, to an extent, fortuitous; future readings of the text may change its meaning. Moreover, little attention has been given to the possible contemporary readings of these thrillers: reviewers concentrate on the roller-coaster aspect of the narrative while critics such as Sutherland and Mandel search for immutable meanings of paranoia and Nazi conspiracy. As we will see, there are other paranoid narratives which achieve an identity as Watergate texts but, like *The Scarlatti Inheritance* and *The Osterman Weekend*, actually predate Watergate in their conception.

The Parallax View

Loren Singer's novel, *The Parallax View* (1972) was originally published in 1970, two years before the first act of the Watergate scandal. However, the narrative can be considered as one of the chief paranoid stories of the early seventies. Much of this can be attributed to the film version of the narrative starring Warren Beatty which was released in 1974. As a result, the narrative undergoes a significant transformation in the way that possible readings of it are arranged. However, it is quite clear that the novel itself allows for a paranoid reading of it. In Chapter 8, we noted that the limiting of characters' perspectives and the adoption of point-of-view techniques enables thrillers to prevent an amoral universe with a minimum of narratorial comment. The narration of

The Parallax View enhances a paranoid outlook in a similar way. There is very little prose narration of the events in the story; the lack of description is therefore replaced by a great deal of dialogue and, consequently, very short paragraphs. Rather than narrating what is happening and counterposing it to the views of the protagonists, the narrative relies on the views of the protagonists to propel the narrative forward. Their suspicions and conjectures provide the narrative's *raison d'être*. The text opens with the four main actors watching a film (a newsreel?) of an unspecified event at which they were all present. Four other members of the group who were present in the film have died in mysterious circumstances. Among the conversations that ensue is one between Graham and Tucker, the latter of whom is in the dilemma of suspecting that the aforementioned newsreel death was actually a murder. The following extract gives a flavour of the way in which the narrative relies on dialogue for the creation of a paranoid outlook:

'Who would you voice this to? Whom could you show it to?' Tucker demanded. 'Who? That's the natural process that I followed. Go ahead'.

'The FBI', said Graham tentatively.

'Cranksville. No. How about the CIA. There's where you could get a hearing for something this devious. Eh? What about them'.

'What about them. I know some of them fairly well'.

Tucker grunted.

'So do I. Screw them'.

'I'll save you the time. We don't have any time. I am not recruiting you into the ROTC or the Party, or a committee for truth and justice seekers. You don't turn this into an arm of the bureaucracy, and say give me a report. What I have to do is break down the differences between you and me, or build up the agreement as a matter of survival. I want to make a plan for resistance to this, something, if it exists. And I'm convinced that it does.'

Agitated, he got up and paced the room, cracking his knuckles and rubbing his jaw.

'I've been living it alone. Now you can say it's paranoia, anything, I'm not the most stable of people, I know. But I'm equally certain that you will have the same effect, share the same hallucination, and that it won't be long either, before you will have satisfied yourself'.

'I have already', said Graham, 'I don't know enough about you to know whether you're stable or unstable, or paranoid enough to be institutionalised. Don't know whether I shouldn't be either', he added, smiling. He paused for moments, frowning, wanting to be objective, seeking to combine studied abstraction with the turbulence that Tucker had aroused.

'Christ, Tucker', he added, 'I never have the time or the ability probably to think about men and behavior and attitudes and governments and all the rest of it. I was brought up believing that man's shell was worth saving - the more exceptional the man, the more worthy of reverence, but that none of them weren't worth it. Here I'm living in a time when slaughter and repression are common and

individuals are smashed and trampled in terms of principles that are claimed to justify the opposite of what they state' (Singer 1972 p. 11).

Most of the passage depicts Tucker's inarticulate grasping to define the sense of isolation and lack of trust for authority that he feels. Crucially, Graham puts this into sober language, attempting to maintain a distance from the vicissitudes of contemporary society. At this point in the narrative, Graham has not become the victim of paranoia to the extent that Tucker has; however, he soon finds that he is prone to such an attitude. His last utterance in this passage, regarding the mendacity of publicly stated principles, is an indication that his reaction to the threat of conspiracy will be less aggressive than Tucker's. One way in which he first begins to feel the creeping paranoia is when he takes a fishing trip to the spot where the latest killing of a colleague has taken place. Gradually he realizes he is being watched and the watcher turns out to be the game warden's assistant. The sequence is narrated from a point of view close to Graham

The watcher was an enemy.

He had known it from the moment he had seen him there, above, between Graham and his car. He had interrupted his pleasure; he had noted his lack of a companion, and had not revealed knowing it. Most of all, he had inspired fear, a consciousness of evil in an area that Graham knew as a sanctuary (p. 16).

Graham manoeuvres him into a position in which they are visible from the road so that the fear of witnesses will prevent an assassination. Subsequently, Graham manages to find a room nearby with a jovial man named Pelikas. Before the narrative proceeds much further, Graham has found out that Pelikas is the person who killed Graham's colleague, and he did so after answering a newspaper advertisement for a mysterious agency. For our purposes, though, it is worth noting that Graham's fear of the game warden's assistant was perhaps justified, although unnecessary.

One of the consequences of the fear of conspiracy that the narrative dramatizes is the divisive nature of its impact on groups. Individuals pitting themselves against persecution by authorities are often able to identify their persecutors. When the persecution is directed at a group then there is uncertainty about who is working on behalf of the persecutors among the group. The private world into which the public

intrudes is illustrated in this case by the invasion of Graham's fishing sanctuary; the damage caused to personal security as a result of such invasions is demonstrated in the following:

'There's something you might as well know right now, Mal', Tucker said quietly. 'I don't really trust you, either'.

Graham nodded.

'I know', he said, 'Nor I you, nor Sidney, nor Peggy, nor, suddenly, anyone else' (p. 39).

In one sense, this is the same kind of paranoia that suffuses a film like *The Thing* (1982). When an alien penetrates a scientific team in the Antarctic, imperceptibly taking over the bodies of persons there, paranoid fears follow: suddenly one character refuses to be left alone with another. This is the mechanism that is at work at this stage in *The Parallax View*. However, it is supplemented by an emphasis on the fact that the source of paranoia is an organization rather than an individual. As Tucker says on killing someone he believes to be their adversary,

What we have here is a doctrine not a man! He's a part of a system that's already destroyed four better men than he's even seen!' (p. 46).

However, as we have noted, Graham is concerned about trends in contemporary society which he finds threatening and his chief concern is with their threat to "man's shell". Now, given that Tucker reveals himself to be paranoid to the extent of framing Graham and then attempting to murder him (p. 95), there is the possibility of reading *The Parallax View* as a rendering of the theme of corporatism against the individual. Tucker has waged war on what he sees as a doctrine and Graham, too, is worried about contemporary mores; however, the narrative allows the suggestion that this is actually the way that the villains characterize their objects. When Graham meets a representative of the organization called 'Parallax', which has been responsible for the murders, he finds out a little of their doctrine:

I have to thank you for appearing. I suspected your existence but how could I confirm it. I just never met your like, and I spend time delving into motive and thought pattern. What will you call all of them when the mass conspiracy trials begin in nineteen hundred and blank? Trotskyites, deviationists, anarchists, rightists, leftists, cavaliers, sans-culottes, Vendeeists? . . .

'Tentatively', Trumbull said, "'Disruptionists". It's both general and specific' (p. 109).

Implicit in this, then, is a battle over the meaning of individualism. Tucker and the Parallax representative, Trumbull, both characterize their opponents in terms of a flexible 'doctrine'. In contrast, Graham is concerned with "man's shell". It must also be remembered that the word parallax implies a distorted view, for example looking at the hands of a clock from an angle rather than from a vantage point directly in front of the clock face. A reading of the narrative could therefore be orientated to questions about the role of the individual in the face of paranoia-inducing events. The contest of individualism and corporatism, of course, has a long and varied genealogy in American history and is also clearly implicated in the thriller (see Palmer 1978). Yet it seems that there are the grounds for a more specific reading of the theme in the period in which *The Parallax View* was first published: as we have pointed out in Chapter 3, the upholding of the freedom of the individual to speak in the press was very much on the agenda in the early seventies. It is not inconceivable that readings of this text in the period could be arranged around the concept of the role of the individual in upholding the First Amendment when faced by persecution from government agencies. This was the chief way in which this theme was manifested elsewhere in America at the time and it would provide a convenient frame of reference for the a reading of the narrative. The pessimism in the final pages of the novel, when Graham is involved in a mysteriously fatal car crash, is tempered by the discovery of a policeman that it was no accident (pp. 142-143). The final question that is left unanswered regards whether the story of Parallax will be revealed to the public as a result.

The film version of *The Parallax View* (1974) provides some important points for discussion. The most salient of these are a result of its differences from the novel, the first of which concerns its explicit identification of one of the sources of paranoia. Where the book conjured up an image of assassination in the opening pages with the men running alongside and then jumping onto the automobile in the film watched by Graham et al., the film actually stages assassinations. Sutherland points out that the idea of assassination as spectacle and source of suspense became a trend in the 1970s

with such novels as *The Day of the Jackal* (1971) and *The Eagle Has Landed* (1975) (p. 171) but, clearly, such an analysis is inapplicable here. Apart from the fact that the novel predates both these texts, as we have demonstrated, assassinations in this period had a resonance in American life that went far beyond anything that a thriller could supply on its own. The film opens with a shot of the Space Needle in Seattle which was built for the World's Fair of 1962; rocket-like, it can be said to symbolize the New Frontier ethic of the Kennedy era. Representatives of the news media gather at the Needle's base as Senator Carroll and his wife enter the scene in a buggy which is preceded by female Chinese dancers dressed all in red. A newscaster called Lee Carter (Paula Prentiss) puts a question to the senator and then the media party follow him to the cordoned area which leads to the lift of the Space Needle. Amongst the media people is the character of Malcolm Graham from the book who, in the film, is called Joe Frady (Warren Beatty). He attempts to gatecrash the media party by telling a security man that he is with Lee; she denies it and thus he is excluded from the scene of the assassination. As drinks are passed round at the reception in the top of the tower, Senator Carroll makes a speech, extolling the virtues of the day - Independence Day - and his Independent status in the present campaign. He then adds,

Sometimes I've been called too independent for my own good . . .

and it is at this moment that he is shot dead. The assassin is chased by secret service men and falls off the top of the tower; a cut to a shot of the tower with a man in the foreground concludes with the man walking away, smiling. At the very outset, then, the narrative offers the possibility of a number of different readings of the assassination: as a media event, as precipitated by the political stance of 'independence', as connected with the Kennedy era, as an act co-ordinated by a number of people and as an event whose details remain untold.

The fact that the assassination is presented as an event with untold details provides a bridge to the opening titles scene and this, in turn, exhibits some of the key iconography of the paranoid text in the 1970s. Firstly, music is heard on the

soundtrack: without going into detail, it is worth stressing that the ambience created by the music in this film is carried over into other, similar, films. Michael Small's score for *The Parallax View* is very much like his score for *Marathon Man* (see below). In the barest sense, both juxtapose a brief intermittent and discordant keyboard section with a melancholy trumpet and Coplandesque main theme. The effect is more evident if the two soundtracks are heard consecutively, although there are obvious differences between the music of the two films. In the opening titles, this music supplements a very long shot of a committee sitting on a legal bench. The wood panel at the back has localized lighting while everything in the foreground is in darkness. The colour and effect of the light on the wood at this stage is reproduced in other sections of the film. Above the chairman, there is a large American eagle and the camera zooms very slowly towards the panel of men. While this takes place, the title music plays, the titles unfold and the words of the chairman of the committee become audible. He is saying that the committee's conclusion is that the assassin responsible for Senator Carroll's death worked alone. The juxtaposition of these elements, coupled with the information that is narrated in the initial opening scene create a certain feeling at this stage. Not only is there a possible reading of the committee as representing the Warren Commission (who worked on the Oswald case, drawing similar conclusions), but also the elements in the presentation of this scene imply that the committee is not telling the truth of the matter. This lighting is echoed most blatantly in the affairs of the Parallax organization: when their recruiter comes to meet Frady in his bedsit, the shabby place is lit almost identically; when the man comes a second time, close to the planned assassination, there is almost complete darkness in the bedsit. The murkiness implies conspiracy and cover-up. When such juxtapositions of the music and/or lighting recur in the text (and, as we shall see, other paranoid texts) a reproduction of this reading is encouraged.

Immediately following the opening titles a caption says "Three Years Later"; there is then a scene where it becomes clear that policemen are trying to frame Joe Frady. Dishevelled, Frady knocks at the front door of an old couple and asks if he can have

access to their back yard in order to look for his parrot. The absurdity of the scene is heightened by the fact that the camera presents it from the point of view of the old couple in the house rather than from an over-the-shoulder shot from outside the house of the couple answering the door. Frady goes quickly and harmlessly beyond the net curtained French windows at the rear of the room while watched by the bemused couple. Immediately, plain clothes police barge into the house from the front and accuse the couple of possessing drugs. Frady looks on through the window plaintively. The next scene is in a police station and Frady is surrounded by policemen. They are now accusing him of a different crime altogether and he not only counteraccuses them of framing him but deliberately antagonizes the assembled policemen, one of whom has to be restrained from hitting him. Frady's boss, Bill (Hume Cronyn), arrives to restrain Frady and deliver him from the scene. Back at their office, it becomes clear that Bill is the editor of a provincial newspaper and Frady is a journalist. The conversation makes clear that Frady has been regularly attempting to expose scandals and make a name for himself as an investigative journalist, an activity that Bill finds tiresome. The latter points out:

We're in the business of reporting the news not, creating it.

This is one of the major advances on the novel version of the text. Frady (Graham) is now explicitly an investigative journalist on the brink of an exposé. At this stage it need hardly be emphasized what such a role would mean to the contemporary audience. The key point to remember is that Alan J. Pakula directed *The Parallax View* two years before he directed *All the President's Men*; the news coverage of Watergate and the figure of the reporter in exposing aspects of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers which we discussed in Chapter 3 had already led to the role of the journalist becoming almost akin to that of a modern folk hero. Moreover, the Watergate affair in the real world was beginning to reach a denouement; *The Parallax View* was released in America approximately six weeks before the resignation of President Nixon, and it is likely that conspiracies and the role of journalists in exposing them, would be on the minds of many members of the public. In addition, the lighting in Bill's office is almost identical

to the lighting on the panel of the committee reporting the Carroll assassination. The reason for this within a close reading of the meaning of the lighting of the movie is, at first, unclear. However, Bill is rarely shown outside his office and he is constantly giving Frady rational reasons why the assassination and subsequent deaths are not part of a conspiracy. In addition, at a later stage he refuses Frady a pay advance in order that he might follow his leads on the plot. Bill is still in his office deciding whether to call for a re-opening of the Carroll case when he dies, supposedly from a heart attack, although it is clear he has consumed poisoned food. The final shot of him slumped in his chair is dominated by brown shades and localized lighting that is reminiscent of the committee scene. Bill's refusal to countenance the idea of a conspiracy echoes the response of the committee and is conveyed by the iconographic device of lighting. When he starts to suspect dirty work it is too late: he cannot retreat to the light because the assassination squad is already there, waiting to take care of him. We have argued that the semantic and syntactic dimensions of a genre text are difficult to separate in a reading. Clearly, this is one more case of this: what we call the film's semantic elements - such as lighting and settings - make up a large part of the syntax of the narrative. It must be clear that further references to the semantic aspect of the text also imply its overlapping with, and inseparability from, the syntactic.

The way in which all the film's semantic elements complement each other can produce a quite powerful reading of the conspiratorial nature of the text as rooted in a distrust of the corruption of authority structures. What sends Frady off on his quest is the knowledge he gathers that various witnesses to the Carroll assassination have all died within the last three years. Initially he is unwilling to accept that a conspiracy is afoot until he is visited by Lee Carter. She is clearly distraught and appeals to Frady, as an ex-lover, to investigate her claim that somebody is trying to murder her. He is very cool about the business: he suggests that this is not the first time she has displayed neurotic symptoms, that the deaths of their colleagues all have rational explanations and his behaviour is almost justified by her uncharitable treatment of him at the base of the

Space Needle in a previous scene. The scene that follows is at the morgue: Lee's body is on a slab and the end of the scene involves the camera drawing out slowly to show Frady nearby, regarding the corpse thoughtfully while the music which accompanied the committee plays on the soundtrack. This is the catalyst for Frady's investigative crusade, a fact that enables a reading of his integrity. This is underlined by his initial research in Salmontail, where one colleague called Arthur Bridges has died on a fishing trip, and by his search for Austin Tucker (no relation to the Tucker in the novel) who has gone into hiding after witnessing the Carroll assassination. In a bar in Salmontail (which is lit like Bill's office and the committee panel) Frady gets involved in an spectacular brawl provoked by a redneck deputy who provokes him outrageously. He is then befriended by the sheriff who promises to take him out to the place where Bridges was supposedly drowned, a fishing spot beneath the floodgates of a dam. When Frady is fishing at this place it becomes clear that the sheriff plans to kill him. Sirens indicate that the floodgates are about to open and the sheriff makes to shoot; Frady catches him in the face with a fish hook and they are both washed into the water as the deluge begins. The scene is reminiscent in this way of *Earthquake*, *The Towering Inferno* and *The Poseidon Adventure*. The appearance of water so prominently in the text offers, again, the possibility of reading it as a massive cleansing effect. Having survived this, Frady is again involved in a watery situation when he meets Tucker (William Daniels). The latter is very nervous and wary of Frady, believing that the journalist is only out to blackmail him. When Tucker says Stop acting like you're on the *New York Times* or something it is possible to read the irony of the situation as deriving from the very fact that Frady is acting as a sincere investigative journalist. Tucker refuses to speak to Frady except within the safety of his yacht. As the boat pulls out from the dock there is another long shot accompanied by music. Before too long, the boat has exploded killing Tucker and his bodyguard but not Frady. That this was going to happen is clearly indicated by the arrangement of semantic elements in the scene. Similarly, when Frady has penetrated the Parallax organization he uncovers a bomb plot involving an airbus. A suitcase is in

possession of a man Frady has seen at the Parallax building; Frady follows him to the airport. The man is the same one who appears in a photograph of the Space Needle reception shown to Frady by Tucker; he is also the new sandwich boy who calls on Bill at his office minutes before the latter dies. The man gives the suitcase to luggage handlers it prepare it for loading onto the plane carrying a senator. As the trolley carrying the case moves toward the aircraft, the camera follows it slowly while the music once again plays on the soundtrack. It is quite evident that such semantic cues enable a reading that identifies with that of the paranoiac; like the famous glass of milk in Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946), apparently innocent objects become heavily charged with suspicion of a conspiracy. Frady is no longer the deluded loner; his paranoia is justifiable.

A reading of these element in the conspiracy, then, produces two foci of paranoia in the narrative. The first is that appearances are rarely innocent; the second is an extension of this in that even figures of authority are likely to entail danger. It is after the spectacular fight in Salmontail that Frady finds out that he has been fighting a bigoted law-enforcement officer. It is also after he has partaken of the sheriff's help and hospitality that he discovers the sheriff works for the Parallax organization. Isolated in remote Salmontail as the police are makes them corruptible. In a similar way, Frady throws doubt on the splintered bureaucratic nature of government agencies, saying to Bill:

If you wanna use the FBI or CIA you don't have to infiltrate the whole agency to do it. At first I thought these killings were related only to the Carroll assassination. It's much bigger than that. Whoever's behind this is in the business of recruiting assassins.

One possible reading of this corruptibility is that it is sustained by a system of familiar objects. Very shortly after Frady makes this statement, he visits Parallax in order to receive an initiation which verges on indoctrination. In the text's noted set piece, which echoes that of the film of *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), Frady is seated in a darkened auditorium where he watches a large cinema screen. A montage of images is repeatedly shown, with increasing frequency. This is supplemented by music and each set of images is proceed by the captions ME, COUNTRY, HAPPINESS, LOVE, MOTHER,

and GOD. The familiarity of many of the images is constantly mitigated by their juxtaposition with other images and captions. Some are apparently innocuous (pictures of sun rays), some are not so innocent (pictures of Hitler at Nazi rallies). However, in the context of the Parallax organization all the images become ideologically charged in different ways. In the final scene of the film something similar happens. The band and majorettes are rehearsing in a large hall which will be the site of a massive reception for Senator Hammond. Hammond enters on a golf buggy as the band practices marching tunes; he is uninterested in anything but his golf swing as a group of young people in tiered seats turn over large cards in unison to show a composite picture of Washington, Lincoln, and then Hammond. Meanwhile, in the rafters of the building Frady is waiting, having followed some Parallax operatives only to lose them at this point and become trapped. In contrast to the rest of the hall's brightness of colour, the rafters are very shady and dark. From his vantage point Frady surveys a very American scene: a band, patriotic tunes, quasi-cheerleaders and a huge array of red, white and blue tables set out regularly across the hall. As the band strikes up again, Hammond prepares to leave the hall in his buggy; there is a close-up of three composite faces made consecutively by the cards. (It is difficult to make out the faces - two are caucasian, the last is not: one might guess that the unfamiliar faces are those of the assassinated Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King - that is to say, an extra-diegetic comment). A shot from the rafters suddenly kills Senator Hammond in his buggy, although it is clear that the unarmed Frady is not responsible. An aerial shot of the hall is presented in silence as the buggy slowly swerves out of control, fracturing the regularity of the red, white and blue tables. The effect suggests a distortion of the stars and stripes. As an amount of panic ensues, Frady realises that he is being set up and attempts to escape from the rafters. A long horizontal shot of Frady shows his silhouette in the rafters while the bottom half of the screen shows the bright, American scene in disarray. This arrangement of the scene can be read as a novel variation on the theme of the world of conspiracy as either below or outside the 'normal' world. In this formulation it is above the 'normal' world looking down on it and in a position of command. This is

underlined by the final moments of the film. Somebody has spotted Frady from below but he has noticed that directly opposite him there is an open door; as he looks, the screen is completely dark except from the very bright light in the doorway. Frady runs for the door and suddenly a silhouette with a gun appears and shoots into the camera as it faces the door. The brightness that the door represents echoes the brightness of the hall. If Frady's assassin is shady, he is also somehow bathed in the light of legitimate America represented below. It will be remembered that members of the Parallax organization have penetrated the building with ease and have donned security badges without any questions being asked. In addition, the revelation that the supposed assassin gets murdered by the group who hired him gives a new slant to the presumed motivations of Jack Ruby in his assassination of Oswald. The very last scene of the film acts with the first to provide a frame: the committee is once again in session in identical circumstances. The chairman pronounces that

There is no evidences of a conspiracy in the murder of Gerald Hammond
and the camera zooms out slowly once more, supplemented by music and the end titles.

One thing that is curious about the reviews of *The Parallax View*, as well as a number of the paranoid films in general, is that, when considered retrospectively, they seem overwhelmingly negative. After their initial appearances, a number of the films which we consider in this chapter are assumed by many critics to be classics at least of their genre (see, for example, the entries in guides such as Scheuer [1983] and Maltin [1991]). In the review of *The Parallax View* in the *New Yorker*, Penelope Gilliatt expressed her exasperation:

Organized murder for a political purpose, or one man's madness? Film after film now provides a bloody fantasy on the theme of an assassination conspiracy veiled for reasons muddled by filmmakers' wish not to nourish any particular popular enmity (Gilliatt 1974b).

Gilliatt's main complaint seems to be that the film is too hooked on the idea of a conspiracy or that the conspiracy is not specific enough. The film for her is saying too little:

The fallaciously titillating statement is merely that the arcane series of accidents is the work of 'conspirators' (1974b).

To this she adds the more explicit point that

No question is allowed of there being any defined political enemy (1974b)

Her reading is difficult to grasp immediately as the events of the narrative seem so definitely related to contemporary political upheavals. One way of conceiving of her comments is to put them into the same category as those reviews of Ludlum's novels which attest to narrative thrust rather than the Watergate overtones. For them, an exciting narrative could be exciting anywhere. For Gilliatt, it seems that the situation is similar, although she views it negatively; the film's openness to interpretation is what annoys her:

The film is adapted from an excruciatingly poor and overwritten paperback that typically attributes the multiple crime to a convenient mixture of the arbitrary and psychotically angered and the conspiratorial and ideologically vaporous. Any political conspiracy is consistently denied in the film by distantly seen male investigators who are arranged like singers in the 'Messiah'. The movie seems to have a stake in putting the crime down to the numinous belief that the accidental carries transcendent overtones. It is a queer notion for a country so concretely envisioned (1974b).

What she overlooks in this statement is that the narrative does not necessarily have to name the villain in order for the readers to make their own conclusions. Reader investments in the contemporary period would quite adequately furnish readings of the text with a more or less defined villain. When Gilliatt writes

The point of this movie seems to be to arouse outrage without offending anyone (Gilliatt 1974b), she is actually inadvertently testifying to the film's power: if it can arouse outrage it can surely provide the grounds for readers to make their judgment on the object of that outrage. This seems to be what Pakula is implying in a statement contained in the movie's publicity:

Real terror does not come from any ghoul but out of the audience's fantasy terrors (Publicity Brochure for *The Parallax View* 1974).

As we have noted before, what is left unsaid can be filled by specific as well as general investments. Pakula makes it clear that he was aware *The Parallax View* was not simply a horror story but a political thriller, utilizing a specific ideological verisimilitude in tandem with the mechanism of suspense. He sees the film as

the exploration of secret plots and dangers and manipulations that may exist within a society where so much has been buried and made secret in the name of preserving stability. The fact that it dealt with

plots that would fulfil even the most paranoid was attractive to me (Publicity Brochure for *The Parallax View* 1974).

While *Time* was, like other publications, negative about the film as a whole, it also recognized that it was characterized by a thriller's specific ideological verisimilitude.

Richard Schickel wrote

The paranoid thriller is an expanding genre in the movies and popular fiction.* The idea is to start from a thinly fictionalized version of a political tragedy like one of the Kennedy assassinations and build on it a thickly embroidered explanation that caters to the suspicion that such murders are plotted by a malevolent Establishment. It is apparently comforting for many people to believe that the course of the world is changed more by rational planning, however evil, than it is by irrational individual actions.

*Recent films include *Executive Action* and *The Conversation* and novels like Richard Condon's *Winter Kills* and Frederick Forsyth's *The Dogs of War* (Schickel 1974a).

His misgivings about *The Parallax View*, recognizing the importance of verisimilitude, are quite different from Gilliat's. For Schickel, paranoia in itself is - even in the face of Watergate - simply paranoia. The dilemma which he poses for the resolution of paranoia seems to have no knowledge of Woodward and Bernstein as a frame of reference:

If the hero can break the conspiracy unaided, it cannot be much of a conspiracy. If, on the other hand, the conspiracy is all powerful, then the audience is robbed of the basic pleasure of identifying with the protagonist's triumph over the odds (Schickel 1974a).

If we compare contemporary American reviews with their British counterparts, the contrast economically dramatizes the possibility of two main readings of paranoia in the text. The *Spectator*, for instance, calls *The Parallax View* a genuine thriller of the post-Watergate age (Fallowell 1974) while, at a different point on the political spectrum, the *New Statesman* refers to the plot of the film by declaring

Watergate substantiates that: one is not paranoid (Coleman 1974).

For Gilliat, then, the paranoia is not specific enough while for Schickel it pretends to be too specific; for the British, a reading of the paranoia in the text, it is implied, will make the paranoia specific. In so far as the extra-textual cues can be said to arrange the text for a possible reading of it, the American reviews highlight the general mechanism of paranoia or, put another way, the syntactic aspect of the text as a thriller. Yet, as a result of the text's framing of its own verisimilitude, the narrative can also be said to allow for a specific reading of its semantic elements in terms of a particular meaning of

paranoia. *The Parallax View* was not the only paranoid text of this period to be viewed by critics as a film giving a false perspective on American life.

The Conversation and Six/Three Days of the Condor

Two other texts of the period which depict malevolence in the midst of surveillance operations were the subject of mixed reviews. *The Conversation* (1974) was an awaited and heralded film by *The Godfather* director, Francis Ford Coppola. Based on Coppola's original screenplay, the film features Gene Hackman as Harry Caul, "The best bugger on the West coast". Caul is an obsessive freelance surveillance operative who is, at the beginning of the film, supervising a team who are trying to record a conversation. The film does not contain conventional thriller action sequences such as chases and gun-play; instead, it relies on a great deal of dialogue, supplemented by visual set pieces, to effect its diegesis. It is possibly this fact which has made *The Conversation* ripe for complex critical exegeses of its 'meaning'. Using concepts derived from Kristevan and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Kaja Silverman (1988 pp. 87 ff) has recently addressed the way in which the film can be seen to embody a "maternal voice". Her reading of the text seeks to emphasize that Harry is in a constantly fluctuating relationship with a female voice which he either recognizes as a beloved part of himself to be reincorporated or as abject, to be denied and repulsed. In addition, Silverman points out that Harry's role as surveillance operative is to represent the 'cinematic apparatus'. Much of this argument hinges on a discussion of the opening sequence, in which Silverman states that

Exteriority is shown to be the necessary guarantee of Harry's identification with the apparatus. This exteriority is perhaps most strongly marked in the opening zoom, which at no point aspires to anything like intimacy with its subjects (p. 88).

Silverman's point about exteriority is well taken but it must be extended beyond the realms of the cinematic apparatus. We could say that there are three possible kinds of exteriority to be examined here. Silverman discusses a correspondence between a

cinematic exteriority and a psychoanalytic one; what she excludes from her discussion is their correspondence with a notion of sociological exteriority. Harry's exteriority is not solely a psychological one which is enhanced by certain modes of cinematic narration; it is always an exteriority in respect of the social world depicted in the text.

Silverman argues that the 'exteriority' of the narration of the film is very much bound to the reading of Harry's exteriority, that Harry represents a position from which the narration takes place. If we examine the all important opening shot of the film it can be seen that it commences with a long, high shot of Union Square in San Francisco. It is not a bird's eye view which shows the top of actors' heads but more like a rostrum camera shot. There is a very slow zoom on people in general in the square, but the most volatile of the people seems to be a uniform-clad mime artist whose movements mark him out from the rest of the people milling around. He avoids various dogs and, in the same slow zoom at medium shot, Harry enters the scene although his back only is seen. At this point on the soundtrack a Dixieland jazz tune is gaining volume and this is interspersed with wierd distorted sounds which are later encountered as Harry works on the Union Square tapes. The mime artist follows Harry for some time and then gets fed up and leaves him. The next shot is a close one of a man on a nearby rooftop peering through a telescopic sight on a rifle. All of these constituents of the opening sequence say something about the narrative, from the surveillance to the hint of death in the rifle. What Silverman does not emphasize, however, is the role of the mime artist in this sequence: he is frustrated with Harry, who walks away from both him and the camera. If anybody at this stage represents the cinematic apparatus then it is the mime artist, whose entire vocation is based on the visual. Harry refuses to take part in the mime-artist's game, preferring not to be observed. So, in so far as he is observed by the camera and the audience it is in terms of the visual. Moreover, when Harry constantly replays the tape of the conversation later in the film, the narrative continues with the original *visual* version of it. The words are spoken and replayed on the soundtrack but the actors are to be seen uttering the words on the screen. Clearly,

Silverman is right to suggest that the narration of the film is very much tied up with Harry's view of the events: his dreams, his premonition of murder, an inner scream, etc., are all part of the narrative. However, Harry's exteriority can be said to be more substantial than Silverman allows: he is observed throughout the film and it is his job to observe; but it is also clear that he is almost totally prevented from seeing what he wants to see. His actual observation of the murder takes place by way of a microphone he fits in the adjacent room of the Jack Tar hotel and by way of a bloodied hand seen through translucent glass. He immediately retreats between the covers of a bed having turned on the television, not for the visuals but merely to block out the world by means of sound. Harry's exteriority, therefore, can be said to be an exteriority from the realm of vision that so concerns the audience. In addition his exteriority can be established in another way: the two roles in which Hackman had appeared prior to *The Conversation* - in *The French Connection* and *The Poseidon Adventure* - cast him as the central character but also as a definite outsider. The narrative of *The Conversation* constantly reveals him to be an outsider again; he has no social life and simply does not fit in with the people he meets. Also more immediate elements in the narrative must not be ignored: Harry's clothes, his unfashionable plastic mac, his sparse apartment, his moodiness and eccentricity, all contribute to a reading of him as an outsider. Moreover, there are good reasons for his exteriority: after Harry has already shown himself time and again to be a loner afraid of people interfering with his private life, he allows Meredith (Elizabeth MacRae) to seduce him only to find that she has stolen the tapes of the Union Square conversation while he slept.

The point about this contestation of Silverman's reading is that it moves toward a possible political reading rather than a hidden psychoanalytic one. Harry's exteriority can be viewed as an offering with which the audience might interact; discussing the tapes in the surveillance van opposite Union Square he says

All I want is a nice fat recording.

The syntagm "All I want is a nice fat . . . " would usually be filled by "pay packet" in many circumstances. This is counterposed to Harry's reaction soon after this scene. For the first time he begins to listen to the contents of a tape he has made, and then to act upon it. On visiting the building of the Director (Robert Duvall) who has commissioned him to make the tape, he is first met by Martin Stett (Harrison Ford) who informs him that the Director is not available and that he will take the tapes from Harry. A scuffle for the package ensues and it is clear that Harry has now developed scruples that go against his desire for a nice fat recording. Harry's previous lack of scruples is well outlined by a fellow surveillance operative, Bernie Moran (Allen Garfield), who is professionally intrigued by one technical innovation that Harry has used but which has caused three deaths on the East coast. In fact, a cynical reading of the whole film could be that Harry's downfall is a result of his failure to be totally impassive in his most recent assignment. His concern about a possible impending murder causes him to misinterpret the tape and to misidentify the murder victim. (In the 1992 film, *Homicide*, a policeman tells a joke in which a prostitute declares that she lives by the rule that, when you start coming with the customers, it's time to give up: this is essentially Harry's dilemma in such a reading). Another point which must be made about Silverman's reading of *The Conversation* is her emphasis on the feminine: this revolves around the voice of the woman on the tape, Ann (Cindy Williams) who Harry meets in the dream. Yet it is the (supposed) boyfriend, Mark (Frederic Forrest)⁴ who continually utters the fatal words in the narrative,

He'd kill us if he had the chance.

The paranoia engendered in one camp by paranoia existing in an opposing camp which we have seen to be a part of the logic of Watergate is here reproduced. Moreover, when Harry finds out that he has made a mistake about the identity of the murder victim he becomes completely paranoid. In the final scene of the film he receives a call from Stett

⁴ Silverman calls this character "Paul (Michael Higgins)"[sic] p. 88; Paul is actually the man with the 'hearing aid' who is part of the surveillance team at Union Square and who Harry later meets again at the convention before chasing through the streets in a packed car for a party at Harry's workplace. As we have mentioned, the role of the boyfriend is played by the famous American actor, Frederic Forrest.

who replays over the phone Harry's own saxophone playing of a moment earlier; Harry then strips his entire apartment and searches for the bug. This is important for a possible contemporary reading of the text. The psychoanalytic reading of the film does not necessarily countenance the ways in which the narrative offers the possibility of reading with regard to historical events. Although Harry's reaction seems extreme, provided the narration is reliable - and there are grounds for assuming that it is, despite the representations of Harry's inner state - *The Conversation* can quite adequately work as an illustration of Kael's idea of justifiable paranoia (see beginning of this chapter). Somebody is out to get him, he has witnessed their work and he knows that he is being observed.

The Conversation received more positive reviews than some of the other films in this section. However, they tended to treat it as a cinematic classic with only a passing contemporary relevance. Part of this had to do with the fact of the film's genesis; in the publicity for the film, Coppola explains

I started work on 'The Conversation' screenplay right after the opening of 'You're a Big Boy Now' in 1966 and completed a first draft in 1969. At that time there were very few original screenplays being written, and I had resolved to do films only from my own original stories.

I don't remember how I first became interested in the subject matter, but right from the beginning I wanted to make a film about *privacy*; using the motif of eavesdropping and wiretapping, and centring on the personal and psychological life of the eavesdropper rather than his victims. It was to be a modern horror film, with a construction based on repetition rather than exposition, like a piece of music. And it would expose a tacky, subterranean world of wiretappers; their vanities and ethics; the magazines they read; and the women they value. Ultimately, I wanted the film to come to a moral and humanistic conclusion. I had no idea of what was to come in 1973. White House plumbers, Watergate, Ellsberg files, of course were unfamiliar phrases to me, even now I'm not completely sure of how these names and events relate to this film, despite so many coincidences and prophecies (the 'Uher 500' tape recorder). As I think about it now it's done, I realize that I wasn't making a film about *privacy*, as I had set out to do, but rather, once again, a film about *responsibility*, as with 'The Rain People' (Publicity Brochure for *The Conversation* 1974).

Despite his initial disclaimer it is clear that we have a more complex situation on our hands. This is one more situation where a popular text is actually the precursor of a particular socio-political phenomenon. Yet, at the same time, to say this is to suggest that there is a 'text itself' which precedes the arena of its reading. To be sure, the original screenplay is concerned about surveillance but much of the possible audience investment in the phenomenon is clearly shaped by contemporary events as Coppola

appears to be hinting towards the end of the quote. The 'prophetic' nature of the narrative derives from the fact that surveillance rather than another theme of the film (for instance, loneliness) is heavily inested with importance. Silverman's reading of the film in terms of the female voice is very powerful: it lays bare the device of surveillance and shows that it merely acts as a mask for a dynamic that is much more deep seated. However, Silverman's is just another reading which can be historically located on its own post-Lacanian terrain. That *The Conversation* advertized itself, following the critical praise for *The Godfather*, as something more than a popular film, is incorporated into the reviews. The historical transience of possible readings is mitigated for reviewers by the fact that *The Conversation* seems to be, for them, something more than 'of the moment'. Simon, in his own way, plays down contemporary references by dubbing the film a

quasi-documentary about wire-tappers at work (Simon 1974c p. 40).

Rather than noting the possible specific investments accruing to surveillance for the audience in the early seventies, he treats eavesdropping as a purely cinematic device:

The film disintegrates into the very thing it purports to be: an invasion of the spectator's privacy with glaring visual jolts and aural jabs (Simon 1974c p. 48).

In slight contrast to her comments on *The Parallax View*, Penelope Gilliatt in the *New Yorker* seems more willing to countenance tenuous connections between the film and contemporary events. She points out that

Francis Ford Coppola began the script in 1966, long before we learned our repulsive familiarity with bugging, telephone tapping, and tape recordings tampered with so that they mean the opposite of what the original said (Gilliatt 1974a).

Yet, she also hints at further dimensions to the phenomenon of surveillance in the concurrent climate when she writes of Harry in the earlier part of the film that he

prefers to think of himself as the employee of a Private Party, concealing from himself that his Private Party may be anyone, including the President (Gilliatt 1974a).

The reviewers of such films are clearly avoiding certain facile equations of the historical period and the text. In fact one could say that, in reaction to such equations, they are actually attending to the specificity of these films. Rather than treating the texts for the topical meaningfulness of their content they are supplementing or replacing such

readings with commentary on the formal aspects of films. A critic like Pauline Kael is renowned for this kind of work. Regarding *The Conversation*, the comments of Cocks are a prime example of this:

The Conversation is a film of enormous enterprise and tension. It also gains, because of Watergate, and added timeliness, but it does not depend on it. More than anything it is a film about moral paralysis, a subject that does not need headlines to lend it importance (Cocks 1974a).

Cocks praises the film's formal attributes, he notes potential points of contemporary investment whilst playing them down and attributes what he sees as the film's success to the timeless nature of its theme. As we have noted in our discussion of the hard-boiled story, the narrative prose of a written text can work in such a way as to efface its own production. If a particular narrative discourse is sufficiently widespread and formalized it becomes almost transparent. In our discussion of Sauerberg in Chapter 4 (above) we noted that this was possible for a range of narrative discourses although the one that both Sauerberg and MacCabe see as imperative is (classic) realism (see also Chapter 7, above). If this is the case, then some of the formal aspects of the narration *The Conversation* - such as the tension mentioned by Cocks - can be said to efface their mechanisms of production. That is to say that they are not foregrounded for a general reading and they are certainly not elucidated in the analyses which are offered by reviewers. In addition, the supposedly immutable and 'timeless' themes of the text - like the themes of a specific genre - can be proved to be subject to change and historically specific readings. So, taking Cocks' statement as a delineation of three possible major regimes in which to read the film, we are left with the film's 'timeliness'. As we have discussed, this 'timeliness' is, in the main, produced by a specific reading, by investments which are already enacted to fill the text's potential indeterminacies. The film is not simply topical; instead, it has the potential to be topical. This may seem a fine distinction but we will pursue its implications further at the end of this chapter.

If exteriority and surveillance appear to be possible themes of *The Conversation*, then it shares these in common with a very different text which is called *Six Days of the*

Condor in its novel version and *Three Days of the Condor* in the film version. Both *The Conversation* and *Condor* are concerned with a character who has no real home life and who is dedicated to a tedious mode of surveillance with heavy political overtones. The protagonists undergo an enforcement of moral scruples and in *Condor* this is effectively acted upon in certain ways. The novel version of this text by James Grady (1975; originally 1974) takes the outsider theme but places it within the specific ideological verisimilitude which is characteristic to the thriller. In fact, if anything stands out about *Six Days of the Condor* it is its striving for an atmosphere of accuracy. At the very beginning of the text there is a preface which says

The events described in this novel are fictitious, at least to the author's best knowledge. Whether these events might take place is another question, for the structure and operations of the intelligence community are based on fact. Malcolm's branch of the CIA and the 54/12 Group do indeed exist, though perhaps no longer under the designation given to them here (p. 5).

This is a familiar device to the 1970s thriller reader. As Sutherland points out

Bestselling novels of the 1970s are packed hard with factual detail, authentication and solidity of specification, all acquired by 'research' . . . (1981 p. 144).

A foreword of the kind used by *Six Days of the Condor* can be found, for instance, to explain post-war Nazi organizations in *The Odessa File* (Forsyth 1973 ix-xi). As can be shown with regard to Grady's novel, they are only one of a number of textual devices that can be employed to ensure a certain level of verisimilitude. The opening page of the novel backs this up:

Four blocks behind the Library of Congress, just past Southeast A and Fourth Street (one door from the corner), is a white stucco three-story building. Nestled in among the other two houses, it would be unnoticeable if not for its color. the clean brightness stands out among the fading reds, grays, greens and occasional off-whites (p. 7).

The novel describes a real place and continues in this mode for some pages, utilizing the present tense even when describing the protagonist's co-workers and their habits. It then almost imperceptibly slides into a past tense narrative. Other examples of the verisimilitude effect are carried out on a smaller scale. When Malcolm attempts to gain entry to a room by using an identity card to force the lock (as is so often witnessed in thrillers) the card breaks (p. 48). The most pronounced example of this appears with the technical discourse on silencers

A pistol, while effective, can be a difficult weapon to use under field conditions, even for an experienced veteran. A pistol equipped with a silencer increases this difficulty, for while the silencer allows the handler to operate quietly, it cuts down on his efficiency. The bulk at the end of the barrel is an unaccustomed weight requiring aim compensation by the user. Ballistically, a silencer cuts down on the bullet's velocity. The silencer may affect the bullet's trajectory. A silencer-equipped pistol is cumbersome, difficult to draw and fire quickly (p. 45).

A moderately attentive reader will recognize an over-use of jargon here: "aim compensation" is a wholly unnecessary quasi-technical term and the sentence which follows could easily be replaced by "silencers slow down bullets". Clearly the jargon adds to the verisimilitude even if some readers may find it unconvincing. The key verisimilitudinous device in the text, however, is the occupation of the protagonist, Ronald Malcolm. He is involved in surveillance for the CIA but it is a far from glamorous job: he is paid to read thrillers in order to detect the presence of any codes, messages or subversive content which might affect national security. Like Harry Caul, therefore, he is involved in almost obsessive, tedious surveillance and has no family attachments to distract him from his occupation. A colleague notices some discrepancies in receipts and Malcolm is dismissive about it and thinks no more of the problem until later in the narrative. He goes out to lunch only to find on his return that the building in which he works has been 'hit'; everybody there is dead and he realises that he must flee. After kidnapping a young woman he is fortunate enough to strike up a relationship with her. In the book, the relationship is rather sudden and the woman is a young student. The film version portrays this woman (Faye Dunaway) as an older person who is a photographer and the relationship develops out of the mutual confinement. This is where there is a departure from the Harry Caul character of *The Conversation*. In the space of developing domestic arrangement Malcolm finds himself becoming subject to paranoia. Suffusing *The Conversation* at all times is the paraphernalia of surveillance which makes Harry's paranoia understandable if other-worldly. In *Condor*, the other-worldliness is, like Ludlum's narratives, juxtaposed with a 'normal' world. Malcolm has got his job with the CIA by an incredible accident while in college and, despite his lack of attachments, is a very ordinary person. His new domestic situation, coupled with the fact that (in the book) he is bed-ridden with flu, provide a backdrop of

normality against which Malcolm is pursued by killers. When a mailman calls at his new girlfriend's home while she is out he has no worries about dealing with him:

'Good morning sir, how are you today?'

The mailman's cheer seemed to infect Malcolm. He smiled back and said hoarsely, 'Got a little cold. What can I do for you?'

'Got a package here for a Miss . . . ' the mailman paused and slyly smiled at Malcolm. 'A Miss Wendy Ross. Special delivery, return receipt requested'.

'She's not here right now. Could you come back later?'

The mailman scratched his head. 'Well, could, but it would sure be easier if you signed for it. Hell, government don't care who signs, long as its signed' (p. 77).

As Malcolm looks for a pen, the mailman makes his attack. Both the film and the novel make the ensuing battle a pivot of the text as a whole. Although the events of the narrative have created an amount of tension in that Malcolm (Robert Redford) knows he is pursued, the mailman initially seems an innocent character. When the fight takes place, the film in particular pays great attention to the use of household objects which are used within the very domestic space. As in other paranoid texts, the most commonplace items begin to present a threat which the narrative confirms is wholly justifiable. It is this juxtaposition of the commonplace with the threat of conspiracy which contributes to such thrillers' suspense. This is very evident, for instance, in Victor Marchetti's novel, *The Rope Dancer* (1974; originally 1972): Paul Franklin acts as a double-agent for the National Intelligence Agency and Hungarian intelligence and the novel deals with his oscillation between professional life and domestic duties. Like *Condor*, much of the action is set in the highly charged but not physically volatile centre of Washington D.C. If Harry Caul can be said to represent full exteriority in his paranoia while Paul Franklin's life in *The Rope Dancer* has a firm domestic basis, then Malcolm in *Condor* falls somewhere in between.

The resolution of the narrative of *Condor* plays on the fact that the conspiracy seems to be everywhere while still retaining its anonymity, as in *The Parallax View*. The key to this lies in a fact which is heavily emphasized by Marchetti and Marks in *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*. As we have mentioned Chapter 5, their diagram of the

American intelligence (pp. 98-99) community illustrates their stress on the splintered nature of secret bureaux at the heart of government. Throughout the Watergate affair and especially during the fight for the release of the White House transcripts what was at issue was that organizations close to the government were working without the president's awareness. As it turned out, Nixon was more cognizant of the movements of the Committee to Re-elect the President than the tapes revealed. However, as we have mentioned, the role of agencies such as the FBI and the CIA and their subdivisions still remains hazy. This splintering of power between groups who have no recognizable centralized entity to whom they are responsible in government features in a number of paranoid texts. In *Condor*, it is manifested by the criminal activities of Maronick and Atwood which result in Maronick's despatch of Atwood for fear that he is hatching his own plot. Maronick explains to Malcolm:

In 1968, as part of their aid to a beleaguered, anti-communist government, the C.I.A. assisted certain Meo tribes in Laos with the main commercial activity of that area, narcotics production. Mixed among all the fighting going on in that area there was a war between competing commercial factions. Our people assisted one faction by using transport planes to move the unprocessed opiate product along its commercial route. The whole thing was very orthodox from a C.I.A. point of view, though I imagine there are many who frown on the U.S. government pushing dope.

As you know, such enterprises are immensely profitable. A group of us, most of whom you have met, decided that the opportunity for individual economic advancement was not to be overlooked. We diverted a sizable quantity of unprocessed high-quality morphine bricks from the official market and channeled them into another source. We were well rewarded for our labour (p. 142).

The receipts queried at Malcolm's division are connected with the drug transactions and have ultimately caused it to be 'hit'. This is the text's pay-off: an incremental corruption has led to layer upon layer of deceit including numerous deaths. It is also at this point that the narratives of the film and the novel depart significantly. In the film, Malcolm eventually takes the story of the whole affair to the *New York Times*. In the book there is a more emphatic denouement bordering on revenge. Wendy, Malcolm's girlfriend, has (he believes) been fatally shot. This goes some way in the terms of the narrative to justifying Malcolm's action in tracking down Atwood, shooting him through both kneecaps and tying him up. After Malcolm has left,

Atwood lay very still for some time after Malcolm had left. Slowly, weakly, he tried to pull himself and the table across the floor he was too weak. All he succeeded in doing was knocking a picture off the table. It fell face up. The glass didn't break into shreds he could use to cut his bonds. He resigned

himself to his fate. He slumped prone, resting for whatever might lie ahead. He looked briefly at the picture and sighed. It was of him. In his uniform of a captain in the United States Navy (p. 146).

The naval uniform is obviously important. Firstly, Malcolm uses it as a disguise in the next passage of the book in which he executes Maronick in an airport toilet. But also the reference to Southeast Asia and the drug deal implicitly link Atwood to the military operations in Vietnam. In the face of such rottenness Malcolm's only option in the book is to do the dirty work and to actually join the system on his own terms. In the sequel to the novel, *Shadow of the Condor* (1978; originally 1975) he does further work for the CIA only to find himself embroiled in further webs of duplicity. In the film version similar conclusions are reached but with different consequences. Kael notes,

As in 'The Parallax View', the enemy is omnipresent and essentially invisible. There's no solution to the mystery. The message is that the past was corrupt and there may not be a future. In a concluding political dialogue, Robertson speaks, Nazi-fashion, for the cynical forces of darkness, and Redford defends democratic processes. But where can he go for help? Who isn't part of the conspiracy? He has only one hope: the *Times* (Kael 1975).

The film version therefore is in tune with certain themes of paranoia in the period that we have discussed already. We will return to this in a moment, but it is worth considering what Kael believes to be the overall effect of the film. Somewhat enigmatically, she declares,

Films like 'Parallax' and 'Condor' don't merely not give you anything - they seem to take away from you (ibid.).

From the review it seems that Kael believes the film to be overfilled with gloom and that what the film takes from the viewer is hope. The question is whether the *New York Times* itself is part of the conspiracy or not. Kael's remarks are overwhelmingly negative, then. Essentially the same view is taken by Cocks:

A piece of dotty, slightly paranoid intrigue, *Three Days of the Condor* promises little and keeps its word (Cocks 1975).

The inconclusive nature of the film, like that of *The Parallax View* seems to be irksome to these critics and it is very telling that Cocks should add that

Everything in the movie is familiar (ibid).

The paranoia that the film manifests can be found in other films; but how much of this familiarity for Cocks is based on what was happening in the political world at the time?

As we have shown in Chapter 3, the tribulations of Vietnam and especially Watergate

were felt to be largely unresolved in the period. The reviewers' readings of films like *The Parallax View* and *Three Days of the Condor* state their dissatisfaction with the inconclusiveness of the narratives in contrast to *The Conversation* where Harry is conclusively bested by a localized business triumvirate of Ann, Mark and Martin Stett (Williams, Forrest and Ford). For the critics, then, *The Conversation* has fewer potential indeterminacies than the other films even though the identity of the concern for whom Harry works is not made clear. In highlighting the inconclusiveness of the paranoid texts, then, the reviewers simply emphasized the fact that they were open for specific and potentially historical readings. This is made explicit in Cocks' statement about *Three Days of the Condor* that

The movie is predictable enough for the audience to pass as a game of fill-in-the-blanks; audiences could be invited to contribute their own gimmicks (Cocks 1975).

One reading that *The Conversation* and *Six/Three Days of the Condor* are likely to have in common is the one organized around the exteriority of the main character. As we have mentioned, in the early 1970s, the outsider in mainstream films was becoming increasingly visible from *The Graduate* and *Easy Rider* onwards. Even in thriller texts this can be seen to be the case. If one considers the role of maverick hacks like Woodward and Bernstein, honest cops like Frank Serpico, amateur robbers like John Wojtowicz and even dissident intelligence men like Marchetti and Marks or private eyes like Jay J. Armes, it is clear that what constitutes the outsider in the 1970s only serves to incorporate him into a new mainstream of values. In the realm of bestselling fiction, from the Mafia to the disillusioned architect, Doug Roberts, from the Jesuit to the grizzled shark-hunter, the same redrawing of the lines is to be witnessed with regard to who exists on the margins of American society (see Chapters 4-6). The exteriority of Ronald Malcolm and Harry Caul does not prevent them becoming the central characters for audience investment in two very different thrillers. What is crucial to their exteriority for future developments of the thriller, however, is the outcome of their respective quests. Harry is caught up in an inextricable situation in which the paranoia induced by his own work in surveillance has resulted in real surveillance of him. In *Six*

Days of the Condor, Malcolm gains what is quite clearly revenge on both Atwood and Maronick; but the sequel to this novel shows him once more in a fraught double-cross situation where he is at the mercy of different interests. This, therefore, embodies some of Harry's dilemma. The film, *Three Days of the Condor*, shows Robert Redford in the last frames going to the offices of the *New York Times*. Although the film is set in New York, while the book is set in Washington, the latter still has the option of sending Malcolm to the *Washington Post*. That it does not take up this option underlines the fact that the strategy is much different in intent. Despite the uncertainty of whether the *Times* will print or self-censor the story, in the contemporary period there is reason to believe that a reading in which the whole affair will be revealed through the newspaper is very probable. Although it is not entirely out of the question, in the era of Woodward and Bernstein only an inordinately paranoid audience would accept that there are stories which can easily be made to remain submerged. Yet, having noted that such options are very different in intent, it is also true that they have their similarities. For our purposes it is worth noting that both physical retribution and media exposure of conspiracy, *taken syntactically*, reveal the same general kinds of textual mechanism. The villains get their come-uppance having overstepped certain bounds in their harassment of individual heroes. What this shows once more is that the semantic aspects of sub-genres provide opportunities for very different points of historical and political investment even within a corpus of texts taken to be loosely connected. The next two texts demonstrate more emphatically, perhaps, the possible split that exists within the mechanism of retribution in the paranoid text.

Marathon Man

The novel version of *Marathon Man* (1976) by William Goldman appeared in 1974 while the film version, with Goldman's own screenplay, followed two years later. Goldman's account (1985) of the screenwriter's dilemmas in the tradition of West,

Fitzgerald and Chandler spends very little time on any misgivings he might have had about the script of the film version. Instead, he pays a fan's tribute to Laurence Olivier (pp. 245-251) whereas in previous chapters he has castigated, for example, the interferences of Nora Ephron, Carl Bernstein, Bryan Forbes et al. This tends to suggest that the screenplay of *Marathon Man* was just how he wanted it; however, there are certain differences of emphasis between novel and film. The stress on the effect of the McCarthy era on the protagonists receives more exegesis in the novel than the film, for example, and in this way *Marathon Man* as novel can be said to resemble E.L.

Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971). Both narratives deal with a couple of siblings who have been deprived of their parents in the 1950s by the effects of the McCarthyist witch-hunts, although in Doctorow's book this theme is, if anything, stronger for the fact that the Isaacsons are based heavily on the Rosenbergs. In *Marathon Man*, the protagonists' mother has been killed in a (suicide?) car crash while hearings were impending against the father, Columbia historian H.V. Levy. The father shoots himself soon after. The high profile Hollywood hearings were not the only manifestations of McCarthyism; the effects were widespread enough to reach into a number of professions and McCarthy's death did not end the tyranny. In *Marathon Man*, H.V. Levy commits suicide a year after McCarthy has died; Ellen Schrecker opens her book on McCarthyism in academia (1986) by citing the case of Chandler Davis, a maths instructor at the University of Michigan who was sentenced to six-months in prison in 1960 having refused to testify in front of a HUAC committee hearing (p. 3). The political effects of McCarthyism in universities are well covered by Schrecker and she illustrates how the witch-hunt was transformed into a pervasive ideology which was often smoothly incorporated into academic administrations. The most notable case which she considers, however, is that of the anthropologist, Dr. Gene Weltfish who was fired from Columbia in 1953, implicitly for her leftist leanings. The point of this is not just that it took place at Columbia University, where *Marathon Man* is largely set, but that the way in which the bureaucracy clumsily disguised the reasons for her dismissal illustrates the nightmare aspect of McCarthyism, that it was a world of

irrational events (pp. 255-257). This is the way it can be read in *Marathon Man*: as a time of tyranny which, although seemingly unreal, threatens to unleash itself again.

Taking this view of McCarthyism makes the lengthy opening sequence of the novel make sense. Before looking at this let us clarify the outline of the plot. The main story of *Marathon Man* concerns a Ph.D student and amateur long-distance runner called Levy who is enrolling for a seminar with the eminent Columbia historian, Biesenthal. During the first few weeks of his period at Columbia he keeps in contact with his brother, an oil businessman who he calls Doc and who calls him Babe. Interspersed with Babe's life and his thoughts about his past life, there is a narrative about Scylla, an international assassin who is involved in transporting diamonds between various countries. It transpires that he has been doing work for Christian Szell, the Auschwitz dentist colleague of Mengele who wishes to emerge from the South American jungle to claim diamonds from a safe deposit box in New York. Doc arrives in New York to stay with his brother who by now has fallen in love with another student; Doc, Babe and the girlfriend, Elsa, have dinner at an exclusive restaurant where Doc exposes her as an impostor. Babe and Doc argue and separate. Meanwhile, Scylla meets Szell in New York and, during an argument, Szell unexpectedly stabs Scylla in the abdomen. Later that evening Babe receives a knock at the door of his flat only to find Doc standing there with a badly wounded stomach. So, at this point in the centre of the narrative it becomes clear that Doc is Scylla, a shock that the film is not able to pull off. Now, returning to the opening sequence of the novel it becomes clear that the car chase between two old men plays a syntactic and semantic role. In terms of the syntax of the novel, the opening scene creates the need for the Auschwitz dentist to come out of hiding: one of the old men that is killed in the ensuing crash is Kurt Hesse, a.k.a. Kaspar Szell, father of Christian and keeper of the diamonds. Yet, at the same time, the driver with whom he gets into a dispute is an irritable old Jew; the narrative prose details Szell Sr.'s Nazi connection (p. 13) but Rosenbaum equally represents a tyrannous all-embracing bigotry:

Everything set his teeth on edge. If an injustice ever dared to creep into his vicinity, he grabbed it and squeezed it with all the bile left in his seventy-eight-year-old body. The Giants moving on to Jersey set his teeth on edge; the jigaboos set his teeth on edge, now more than ever, with their notion they were as good as the next guy; the Kennedys set his teeth on edge, the commies, the dirty movies, dirty magazines, the spiralling price of pastrami - you name it, Rosenbaum started gnashing (Goldman 1976 p. 7).

As we have seen, these kind of views are held by characters such as Kessler in Ludlum's *The Holcroft Covenant* who thinks with his blood and, in *Marathon Man*, they are briefly embodied in the henchman, Karl, who calls Babe "the Jew" and Babe's neighbours "not niggers . . . spics" (p. 197). In a sense, this can be called the voice of the past, of a Nazism which is outmoded in a modern day liberal society. Yet while the *ancien régime* is killed off in the opening chapter it is questionable whether the birth of the new will have successfully eradicated it. This is certainly a key theme which could inform a reading of *Marathon Man* in the contemporary period given the connotations of residual Nazism.

That the text invokes the figure of the outsider is made clear from the very outset of Babe's entry into the narrative. He is heralded with the following:

'Here comes da creep', one of the stoop kids said (p. 15).

Throughout the early part of the narrative, Babe's exteriority is played off against the established Doc. Babe, at 25, is still a boy experiencing angst which is heightened by the groves of academe; Doc is successful in the oil business. Babe obsessively returns to the events of his father's death as if it was a sore tooth (like the one he has developed at the beginning of the novel); Doc seems to have put the affair behind him. Babe is clumsy and uncultured, being constantly buried in his books; Doc is a wine connoisseur who taunts Babe with his lack of knowledge (although Scylla is a whisky man). The comparisons continue but the flavour of them is hinted at early in the narrative when Babe decides to save his money for academic purposes rather than for dental treatment:

Dentists raped you anyway, they charged a ton for maybe two minutes' work . . . (p. 20).

That Babe rejects the idea of treating his tooth at first seems impractical but ironically echoes the later climactic scene of the narrative when Szell tortures him in the dentist's chair (pp. 155 ff). In an early scene with Biesenthal, who is himself an ex-student of H.V. Levy, Babe displays that he is deliberately following in his father's footsteps and trying to exorcize McCarthyism in some way. His dissertation is on tyranny in American life and when he gives as an example of this the internment of Japanese citizens of California during the Second World it is clear that he is hiding something from himself: Biesenthal has to tease out Babe's intention to write a chapter on McCarthyism. Babe then tells him about the events immediately following his father's death:

I don't know how long I stood there, but finally I quit crapping around and walked to the phone and called the cops, and when they came I asked for the gun, and they said, no, it was evidence, and I said, okay, but I want the gun when you've done with it, and they said, we can't give a gun to minors, but I'm a very persistent fella sometimes, and you better believe I've got that gun now. My brother got it for me when the cops were done with it - he was twenty - and when I was legal I practiced with it and practiced with it. I'm dead with it, I really am . . .

I don't know - I kept hoping McCarthy would be found alive somewhere. Then I just thought, see, I'm not all that strong physically, I'm no heavyweight contender, and I thought wouldn't it be terrific to nail some bad guys before I was done. Now I just keep it because it's mine, because it was Dad's. I don't know why I keep it (p. 57).

The answer to Babe's enigmatic last sentence will be offered before the narrative is completed.

Bearing in mind the plot of *Marathon Man*, it is obvious that Babe's exteriority is far from straightforward. Doc's double life allows the narrative to draw together a number of themes of paranoia which have as their foundation a critique of the world which Doc inhabits and which he has inherited from the McCarthy era. Not only in his concealment of the truth from Babe by means of feigned wine snobbery and a suggestion that he has concealed his homosexuality, Doc is the quintessential representative of artifice and double-dealing as a result of the world in which he works. Just before a meeting in Hyde Park where he has actually been set up for assassination the reason for the meeting is narrated:

Earlier that day he had offered the Russians a blueprint for a crucial section of the 'smart bomb' that the military was creaming over these days, a bomb that didn't just drop: it glided until it found its

prearranged target; then it fell. What made it such a bullshit job was that the Russians already *had* the blueprint of the crucial section. Only they couldn't let us know they had it, and after a certain amount of haggling the deal would be made. It was all so 1984 you could throw up (p. 43).

Scylla/Doc is an operative of a splinter organization of government intelligence, but as becomes clear before too long, the government's interests as represented by such organizations do not coincide with either the Constitution or conventional versions of the public interest. Shortly after the assassination attempt Scylla has a dream in which Mengele is trying to take his skin; clearly this is a metaphor for robbery but at one point in the dream they are talking:

'Control is important for us', Scylla agreed (p. 77).

This is a hint of what is to be revealed: that the American government is in league with Nazi war criminals. Doc deals with such contradictions in his daily life and seems to have no trouble in negotiating them; he also lives out his own contradictions, choosing to rely on a flexible notion of the truth and believing what he needs to a given moment. Discussing why Babe keeps the gun his father used to commit suicide and suspecting Babe's dream of retribution Doc has the following exchange with him:

'Babe, Joe McCarthy died a year before Dad killed himself.

'Maybe, maybe not. There's lots of lies have come out of Washington' (p. 98).

Doc's ordinary cynicism is in direct contrast to Babe's idealistic suspicion. As we have noted before, the refusal to be swallowed by a world of corruption - as in the case of Frank Serpico - arises not so much from a new brand of political subversion but from a strain of idealism which derived from a pre-sixties American ideology of justice and liberty. In the paranoid text it is clear that Babe, Holcroft, Graham/Frady, Malcolm and even - in part - Harry Caul embody this to a greater or lesser degree. That Doc should come from the same family and experiences as Babe suggests in the narrative a kind of schizophrenic existence of contemporary American life as a result of the McCarthy period. Like *The Book of Daniel*, *Marathon Man* can be said to map out the ways in which American society has reacted to the ravages of the Cold War and life in the shadow of the bomb. After Doc's death this is made clear when Doc's colleague and lover, Janeway, tries to convince Babe that the murder was 'political':

'It hadda be some nut - this is New York, nuts are slaughtering people every moonrise - some addict tried getting his money and he wasn't quick enough handing it over and you know the rest'.

'I don't think that's even close', Janeway said. 'I think it was political. At least, that's the assumption I'm going on till proven otherwise. And I wish you'd do what you could to help me'.

'Political?' Babe shook his head. 'My God, why?'

'Because it makes some kind of sense. Considering what your brother did. And, of course, your father'.

'What about my father?'

Janeway sipped his wine. 'Why are you determined to make this so unnecessarily difficult?'

'*What about my father?*'

'He was H.V. Levy, for Chrissakes'.

'And he was innocent!'

'I never said he wasn't'.

'You did - you did, goddamn it, you implied it'.

'Well, he was convicted, wasn't he? That's a helluva lot more than implying, that's *fact*'.

'He was not - he was in no way convicted - ' Babe's voice was out of control. 'Do you know that in four years, McCarthy never offered legal support for one single charge - it was all the court of public opinion - did you know he was a Nazi, a fucking Nazi, and he had the country scared pissless. My father was an historian, a great historian, and Acheson asked him to go down to Washington and he went, like Schlesinger and Galbraith went later, and he was there when McCarthy hit. Two guys suffered worst from it all - Hiss went to jail but at least he's still alive, selling stationery, and my father. He tried defending himself but he didn't have a chance against that Nazi son of a bitch - it was a Senate hearing and my father was just cut to shit - every time he tried to establish a point McCarthy made it funny. My father talked in long rambling sentences and McCarthy made jokes out of it. It didn't matter that he had no real facts, McCarthy killed him. He killed his ego, and when you're like H.V. Levy and kids start laughing at you it's over. I was five in fifty three, that was when they had the hearing, and Dad quit Columbia and began to write a book about the whole thing, to clear his name and get it all together again, but he couldn't do it - my mother died the next year, and that just left the three of us, and Dad was drinking bad by then. He lasted till fifty-eight. Five years on the bottle, staggering around. Those years I remember, and that's a shame because he was nothing then, he was garbage then, but what I'd give to have known him before. I read every book he ever wrote and they were great, but I never met that guy, not so I remember, just this husk is all I have for memories, and you can keep all your goddamn stupid implications about my father, just you wait, wait till I finish, it's all gonna be down in black and white there in my doctorate and - and - '

And *stop*, Babe told himself. Right now. He doesn't care (pp. 126-128).

A great deal of information about the narrative is given in this passage and one of the most important ones for our purposes is the explicit link - at least in Babe's mind - between Nazism resurgent and McCarthyism. As the rest of the narrative stays with Babe apart from a few short passages of narration, the equation gains power. The other piece of information implicit in the passage is that there exists a split for Babe between those characters in the narrative who care about the McCarthy period and have acted

upon it and those who have put it behind them and continued business. Doc, of course, is the embodiment of this; Babe explains later to Biesenthal,

'Henry David - my brother- his first three years at Yale he led his class, no one had marks as good as Doc's in a decade, he was that smart, and he was getting better, he was going to be this genius lawyer, this defender of the downtrodden, demolishing tyrants whenever they had the guts to face him, and he was twenty when Dad died, and his senior year, well, naturally things slipped for him, it's shitty when your father kills himself, and somehow, without meaning to, I became the defender of the faith and *he* became the money grubber - I think, godammit I *know*, we were both reacting to the same event, the shooting, and this guy who knew Doc, he said to me earlier tonight, "Your father was guilty, wasn't he?" and I blasted him pretty good, lemme tell you, I set him straight, but now I know he must have gotten that from Doc, it's what Doc must have thought too, he went one way because of what he thought and I went the other, and I have to know something you can tell me, and that's, was he innocent, my old man?' (p. 191).

It would not be too difficult to derive a contemporary political reading from this especially given what we have mentioned about the investment in McCarthyism in the 1970s and particularly Richard Nixon's involvement in the Hiss case.

The wider political implications of the split between the brothers in *Marathon Man* is worked out after Doc's death through the figure of Janeway. Originally Babe sees him as Gatsby, then after Janeway betrays him and delivers him into the hands of Szell once more Babe's perception changes:

Babe just stared up at Janeway. 'It was all lies wasn't it, all a lot of crap about you being this buddy of Doc'. Janeway said nothing for a moment, and as he watched him, Babe couldn't catch much Gatsby resemblance anymore. What Janeway really looked like was the Nixon lawyer, Dean - a pilot fish they called him. A thing that hung around the biggest shark for power (p. 169).

This oscillation between the image of Gatsby and his representation of the American dream and the image of Dean and his version of it makes Janeway an important figure in the novel. He contradicts the notion of any consensus in American life; for him there is no ideal of justice and no allegiance to nation or Constitution. There is only an arena of power where loyalties are constantly to be shifted. Where there is thought to be consensus, Janeway demonstrates there is internal turmoil, particularly in government: immediately after Doc's death he asks Babe,

'All right where did he live?'

'Washington'.

'And what's Washington the center of?'

'Everything: the government'.

'Okay. Now are you aware just how much each part of the government hates each other part? Example, the military: the Army hates the Navy and the Navy hates the Air force. Why? Because once upon a time the Army was *it*, and then the world changed and the Navy became the glamor branch, and then flip, another change, and now the Air Force gets everything it requests while the Admirals and the Army generals eat it. Think of what's going on down there today - it's on TV all day long, plain and crappy. The FBI hates the CIA, and they both hate the Secret Service. They're squabbling and whining, continual internecine rivalry, and the whining gets loudest when you get close to the limits of their powers. The edges are sharp, and between those edges are crevices (p. 131).

The crevices can actually be read as the fabric of American society in the narrative of *Marathon Man*. In this way, the sequence in which the narrative switches to the point of view of Karl (pp. 196-197) is made to appear even more bigoted than we suggested it was earlier. Spics, niggers and Jews are integral to American society rather than outside an implicit mythic Aryan consensus which is non-existent and this incorporation of putative outsiders is represented elsewhere in the narrative. When Babe runs round Central Park in the early part of the novel he wears a golf cap even though he is worried that some people will think he stole the idea from Gary Wottle (p. 15). Wottle, it will be remembered, was the American 800 metre gold medallist in the Munich Olympics of 1972; what characterized his races was that he was always behind for most of the race and then he would spurt forward to the tape at the end. Similarly, when Babe is running from his captors he begins to have visions of the Ethiopian runner, Abebe Bikila (pp. 181 ff). The narrative makes clear that Bikila means a great deal to Babe having won the marathon in the Tokyo Olympics against two vastly better equipped Russian runners. In addition to his underdog status, though, Bikila also ran in bare feet, the condition in which Babe finds himself at this stage of the narrative. Thus, the Olympic ideal once more represents the position of the outsider who channels his passion into areas other than corruption. Moreover, Bikila was a black man triumphing over the excessive planning of other self-confident competitors in a manner almost reminiscent of Jesse Owens. It is not surprising, therefore, that the 'bureaucratic' (in Palmer's terms for the thriller) nature of the power structure is shown to be based on a false assumption of shared goals in American society.

This lack of consensus also entails a loss of faith in the powers of authority to alleviate certain ills. Having eluded his captors, Babe goes to the house of Biesenthal who tells him to call the police:

'Police?' Babe blinked. 'Police? Why should I call them, what good would that do?' He buttoned the raincoat. 'I don't want justice, are you kidding, screw justice, we're way past justice, it's blood now . . .' (p. 192).

Babe's use of the word blood suggests not just the revenge but also the fact of consanguinity between him, Doc, H.V. Levy and his nother as well as the idea that blood is important to Nazi eugenic ideology, that Babe will fight Szell on his own ground. That Szell is responsible for the ills of his family is, for Babe, a fact; revenge is therefore necessary:

And now revenge was coming steadily closer down the road; all of his wishes were coming true; Christian Szell was coming toward him down the road, and in a little while Christian Szell was going to die, if Babe just had the guts to make it happen. He didn't care if he made it out himself, just so Szell didn't make it out too, that would make things more than even-steven, thank you, because Szell had killed them both, H.V. and Doc, no matter what anyone said; he had killed H.V. even though they were continents and quarter centuries apart, a Nazi was a Nazi, you couldn't ask for better if you needed a bad guy, and he had to have killed Doc, Babe wanted that so badly it just had to be true, it wouldn't have been assholes like Karl or Erhard, Doc would have whipped them without breaking stride. Babe stood very still, watching the car's approach, realizing that at blessed last all his wishes were coming true, and on this perfect day, he could feel himself starting to fold (p. 210).

The rhetorical force of Babe's argument is given power by the fact that the narrative has shown his suspicions to be true: Szell did murder Scylla/Doc with a special blade.

However, at the same time as the more literal responsibility of Szell is established, his metaphorical connection with McCarthyism and its legacy is forcefully suggested. This is articulated further in the narrative when Szell goes to pick up the diamonds and events are narrated from a position close to him. Exiting the bank he suddenly sees a certifiable madman, a lunatic in running shoes and raincoat (p. 230).

That the narration takes place at this point from a position close to Szell is crucial because the most likely reading of this sequence will be arranged around the ultimate irony of someone who has profited from the horror of Auschwitz presuming to consider anyone but himself mad. Moreover, Babe looks like a derelict in his present garb - an outsider as far as capitalism is concerned - yet, he is the only person who is able to apprehend the war criminal. Babe explains the logic of his revenge to Szell:

Babe sat comfortably on the ground, holding the gun, talking quietly. 'I don't know that you'll understand this, but once upon a time, long ago, I was a scholar and a marathon man, but that fella's gone now, dead I suppose, but I remember something he thought, which was that if you don't learn the mistakes of the past you'll be doomed to repeat them. Well, we've been making a mistake with people like you, because public trials are bullshit and executions are games for winners - all this time we should have been giving back pain. That's the real lesson. That's the loser's share, just pain, pure and simple, pain and torture, no hotshot lawyers running around trying to see that justice is done. I think we'd have a nice peaceful place here if all you warmakers knew you better not start something because if you lost, agony was just around the bend. That's what I'd like to give you. Agony. Not what you're suffering now. I mean a lifetime of it, 'cause that's the only degree of justice I think we're ready for down here yet, and I know any humanist might disagree with me too, but I don't think you will, because you had a lot to do with educating me, I'm like you now, except I'm better at it because you're going to die and I've still got a long way to go' (p. 233).

So, as we can see, the paranoid text in which fear of authorities pervades the narrative offers not only media exposure as a means of resolution but also outright revenge. In *Six Days of the Condor* this was certainly the case although it was much less emphatic, perhaps, than in *Marathon Man*. What seems to be the preliminary grounds for difference lies in the fact of family: not only does *Marathon Man* suggest in the narrative that resurgent Nazism in tandem with McCarthyism has effected the subversion of a plethora of ideal American values they have also attacked the most personal of institutions. We will return to this in the next chapter.

In thrillers, the point of such revenge as Babe's is always social justice. Clearly, there are some ideals that Babe holds dear and he kills Szell in their name. Such a reading would be quite probable in a time when the main threat to legality, the Constitution and American political life actually came from within the government. However, Ernest Mandel believes that *Marathon Man* fits his thesis in which thrillers are trying to reincorporate a criminal-hero; he writes

In [*Marathon Man*] the distinction between 'good' spies (ours) and 'bad' ones (theirs) is virtually non-existent: the operators have become anonymous agents of unknown nationality, selling their services indifferently to a succession of powers (and former powers, in the shape of a top Nazi war criminal). All are, incidentally, supreme experts in the noble art of murder. The real hero of the book is no longer someone chasing a criminal, but an innocent boy fighting for his life against agents conspiring in the name of heaven knows what . . . The dividing line between crime and established order, evil and punishment, has vanished (1984 pp. 123-4).

This is not quite the case; it appears that Mandel is trying to imply that the syntax of the thriller has actually changed and that crime is now heroic (once more) and that it pays within capitalism. Such a transformation of the syntax has not taken place; however, the grounds for a reading of its semantic aspects have, and it is here, in the historical

reading of the text, that the syntax can be said to appear to be different. This is probably made even more explicit by the film version of *Marathon Man*, and a few observations about the film will make this clear. The choice of Dustin Hoffman for the role of Babe is notable although, as Kael (1976b) points out, he is too old and too short for the role. What he does bring to the role, however, is the air of an attractive outsider - as well as the archetype of the modern (ex-)student, Ben, in *The Graduate* - representing a new mood in cinema since the 1960s. But the opposition between the duplicitous yet orderly world of government and the world which Babe inhabits is emphasized in addition to the outsider theme. When Rosenbaum picks up his car at the beginning of the film an announcement about the baker's strike is heard over the radio; when Scylla (Roy Scheider) is driven through Paris, his taxi is overtaken by a group of young people on bicycles protesting about pollution; Babe refers to Doc's colleagues in the oil business as "a bunch of polluters and thieves"; the streets of Paris are filled with unemptied bins because of a refuse workers dispute; Janeway (William Devane) mentions the strikes in a cafe; when Szell (Laurence Olivier) arrives in New York there is a baggage handlers strike at the airport. These are not features of society that would exist in the regime to which Szell formerly belonged and a pretty explicit contrast appears to have been drawn between the state of social indecision on the streets and the obsessively organized mission of Christian Szell.

Another important theme of *Marathon Man* that is emphasized by the semantic features of the film is the identity of the villains in a general sense. While it locates corruption in the sphere of government and authorities it also marks a significant departure from other paranoid texts' treatment of the theme. A third of the way into the film Babe stays with Elsa in Central Park after dusk and the inevitable happens: they are mugged by two men; but the muggers are not black or Hispanics armed with knives but professionals - both in the way they land their blows and how they are dressed. In the novel version of this scene no real description of the attackers is given beyond the limp possessed by one of them (p. 84). The film narrative the sequence is almost surreal: the

voice-over dialogue is very muted while music plays on the soundtrack and the couple are attacked in the half-light. When Doc visits Babe the latter makes a point about the attackers' appearance:

They had suits like you.

The suits definitely single out the attackers not as criminals but as operatives of some kind of professional agency. The narrative of the film more readily shows them to be Karl and Erhard, whereas the novel depends on the limp as their distinguishing feature. Yet, in addition to the semantic elements placing them within the realms of government and authority structures, they also seem to suggest something new and modern. When the always impeccably attired Scylla goes to meet Szell, who is accompanied by Karl and Gerhard, they congregate loosely around a fountain in the forecourt of a building. The forecourt is spotlit and consist of various structures which appear to be made out of strips of translucent glass. The effect of modernity is coupled with industrialism and this enhanced by Michael Small's soundtrack; like his music for *The Parallax View* it suggests that there are hidden depths to the events to take place in the scene and recalls the sequence in the earlier film in which the committee pronounces its verdicts. The scene ends, of course, with Scylla fatally stabbed. Another man in a suit takes over Babe's life when Doc is dead; this is Janeway. In their initial exchanges Janeway informs Babe of his brother's profession, telling him

I know whereof I speak.

The fragmented nature of government intelligence seems even greater in this version of Janeways' speech and he explains to Babe that he and Scylla were colleagues as "Providers". It is clear from this that intelligence is only the thin end of the wedge; business is a more accurate description of Janeway's and Scylla's occupation. What Janeway represents is a new ideal; in one sense he can be read as the impersonality of late capitalism that Jameson ascribes to the FBI man in *Dog Day Afternoon* (see Chapter 5, above). Put in another way, he is simply a representative of the vicissitudes of the market. At the risk of reading from a 1990s standpoint it is worth suggesting that certain elements of his character suggest this.

Think of me as any other young executive

he says to Szell with his feet up on the desk as William Devane's massive grin fills the face of the character. Ordering Szell out of the country he says

You're a relic

which echoes the death of Rosenbaum and Klaus Szell at the beginning of the text. By this stage it is clear that when he says

I'm just doing my job. I believe in my country

he has uttered a non-sequitur. His job clearly changes from moment to moment depending on where it is profitable to apply his loyalties. So, even if the contemporary audience did not read Janeway as a precursor of the ideological confidence in the market of the 1980s it is clear that Janeway suffuses a novel kind of mercenary streak which is associated with the corruption in government of the 1970s but also goes beyond it. As Babe runs away Janeway spits venomously at Karl and Erhard

Get the fuckin car

displaying his utter contempt for those with whom he has to work. But this does not derive from superior intelligence so much as relentlessness: as Bikila tells Babe in the novel

sprinters have no brains. God gave them speed but they cannot think, once you get them thinking, they're done (p. 185).

In fact the only possible effective opposition to the relentlessness of Janeway must be his other. Although it is Babe who finally despatches him in the film, Janeway's nemesis lies with the stoop kids. The Hispanic teenagers who constantly taunt Babe eventually come to his rescue; Babe persuades their ringleader, Melendez, to break into his flat with a few friends. The flat is under surveillance and Janeway is at the foot of the next flight of stairs; he hears the kids fiddling with the door and approaches them, gun in hand, with his arm extended. All but Melendez, who is breaking the lock, turn swiftly on Janeway and point various Saturday night specials at him. Then Melendez turns to him and says rather emphatically,

Blow it out your ass, motherfucker.

Janeway is therefore effectively bested by the other side of the market, a vicious updated bunch of Dickensian urchins.

Critical reaction to *Marathon Man* as a paranoid text was, once more, largely negative. As Brando's appearance focussed much attention onto *The Godfather*, so did Olivier's appearance create a talking point for *Marathon Man*. A further object of discussion in the latter film was the gruesome dentist scene in which Olivier tortures Hoffman.

Referring to the violence in the film Cocks writes,

Watching *Marathon Man* is a little like getting crowned by a chain-mail fist (1976).

While critics were willing to accept some of the violence in the film some, like Cocks, were unable to reconcile some of the film's themes with a good old-fashioned thriller.

Cocks actually complained that Goldman and the director, John Schlesinger,

have tarted up their story with phony resonances intended to link it to such things as war guilt, the Nazis and the Jews, McCarthy witch-hunting, and the blight of urban decay as emblematic of modern anomie (Cocks 1976).

At the same time, there were a few critics who recognized that the political elements in the plot were integral to readings of the film:

One's emotions are shredded in this film about innocence beset by evil, about intelligence and integrity pitted against intelligence and triple-dealing. Thematically believable in these post-Watergate days of disillusion, the film is lifted above the thriller genre into genuine drama by Hoffman's powerful performance and Schlesinger's superlative direction (Stoop 1976 p. 109).

Yet, it is notable that such a statement, while allowing for political readings is reluctant to face the courage of its own convictions. In order for the film to have a political reading, it is implied, it is necessary for the narrative to 'transcend' the thriller genre.

Once again we encounter the notion that polysemy can only be attributed to non-genre texts. As a corollary of this it is implicit in the reviews of Cocks and others that

Schlesinger, in directing a thriller, was prostituting his art. Essentially such a claim is just a negative inflection of Dustin Hoffman's tribute to Schlesinger that

He's the master of the sub-text (Publicity Brochure for *Marathon Man* 1976).

So, there are a number of permutations in the reviews: Schlesinger is a talented director and should not be lowering himself with genre texts; or, because Schlesinger is talented, the film has greater depths than the average thriller; or, more decisively, the

film is not a thriller. Such concerns contribute little to the historical reading of the film. Pauline Kael comes closer to making *Marathon Man* seem historically specific by refusing to deny its generic status and by actually framing such status in a particular way. The textual mechanisms of the narrative are important for her:

The book was a best-seller because Goldman is an unconscionable master at squeezing the reader; he involves us in the hero and turns the heat higher and higher, making the forces arrayed against Babe so hideously ruthless that anything Babe can do in retaliation will seem justified (Kael 1976b).

Here, Kael is emphasizing the syntactic aspect of the narrative although, as we have continually emphasized, there can be no purely syntactic or semantic dimension of a genre which is available for scrutiny. Therefore it is connected to a semantic dimension:

The chase story is infused with righteousness, since the head conspirator, Szell (played here by Laurence Olivier), is a surviving Nazi war criminal, obscenely rich and arrogant, with a fortune derived from robbing the Jews in the death camps, and the student is a symbol of intelligence, moral strength and endurance (Kael 1976b).

That Kael recognizes this makes her uncertain statement on the role of H.V. Levy and McCarthyism rather puzzling:

Apparently this is just a moral flourish meant to provide a background for the brothers, but such a point is made of the McCarthy persecution that we keep expecting it to have some connection to Szell's ring of thieves (Kael 1976b).

However, her main point about the film stands. While it can be clearly demonstrated that *Marathon Man* is a post-Watergate paranoid thriller she also emphasizes that,

It's 'Death Wish' with a lone Jewish boy getting his own back from the Nazis. It's a Jewish revenge fantasy (Kael 1976b).

As we have seen, *Marathon Man* can be read as a very modern and quintessential paranoid text. While Babe is not totally unaware of the existence of another world alongside his own - his Ph.D topic illustrates this - he is ignorant of the closeness of its threat. The villains in the narrative are clearly available for semantic investments, wearing suits and either representing the government or collaborating in some of its clandestine aims. The established structures of authority can no longer be relied upon to deliver Babe from his predicament any more than they could deliver his father from the hands of McCarthyism. The only solution is to be outside; however, this is not possible. To be outside is merely to be somewhere else in relation to the villains, Babe decides, and this is illustrated by the fearlessness of the gun toting kids who face up to

Janeway. Hence Babe meets Szell on his own ground, depriving him of the diamonds as Szell thought Scylla would, and answering Szell's obsessive question during the torture scene with

It isn't safe.

What Kael has drawn out from *Marathon Man* is the importance of the revenge motif.

While other critics tried to straightforwardly deny a political reading by condemning the resonances in the narrative as cack-handed Kael plays politics down, to an extent, by focussing on Babe's killing of Szell. In the film the final scene is clearly very important: the waterworks on the edge of the reservoir in Central Park where the scene takes place were rebuilt in the studio at a cost of \$135,000 (Publicity Brochure for *Marathon Man* 1976). It is here in the film that Babe makes Szell swallow handfuls of diamonds. When a struggle ensues, Szell is finally impaled on his own dagger and falls after the diamonds into the water: he has gone away from Babe but has landed in the city's water supply. Babe then throws his father's gun into the reservoir. The bitter diamond pills that Szell has to swallow make the significance of Babe's obsession with history an analogous bitter pill. As in the disaster films and *The Parallax View*, water washes away the old regime, but this can also be read as a way in which that same water becomes polluted. Contemporary readings of *Marathon Man* could quite easily be organized around the political implication of clandestine government activities and how they threaten to invade the realm of domesticity. Babe is caught up in the whole Szell business for a complex of reasons but most directly as a result of his brother's activities. It is also here, in the realm of the family, that the narrative provides a rationale for Babe's subsequent actions.

You killed my brother

Babe cries at Janeway in the film. In Kael's formulation *Marathon Man* quite clearly allows for a reading as the point where the political concerns of the period become personal.

Capricorn One

If *Marathon Man* can be said to illustrate the revenge motif embodied in retribution for politically induced paranoia then *Capricorn One* (1978) represents exposure as the means to combat manipulation by government agencies. An original screenplay written, and then directed, by Peter Hyams, *Capricorn One* deals with a manned space flight to Mars in the not too distant future. The film utilizes the idealistic connotations of the space programme in American life and shows that they often rest on a foundation shaped by much different interests. The idealism which fixes on space as the New Frontier in American life is shown in *Capricorn One* to be transitory and representative of a fragmenting consensus in American social life. As we have suggested, the hallowed aims of the space programme were mitigated in some people's minds by the involvement of German rocket engineers who had originally presided over the attempted destruction of London with V2s. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the purpose of expensive manned space flights in times of social strife was less than clear to American citizens. Some even believed that the space programme was a literal, as well as an ideological, sham; Wise points out that

Apparently, a substantial number of Americans - it is difficult to estimate their number with any precision - do not believe that their government landed men on the moon.

On June 14, 1970, the Knight newspapers published an astonishing story based upon interviews with 1,721 persons in six cities - Philadelphia, Miami, Akron, Detroit, Washington and Macon, Georgia - and in several communities in North and South Carolina. The people interviewed were asked whether they really believed that U. S. astronauts had been to the moon and back. The article emphasized that no attempt had been made to reach a cross section of the population; since the survey was not based on the standard polling technique of random sampling, the percentage of disbelievers could not be taken to reflect opinion nationally, or in each community.

Nevertheless, the interviews did indicate that substantial numbers of Americans do not believe in the single most widely publicized action ever taken by their government in peacetime. In Macon, 19 percent of those interviewed doubted the moon landing had taken place; in Charlotte, North Carolina, 17 percent; in Philadelphia, 9 percent; in Miami, 5 percent; in Akron, 4 percent; and in Detroit, 2 percent

When the skeptics were asked why such an enormous hoax would be perpetrated, they generally replied either that the government had done it to fool the Russians and the Chinese, or that it had been done to justify the great cost of the space program. A few thought the government had a bread-and-circuses motive, to make people forget their troubles (1973 p. 342).

A hoax of the kind suspected by the people in these interviews makes up the story of *Capricorn One* and the drama is enhanced by an examination in the film of the attendant political explanations for such deception.

The film opens with a slow fade to reveal a rocket on a launch pad and a soundtrack that consists of instructions from mission control. The sun rises behind the rocket during the shot representing, perhaps, the opening of the film, the dawning of a new age of space exploration and the brightness that signifies that all is well. However, all is not well: as the pilots board the craft after making emotional farewells they are ushered off it by a colleague who tells them to follow him. They comply and are flown to an air base where the head of the Mars programme, Jim Kelloway (Hal Holbrook), meets them to explain. Meanwhile, the launch continues successfully without them. Behind the scenes, it becomes clear that technical difficulties have been encountered and that, rather than risk putting the future of the whole space programme in jeopardy, the astronauts must act out the landing in a film studio. Eventually, for the sake of the safety of their families who are implicitly threatened, the astronauts agree to stay at the base for nine months and film the necessary scenes. When they find out that the public story is to be that the craft has burned up on re-entry - and that they must therefore be killed - the three astronauts make their escape from the base. The second part of the film is concerned with the chase for them, which includes the odyssey of a slightly comic maverick journalist, Caulfield (Elliott Gould), who has smelled a rat while covering the main story of the landing. The main rationale for the hoax landing is that public support for the space programme is waning; this is illustrated by the fact that the Texan congressman and staunch supporter of the Mars flight, Hollis Peaker (David Huddleston) has to entertain not the president but the vice-president (James Karen). After the launch, one area of investment in the space programme is made clear when the vice-president says

Hollis, there are a number of people who think we have problems right here on Earth that merit our attention before we start spending billions of dollars on outer space.

Peaker replies to this by saying

There are a number of people that feel there are no more pressing problems than our declining position in world leadership.

NASA, of course, is not officially affiliated to the military. However, as we have mentioned, military aims have always been built into the space programme as witnessed by the fact that Von Braun was originally co-opted to work for the army. This, coupled with memories of Sputnik 1, is almost certainly what Hollis Peaker is invoking.

Appearing in 1978, *Capricorn One* can be said to have the benefits of other paranoid films which have gone before. This seems to be the case: various sequences in the film either consciously or unconsciously echo scenes from films such as *The Parallax View* or *All the President's Men*. When the three astronauts - Brubaker (James Brolin), Walker (O.J. Simpson) and Willis (Sam Waterston) - are taken to the air base for the first time they are greeted in a room by the mission commander, Jim Kelloway. Kelloway sits at the head of a table with Willis and Walker to his right and Brubaker to his left. The camera zooms very slowly to a close-up of Kelloway while retaining the presence of the astronauts on the fringes of the screen. There then follows a long emotive speech about how Kelloway has known Brubaker for sixteen years and how both had a dream to reach the stars.⁵ He then explains how televisions were set up in Grand Central Station so as people could follow the coverage of John Glen's orbiting of the Earth; by the time of Apollo 17, Kelloway says, people rang the TV stations to bitch about the cancellation of *re-runs* of *I Love Lucy* in favour of the moon landing. He then begins to explain the events of the Mars mission and tells of a screw-up; at this point there is another slow-zoom until Brubaker's suit is just visible enough on the screen to suggest that this is an over-the-shoulder shot. As Kelloway shows, part of the

⁵ It must be said that this is a very long speech of the kind not really witnessed in thrillers since the seventies. In fact, *Capricorn One* can be said to share with all the paranoid films that we have discussed a distinct difference from the kinds of film thrillers that have followed in the 1980s and 1990s. Nowhere in the later period are there thriller movies of such length and with such elaborate set pieces as are to be found in *Serpico*, *The Parallax View*, *The Conversation*, *All the President's Men*, *Three Days of the Condor*, *Marathon Man*, *Capricorn One* as well as paranoid films that we have not considered such as *The Boys from Brazil* (1978) or *Winter Kills* (1979).

shield on the craft was defective as a result of the contractor cutting corners; this is reminiscent of the subversion of the American dream that makes up the scenario of Arthur Miller's play, *All My Sons* (1951). Kelloway takes them out of the brightly lit room to another part of the building which is rigged up as a film studio. As the localized lights in this room come into view at head height, the camera pulls back to an elevated rostrum shot which shows a movie set with a planet surface and a space module. The sinister tones of Jerry Goldsmith's score are heard on the soundtrack as the shot is in progress. The use of slow zoom in conjunction with the music and the overview shot echoes both *The Parallax View*, *All the President's Men*, and *Marathon Man*. We have discussed how the syntactic aspect of events on screen in these films are transformed by the film's semantic aspects: in *The Parallax View*, for instance, the committee shot suggests a cover-up and its iconography recurs in the film; in *All the President's Men*, Woodward and Bernstein furiously type Nixon's downfall as he is inaugurated on TV; in *Marathon Man*, Babe sees the Rosenbaum/Szell Sr. crash as the music plays on the soundtrack, drowning out the other noise of the scene, but his casual pause while running round the Central Park reservoir suggests that he believes it has nothing whatsoever to do with him. What seems innocuous in these films is gradually made to seem portentous and charged with paranoid meaning. Following the rostrum shot, Kelloway continues to outline the reasons for the studio hoax to the astronauts:

I just care so goddamn much I think it's worth it. I'm not even sure of it; I just think it . . . It'll keep something alive that shouldn't die . . . There's nothing more to believe in . . . Do you wanna be the ones who give everyone another reason to give up?

There is no doubt that these words, if taken out of the film, could quite easily be mistaken for the utterances of members of the Nixon Administration. They could refer very easily to Vietnam or be the legal testimonies of Mitchell, Hunt, Liddy, Krogh, Colson, Haldeman, or even Nixon himself. What is important about these words beyond the mere resemblance, though, is that they are borne out of a twisted version of the idealism that Kelloway shared with Brubaker in the 1960s. Brubaker's response confirms the logic of Kelloway's paranoia that is engendered by fear of public opinion:

This is really wonderful: if we go along with you and lie our asses off then the world of truth and ideals is protected. But we don't wanna take part in some giant rip-off of yours and somehow or other we're managing to ruin the country. You're pretty good, Jim, I'll give you that If the only way to keep something alive is to become everything I hate then I don't know that it's worth keeping it alive I don't think this is right - all the rest is bullshit.

That Brubaker's assessment matches Mankiewicz' assessment of Watergate which we quoted toward the beginning of the chapter (above) is quite obvious. Moreover, it is once again like the idealism of Frank Serpico, for instance, in the face of self-serving duplicity and self-justifying twisted logic. However, this is not enough because Kelloway then implicitly threatens the lives of the astronauts' families, all of whom are travelling back from the launch on the same aircraft. As Brubaker grabs Kelloway by the lapels there is a two-shot with a harsh studio light shining in the middle of them. The light illuminates Brubaker's face and leaves Kelloway's in shadow. If the audience had not recognized it before, there is a strong reminder in the narration at this point that the actor who plays Kelloway also took the role of Deep Throat in *All the President's Men*. As we have seen, Deep Throat was not the villain of that film, but he did represent shady motives and clandestine activities. As if to emphasize this, the scene which immediately follows this is set outside the house of Kay Brubaker (Brenda Vaccaro) on a bright day. Caulfield is involved in a long discourse concerning his dislike of cynicism, lack of sincerity and of artificiality, which he illustrates for fellow journalist, Judy Drinkwater (Karen Black), by means of the wrappers on Holiday Inn toilet seats. The contrast between him and Kelloway is blatantly emphasized in this way.

The iconography of *Capricorn One* is similar to that of other paranoid films in its use of bright sunny days and the darkness of corporate locations. This continues in certain ways in the film which indicate quite clearly for an audience the possibility of reading paranoid fears as all too well founded. Whenever conspiracy is about to explicitly intrude into the lives of the protagonists there is a studied use of dark brown shades engendered by localized light sources. The control room at Houston where the most crucial part of the duplicity will be played out is very distinctively lit. The darkness in

this room does not tally with authentic TV coverage of mission control which has occurred in the past. Large screens at one side of the room illuminate various charts but their light does not infuse the rest of the room. Numerous computer consoles illuminate small spaces in which their anonymous operators work. One of these is a young man called Elliott Witter (Robert Walden), a bespectacled programmer who tells one of his superiors that there are discrepancies in the readings that he is receiving only to be told that there have been technical difficulties on his console, number thirty-six. Like Babe in *Marathon Man*, he is a bookish character who returns to his studies to assault the problem and like Chavez, the graduate student in *Earthquake* (see Chapter 6, above), he is persistent. A brief scene shows him in his home, lit in the characteristic brown way, poring over his books. There is then a cut to the control room which is lit in an identical way; the countdown for the landing begins and there is tense music on the soundtrack. As the craft touches down the congregation in the control room stands and cheers but the camera pans from left to right, rising to a rostrum shot which surveys the triumph but which is also accompanied by very tense and sinister music. The meaning of the incongruous juxtaposition of the music and the triumphal shot is, by now, obvious. This is the centre point of the film in terms of its narration and establishment of duplicity and it is followed by a succession of similar sequences.. After Elliot has told Kelloway of his console problems and been sent away, the camera stays with Kelloway who makes a phone call; Kelloway will do this repeatedly in the film until it is made clear that whenever he is near a telephone he is enacting some aspect of the plot. The next sequence is of the astronauts supposedly making their exit from the module to the surface of the planet: as they explain their motions on the soundtrack, the camera pulls further and further back until it is possible to see that the whole scene is enacted on a set with studio lights to the side and overhead. What was originally taken to be television coverage is therefore revealed to be the narrating camera of the film which exposes the hoax. There is then a cut to a pool hall which is lit exactly like the control room: Elliott and Caulfield are playing a game of pool and the ensuing conversation reveals that they are old friends and that, although Caulfield is unwilling to listen, Elliott is very agitated

about his work. Caulfield becomes suddenly interested as Elliott mentions the nature of his worries, but he is called to the bar to take a phone call. Caulfield's words show that the call concerns some administrative enquiries about his office which he is unqualified to answer and he puzzledly redirects the caller. Returning to the pool table the camera shows the cue on the baize and Elliott's absence; the soundtrack plays a short series of notes that are part of the film's title music and the effect is to charge both the pool table and the telephone that Caulfield has just handled with new meaning. The same device follows in successive scenes: Caulfield is shown telephoning for details of Elliott's number from the phone company and when he is told that there has never been a listing for Mr. Witter, the music plays again; he goes to mission control on an assignment and the camera cuts from Caulfield to a shot of Elliott's console which is shut down and covered; he visits Elliott's apartment only to find a woman who claims to have always lived there - when he barges in, saying he has visited this apartment many times, he suddenly slows his pace as he recognizes that the flat has totally changed and the music returns to underline the presence of the conspiracy. The recurrences of this device in which incongruous juxtapositions of semantic elements represent that all is not as it seems on the surface illustrate that *Capricorn One* is self-consciously a paranoid text. Clearly the juxtapositions represent the kinds of denials made by Watergate conspirators which were later demonstrated to be shams, including the President's desperate withholding of the White House tapes or his issue of them in a clumsily edited version. It must be remembered, though, that this need not be the immutable reading of *Capricorn One* eternally and it must be emphasized that such a reading as we have suggested is thoroughly mediated by the narrative.

First and foremost, the narrative requires that the conspiracy be credible. Immediately following Caulfield's visit to Elliott's apartment he drives his car away to find that it is accelerating voluntarily and that the brakes, gears, and ignition no longer work; he escapes by driving off a bridge into a river. Caulfield's suspicions are vindicated. Later, he is involved in a bantering argument with his editor Walter Loughlin (David

Doyle) who reprimands him for a series of hair-brained investigative jaunts including the discovery of a second gunman in the John Kennedy shooting who later was revealed to be in a mental institution at the time of the assassination and other misdemeanours culminating in taking his car for a swim days previously (the police reported that no tampering had taken place with the vehicle). Caulfield has, apparently, always had a penchant for the sensational and his editor chides him for not being a plodder like himself:

Woodward and Bernstein were good reporters, that's how they did it.

At this stage the narrative has shown that Caulfield's scent of a story is authentic; far from recasting Caulfield as a slightly unbalanced low-achiever, Loughlin's speech emphasizes that - at least at present - Caulfield is a lowly and heroic outsider. Loughlin gives him twenty-four hours to come up with a story and there is then a cut to Caulfield in his apartment. Again, it is a room lit like the control room and like Elliott's apartment and, as such, is ominous. Getting up from reading his book he goes to the bathroom cabinet and opens it wide, revealing a near-empty tube of toothpaste and a bottle of mouth rinse from which he takes a mouthful. He returns to his work and then his door is suddenly broken open by federal agents who announce they have a search warrant; as they manhandle Caulfield, one of them announces he has something and there is a shot of him taking a small bottle of white powder from the bathroom cabinet which he declares to be cocaine. The narration of the previous scene has made it clear that, as Caulfield says,

You put it there, you know you did.

This is where *Capricorn One* can be said to represent somewhat of a departure from the other paranoid films. In *The Parallax View* there is a great measure of uncertainty about the conspiracy until a gun is pointed at Frady while he is fishing near the dam; in *The Conversation* and *Three Days of the Condor*, the true nature of the conspiracy is not revealed until very close to the end of the narrative; and in *Marathon Man* it is never quite clear, as a result of the internal competition, where the conspiracy lies once Doc is dead and Babe is roped into the business. In *Capricorn One*, the audience is in full

possession of the facts from a very early stage of the narrative, and it is this that makes its plot similar to a film such as *North by Northwest* (1959), where Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) is self-evidently innocent in the audience's eyes of the crimes of which he is accused. The suspense lies in how the conspiracy is uncovered and the delays in Caulfield's quest. When he finds the air base where the astronauts have been kept hidden, he enters a hangar and the camera views him from a space within the hangar; the interior of the hangar is now just ashes, but he is able to procure localized light from a switch. The establishing shot which has preceded his entry into the hangar has been of him pulling up to the base in Judy Drinkwater's sports car. The shot from inside the hangar is therefore, in contrast, very dark except for the bright sunlight which shines through the door Caulfield has used. After finding amongst the ashes a pendant and chain inscribed to Brubaker from his wife, Kay, Caulfield has implicitly gained possession of the key piece of evidence of his theory. There is a long shot as he turns his back in the middle of the frame and sprints for the sunlight in the door slightly to the right of the frame. This can be read as a direct echo of the climactic shot of *The Parallax View*; however, no armed man appears in silhouette to fire at Caulfield. In short, the sequence can be read as emphasizing the optimistic side of the exposure of conspiracies.

One other feature of the semantic aspect of the narrative of *Capricorn One* should be mentioned. When Brubaker, Willis and Walker escape into the desert they are pursued by two black/green helicopters; contemporary readings of the film might render specific connotations to the sight and sound of these aircraft. Alasdair Clark (in Walsh and Aulich 1989) argues that

No sound or image is as evocative of Vietnam as the helicopter (p. 86).

His essay goes on to discuss how this particular icon of coverage of the war has been transformed in Hollywood movies. Like me, he believes that *Capricorn One* definitely incorporates the iconography of Vietnam in the use of specific images of the helicopter (p. 104). The astronauts split up in the desert and, at one stage, Walker has fallen to the

ground suffering from extreme exhaustion and dehydration; finding no water, he looks up to see two vultures circling. Slowly they are transformed to reveal that they are, in fact, helicopters which, in his hallucination, have appeared as birds. Willis climbs a mountain soon after this only to find two helicopters - not men - standing on the flat top of the rock, waiting for him. The helicopters in this film represent the faceless machinery of the conspiracy as opposed to the double-dealing of its human agents. Clark agrees that even the pilots are shown to be machine-like. This can be seen when Brubaker has reached the edge of the desert. He takes refuge in a disused garage; the helicopters catch up with him and the pilots attempt to enter the garage; as he attacks them with a crow-bar, it is noticeable that they have not even removed their helmets or visors. This impersonality can be read as a condensation of the extreme situations of war in Vietnam with the helicopter representing the technological impersonality of the conduct of the war, especially during the early seventies period of 'machines in, men out' and 'Vietnamization'. The widespread use of the technology of war has concomitant effects: in a famous work of psychology, Stanley Milgram pointed out their relation to the phenomenon of obedience to authority, asserting that

In many instances, technology helps reduce the strain by providing needed buffers. Napalm is dropped on civilians from ten thousand feet overhead; not men but tiny blips on an infrared oscilloscope are the target of Gatling guns (1974 p. 163).

However, in *Capricorn One*, the protagonist is the very *recipient* of this impersonal aggression: if the helicopters are birds or impersonal technology, then Brubaker is just a fly on the surface of the desert. However, there is a contrast to the helicopters which is presented in the narrative. Immediately prior to the garage scene, Caulfield has tried to hire the services of Albain (Telly Savalas) and his aircraft, a crop-duster. In the haggling over money it becomes clear that Albain is an old-fashioned populist who not only thinks that Caulfield is a "pervert", but believes that his son - a lawyer - must be one as well. While circling the garage, Albain and Caulfield notice that it is under attack from the helicopter pilots. They swoop down and land for a few seconds in order to allow Brubaker to board the wing and make their escape. As the helicopters follow, one of the most breathtaking chases in the history of Hollywood cinema takes place. Albain

eventually causes both of the pursuing craft to crash when he releases his fertilizer near an oncoming mountain. In terms of the cinema, it is clear that the crop-dusting aircraft is a reference to *North by Northwest*; however, as a result of its pilot, the crop-duster in this film serves as an emphatic human foil to the impersonality of the helicopters. At this stage, the narrative usefully emphasizes the sordid nature of the deeds that the helicopters seek to pursue. This emphasis has been muted when Willis and Walker were caught: their fate is signalled only by the release of a flare which each agreed to carry out if their journey failed. The sinister threat of violence against Brubaker, Caulfield and Albain in the final scenes with the helicopters serves to further underline the duplicity of the authorities, especially as it is immediately followed by a scene at the memorial service for the dead astronauts. The cut is from the denouement of the chase to a scene in a cemetery on a bright day with masses of uniform white gravestones in the manner of Arlington National Cemetery. Here, the President - not the vice-president - gives a rousing speech before a congregation of friends and colleagues of the dead men, as well as the media; what underlines the President's rhetoric is now clear in the narrative and his voice continues in spite of the action taking place outside his immediate vision:

At a time when cynicism was a national epidemic, they gave us something to take pride in. It is a dream that should not be allowed to die. A nation is built on the spirit of its people. The test of greatness of any nation is how that nation pulls together in a time of crisis. The only limits on what we can achieve are the limits we place upon our hopes. These three men reminded us of the limitlessness of our hopes [romantic music and panning shot of Caulfield arriving in Judy Drinkwater's red sportscar; voiceover continues as camera stays with shots of Brubaker getting out of the car and individual shots of the wives of the astronauts]. There was a moment these past few days when we were all one people. We were all hoping. We were all a little bit taller, a little bit prouder. We were all feeling the same fears, the same exhilaration. We knew there were no goals that we could not reach if we just tried to reach them together . . .

The President's speech trails off as the music on the soundtrack surges, Kay Brubaker is shown in shock, Peaker and Kelloway are shown in consternation, the cameramen and sound crew of the TV station turn 180 degrees and Brubaker and Caulfield run in slow motion towards the narrating camera. the true celebration of the moment is suddenly made clear as opposed to the sham one. The rhetoric of the President in this final scene only serves to clarify the mendacity of Kelloway and his cohorts. It is the

rhetoric of consensus, false optimism and individualism. The individualism that the President exalts in his speech is precisely what Kelloway has been trying to suppress in order for the space programme to continue. The consensus that he invokes no longer exists: the New Frontier is emphatically less important than inflation. The idealistic optimism he expresses is self-serving, and split between those like Brubaker who would abandon it on principle and those like Kelloway for whom it is a provider of power and unrecognizable as an empty shell. Even though the narrative is concerned with the space programme and even though it relies on intrigue and action, *Capricorn One* can probably be said to allow for a reading as one of the most representative of the paranoid texts, in that nearly all the narrative elements that we have argued make up the paranoid texts are to be found in the film.

The extra-textual cues which might contribute a great deal to a reading of *Capricorn One* were acutely aware of the Watergate connection. In a British newspaper, the director, Peter Hyams, set the tone for the reading of the text by saying that

Before Watergate came along everyone thought the idea was too incredible ('Mars mission a space-age Watergate' *Evening News* 10 January 1979).

As we have seen, not everyone in America thought that the plot was too incredible: the quote from Wise (above) dates from 1973 and the data it discusses dates from sometime before. However, what Hyams is referring to specifically here are the potential buyers of his screenplay. Long before Watergate he had had the idea for the general outline of the story; the general move towards its acceptance as a movie project and a topical reading of its narrative can serve as a paradigm of how readings of thrillers are so often historically specific. As Nightingale points out,

The plot of the film sounds as if it must have been custom-built for an America still tense with post-Watergate paranoia . . . (Nightingale 1978).

Yet the script had, for a long time, continually received a thumbs down from producers (see *ibid.* and also, 'Mars Mission a space-age Watergate' 1979). Nightingale is therefore indicating that the reception of the text by audiences rather than producers was crucial:

the main reason for the sudden rise to favor of 'Capricorn One' was, clearly enough, the shift in the national mood brought about by the scandal at the White House (1978).

If producers thought that the story was too incredible for audiences to swallow, it appears, their opinions were soon changed:

Watergate may not have inspired 'Capricorn One', but it made its thesis more acceptable, its plot more credible and some of its content strangely prophetic (ibid.).

This is almost a description of how a major feature of generic innovation is realised.

Clearly there were paranoid conspiracy thrillers well before the seventies. Precisely the corpus of works that Palmer (1978) discusses are sufficient to make this statement valid. However, in the seventies the organization of semantic elements of paranoid thrillers was unified enough across a number of texts that it almost provides the grounds for positing the existence of a historically specific sub-genre. The way these semantic elements were reorganized was by means of their availability for a historical reading. We will return to this in the conclusion; but what Nightingale is trying to imply, it seems, is that the script of *Capricorn One* stayed basically the same from its original conception while Watergate had reorganized the regime in which its elements were to be read. We should add to this that it is not only the political reality of Watergate that effected this reorganization but also other paranoid texts of the period - intertextual references - and a number of extra-textual cues. In a major feature in the *New York Times* Nightingale and Hyams participate in a dialogue about deception and its role in the presentation of the war in Vietnam:

Didn't the long-unacknowledged part the United States played in the early days of the Vietnam war indicate that such an undertaking could easily be sanctioned and organized? 'Think of it - a country bombing another country for eight months without anyone knowing about it. Think of all the planes involved, all the barracks that had to be built, all the beds that had to be made, all the meals that had to be cooked. My idea was peanuts beside that, much smaller in scope and probability' (Nightingale 1978).

The magnitude and the extent of the secret bombing of Cambodia - as well as the maintenance of its clandestine nature - is often underemphasized and Hyams' statement on the subject evidently draws from his knowledge of journalism. That news can be managed efficiently and within quite rigid restrictions is something to which he is keen to testify:

I worked for [TV] during Vietnam, for instance, back in the 1960s. Before I went, there were all these televised interviews with soldiers who kept saying, 'It may be a dirty a little war, but's the only one we've got. We should be here, and if those protestors would come over, they'd see the fine job we're doing'. Once I got there, I found nothing but guys saying, 'Get me the hell out' (Nightingale 1978).

So Hyams' perspective on the power of TV is transferred to the narrative of *Capricorn One*. This is made explicit at various stages in the film, especially when Kay Brubaker shows Caulfield some home movies of the Brubaker children watching the making of a Western at Flatrock. This is one of the integral moments of the film in that it is the intersection point of the working out of the cover-up and the fate of the family. The television coverage of the event and the rôle of the family are closely linked in this film: Brubaker's televised message from Mars to Kay about his plans to take their son to Yosemite is meant as a clue to his present situation. When Caulfield picks up on this the vindication of the journalist's suspicions comes through home movies. Later, at the televised memorial service, Kelloway has ensured that Kay and her family attend the event and there are numerous shots of her and the children on the way to the cemetery. Clearly, a connection can be made between the role of TV in domestic situations and which American values are being subverted by the cover-up. Kay tells Caulfield how her husband was absolutely fascinated by the attention to detail and the ability of the Western film-makers to deceive. If this can be said to be the key to the unravelling of the narrative as far as Caulfield is concerned then it can also be said to embody, perhaps, not only the authorial voice but also, more specifically, the reference to Vietnam in Hyams' interview in the *New York Times*. At the same time, though, Hyams points up the importance of Watergate, and the aspect of the narrative which he chooses to emphasize is the realm of idealism which we have discussed. He draws an equation between the Kelloway character and Egil Krogh:

Krogh was the most fascinating character in the whole Watergate story. If you had to do a profile of the most attractive American in the world, it would be Krogh - blond and blue eyed and handsome and very bright, bringing his family to Washington to serve his President, filled with idealism, and actually crying when he saw the Washington Memorial. He was the best, and he wound up doing horrible things and pleading with young people not to join the government (Nightingale 1978).

The transformation from believing in what one was doing in government to fanaticism is a topic which we have already discussed. Once again, this is not a new topic: a novel such as Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* (1951; originally 1946) deals

directly with this dilemma in American life. In readings of the theme in this period, however, it is likely to be heavily invested in specific ways by the audience. On this topic Hyams notes the success of the film at previews, especially regarding emotional reactions: many audiences, it seems, cheered at the end of the aerial chase when the helicopters were destroyed. Apart from the technically stunning aspect of the sequence, Nightingale seems to think that there are social reasons for such reactions:

part of the explanation may, once again, be the mass trauma from which America is slowly recovering (Nightingale 1978).

Hyams adds to this:

Maybe it's that the right side wins, maybe it's the idea that somehow or other things will work out. Maybe it's because it is, in fact, a most uncynical movie (Nightingale 1978).

Such readings would seem to suggest that the film fictionally resolves some of the contradictions that were left open by Watergate in American political life. That some readings are tempted by an excessively facile conflation of fiction and reality is not our concern. Hyams' belief that *Capricorn One* is uncynical seems to be borne out by our consideration of possible readings of the narrative. Particularly with regard to other paranoid texts such as *Marathon Man*, as we have suggested, *Capricorn One* opts for a different kind of retribution from revenge. Like *All the President's Men*, the narrative is actually inconclusive; however, history enables a filling of the final indeterminacies of *All the President's Men* as it does with *Capricorn One*, albeit in different ways.

Capricorn One has an ending which is similar to *All the President's Men* but a reading of it as the prelude to justice being done is engendered by the resolution of the chase scene, the triumphal music in the final sequence, the reference to other paranoid texts which have either been able to resolve the conspiracy threat or have not, and the narrative of Watergate itself. What Hyams' comments accomplish, for our purposes, is to draw attention to the Watergate frame of reference for reading the text. Whether the connections he draws are facile or not, the fact that he emphasizes them may act to alert potential readers to a regime of organization for the text's semantic elements. What *Capricorn One* can be said to represent is the pinnacle of the paranoid genre in that it incorporates aspects of other paranoid texts into the fabric of the narrative for specific

reasons; the most pronounced of these that we have discussed is the ironic arrangement of semantic elements so as to encourage a paranoid reading of what seem either sincere or innocent objects, speeches and events. It is a measure of the currency of such devices by this time in the seventies that specific readings of them could now be expected without the requirement that the humour of the narrative be eliminated.

Conclusion

What we have attempted to examine in our discussion of the paranoid thriller in the 1970s is the idea that the term 'paranoia' as it is utilized in the description of such texts cannot be understood simply by defining it as an eternal psychological mechanism. In psychoanalytic theory there is room for some flexibility with regard to the concept, but in the realm of politics, as Hofstadter goes some way toward demonstrating, paranoia is historically specific. Such specificity cannot be examined in thrillers by a scrutiny of the text's mechanisms alone: as we found in Chapter 2, historians of popular fiction have constantly attempted to carry out such a scrutiny for this purpose, resulting in a corpus of texts explicable only by similarities in their formal characteristics. Before the corpus of texts which we have called paranoid thrillers came to prominence in the 1970s there were a number of narratives with almost identical properties: the most famous dates back to 1915 - *The Thirty-Nine Steps* by John Buchan. Other famous examples can be found in Hitchcock's films especially *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *North by Northwest* (1959) and the non-fictional narrative, *The Wrong Man* (1956). The difference between these early texts and those of the seventies, of course, is in the nature of the conspiracy: it is important in the later narratives that there is a *corporate* conspiracy. This can also be said to be true of some British texts which were clearly influenced by the seventies paranoid narratives, for example *Defence of the Realm* (1985) and TV serials such as *Charlie* (1983), *Edge of Darkness* (1985) and *Natural Lies* (1992). Yet, in spite of the corporate nature of the conspiracy in these

British texts it would still be to treat them with insufficient specificity if one were to lump them into the same corpus as their formal American forebears of a decade or so earlier. *Edge of Darkness*, for example, allowed for significant contemporary audience investment by virtue of the fact that the Westland affair and the deployment of cruise missiles were in full flight when the programme was first broadcast. Moreover, to suggest that *The Parallax View* is the same kind of text as *Edge of Darkness* can only be done in an historical vacuum; equally, *The Parallax View* is no longer the text that it once was in its original readings. By now this is, for us, a well-rehearsed argument. However, it does assist us in our attempt to politically locate paranoid texts. Far from being texts with immutable reactionary - 'sick' - mechanisms, as Mandel would have it, the paranoid thrillers allow for quite specific historical investments from period to period. Paranoia does not have just one meaning in these texts, nor is it simply a syntactic 'vessel' into which contemporary meaning is poured. As we have continually argued, the syntactic aspect of genre only exists insofar as it is inseparable from its semantic component; audience investment - which is always already present in the potential indeterminacies of the text - effects a concomitant reading of both the semantic and syntactic aspects of the genre text. Even if this reading can be said - from an ahistorical vantage point - to share the formal characteristics of another reading of the same or other texts in another time, this does not necessarily mean that the reading of the text is experienced as similar contemporaneously. The reason for this is history; a quotation from Schrecker illustrates this to some extent:

[T]he anti-Communist consensus that swept the country in the late 1940s and 1950s, [was] a consensus that viewed the American Communist Party as one of the gravest threats to its security the United States had ever faced.

In retrospect, it now appears that this assessment was wrong. Whatever the perils the Cold War might have brought on the international level, the danger that a few thousand American Communists, acting on secret instructions from Moscow, were about to take over the United States was not one of them. And yet, so pervasive was the image of the Party as a lethal foreign conspiracy and so useful was that image as a way to cope with the uncertainties of the new atomic age that few American leaders could or would accept a more realistic assessment. The onset of the Cold War had shocked and confused them. Suddenly, the Soviet Union, which only a few years before had been America's ally against Nazi Germany, was now its enemy. And Stalin, whose armies had installed Communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe, seemed to be as dangerous as Hitler. President Truman responded by talking tough and pouring aid into Western Europe. But the situation only seemed to worsen. The Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1948 touched off a frightening war scare, intensified a few months later

by the Berlin blockade. Then the following year came the news that the Soviets had detonated an atomic bomb. A few months later, China 'fell' to the Communists.

To give the American Communist Party any credit for these revolutionary changes was ridiculous. Even during its supposed heyday in the 1930s the CP had been neither numerous nor popular. Yet, the logic of politics demanded that the Truman administration, which had committed itself to combatting the spread of Communism abroad, confront it at home as well (1986 p. 4).

Historians are usually acutely aware of the cultural/historical relativism that is responsible for the mobilisation of given historical forces at given moments.

Schrecker's statement on this topic is one more version of the same recognition, heightened only by the fact that the Cold War period of McCarthyism can be viewed from certain vantage points as a moment of hysteria in the guise of an intellectually coherent system. Other versions might be Trevor-Roper's conclusions on the European 'witch-craze' (1969) or Boyer and Nissenbaum's social history of Salem (1974). As far as these moments are experienced by their agents, they can actually be said to have a large measure of intellectual coherence. In the early 1970s there was every reason to presume that paranoia was an understandable mindset with regard to the vicissitudes of governments and corporations. If Watergate and Vietnam had not made this an abundantly plausible response, then smaller agencies such as police departments could reinforce such views. When Kael speaks of "justifiable paranoia" as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, it must be remembered that she is referring to Frank Serpico. This is a key point: paranoia can be said to exist as a mindset in the seventies on a number of levels of the power structure of American society - even, for example, in the police department - but it is nearly always represented through the acts of the *establishment* and *authorities*. It would be difficult to characterize this mindset as hysteria - but at the same time it must be remembered that distrust of authority structures was probably abnormally acute in comparison with other periods, and not without justification. If anything, then, the paranoia that characterizes the texts we have discussed is not merely a reactionary container for muted social criticism of some authority structures, as Mandel claims, but a much more serious questioning of the role of authorities in American society.

The question of the political character of the paranoid texts must therefore be taken further to avoid the temptation of positing a period of development in which thrillers are merely thought to be 'political' for a while. These texts of the seventies can clearly be seen as 'political' in *some* sense; but to accept this unquestioningly is to fall into the same line of reasoning as Jameson who, dangerously close to Mandel, suggests

It is indeed as though the major legacy of the sixties was to furnish a whole new code, a whole new set of thematics - that of the political - with which, after that of sex, the entertainment industry could reinvest its tired paradigms, without any danger to itself or to the system . . . (Jameson 1979 p. 78).

Once more, the 'political' is described as a semantic content which can be poured into a syntactic container, although Jameson's argument lies on a far more sophisticated base than Mandel's. The base for Jameson's argument is an inter-textual one in which certain textual mechanisms have become fashionable across a series of texts, to the extent that they no longer have any powers of estrangement. The first contradiction in this argument lies in the fact that, at one time, the new paradigm must have been startlingly radical before it wore off; further contradictions can be drawn out as

Jameson goes on:

I believe a case can be made for the ideological function of overexposure in commercial culture: it seems to me just possible that the repeated stereotypical use of otherwise disturbing and alien phenomena in our present social conjuncture - political militancy, student revolt, drugs, resistance to and hatred of authority - has an effect of containment for the system as a whole. To name something is to domesticate it, to refer to it repeatedly is to persuade a fearful and beleaguered middle-class public that all of that is part of the known and catalogued world and thus somehow in order (1979 pp. 78-79).

Jameson's argument hinges on two theories, here. The first is a variation on a theme made explicit in a body of theory which was published mainly in *Screen* in the 1970s. Utilizing notions taken from Brecht's writings on theatre, various articles put forth the hypothesis that conventional 'realist' devices of cinema were not only stale but actually engendered a reactionary positioning of the reader in respect of certain bourgeois norms (see, for example, MacCabe 1974, 1977; Brewster 1977). One possible solution to this that was advocated was a radical cinema in which narrative devices would be revealed for what they were. Various criticisms of this kind of theory have been given (for example, Britton 1979; Easthope in Barker et al. 1982; McDonnell and Robins in Clarke et al. 1980) but our dismissal of Jameson's version of it focuses on two areas:

firstly, there is no reason to assume that one convention of narration will be any less transient in its novelty or might therefore become as reactionary or orthodox as the *Screen* theorists claim realism has; secondly, Jameson's comments on overexposure stress only the syntactic dimension, in mythical isolation. The other body of theory that Jameson seems to be invoking derives from the work of Julia Kristeva. Without mentioning it by name, Jameson draws on the thesis of Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982) which holds that the most disturbing aspect of existence is the 'abject', all those features of life which are rejected as unclean in infancy and which do not lend themselves to any symbolization. While this argument can be made to have some power, Jameson's rendition of it is out of place. To begin with, the political theme of the thriller in the seventies is not the only location in which phenomena "alien" to the social conjuncture appears; news, for example, constantly covered political unrest. If Jameson's argument is to stick, then *everything* that appears within the realm of the symbolic must be rendered unthreatening. Secondly, leading on from this, Kristeva characterizes the abject as "the jettisoned object" (p. 2), the item that has to be denied in order to live; the political unrest that Jameson mentions is actually part of the social formation and though it may seem 'other' it is quintessentially available to the symbolic. In fact, the symbolic is its natural realm: as we have argued, political 'reality' is a thoroughly mediated entity. This opens out onto a third point about Jameson's statement, which is that, in this context, to name is to articulate *and* to emphasize that which would previously have been conventionally unavailable for incorporation into some discourses because of its existence in others. Political struggle occurs right across a realm of discourses and to suggest that the political rightly belongs on a terrain where discourse cannot be is an unfathomable paradox. The point of this digression around the views of Jameson should now be clear. Continually, we have stressed that a general realm of discourse, both non-fictional and fictional, has been the home of the thriller, with epistemological privilege given to one of these on the basis of a mutable confidence in its equally mutable rhetorical strategies. This allows us to approach the political character of paranoid texts from a new angle. Jameson implies that the political

unrest that is incorporated into these texts leads to its overexposure and a weakening of its effects; before this took place, the 'political' was available elsewhere, presumably in a region of which *could* be reached, by a discourse to which Jameson gives epistemological primacy such that it yields the information that the 'political' is alien. In fact, in this formulation also, the political is assimilable through and through, and it is on this basis that the paranoid texts should be assessed. That texts should be expected to effect any kind of political upheaval is almost an absurd idea; to expect them to fundamentally change the relations of capitalism is even more so. Yet this is not to say that texts do not contribute to political struggle whether they do so with or without discernible long term effect. Writing on the Pentagon Papers, Salisbury states that it is a tragedy that no-one remembers what they were about:

National interest was diverted from what the Pentagon Papers revealed, to the question of whether press and public had a right to print and read them (in Salisbury p. 6).

Ungar puts this into further perspective:

Disclosure of the Pentagon Papers did not end the war in Vietnam. It could not even be stated with certainty, as Daniel Ellsberg and others had hoped, that the revelations of duplicity and deceit in American policy had stimulated any new and militant popular outcry for setting a fixed date for complete withdrawal of American land and air forces from Southeast Asia. Despite the secret US negotiations with the North Vietnamese and President Nixon's journey to Peking and Moscow, the prospect was for an indefinite, though less visible and offensive American presence in Indochina. If anything, the Papers and their historical lessons seemed to reinforce the likelihood of that prospect.

Relatively few Americans, in fact, read the Pentagon Papers in any detail. The Bantam edition based on the extensive ten part series of articles in *The New York Times* sold well over a million copies but resulted in little public reaction. (1989 pp. 301 - 302).

This is one side to the story of political texts in the 1970s. In the 1980s, one might wish to compare the actions of Sarah Tisdall and Clive Ponting who both leaked politically sensitive documents in turbulent circumstances but can be said to have made little individual impact on the source of political events. Nevertheless, as we have suggested, texts can contribute to political struggle; Gabriel Kolko makes note of this principle but also extends it:

There is a certain tragic irony in the fact that individuals who have sought to expose those elements of secrecy in our foreign policy (ranging from those who persisted in publicizing the facts about the My Lai massacres to Daniel Ellsberg) had so little impact on functional conduct of policy despite the fact that they expected they would. For what they revealed was that, in the last analysis, again, the problem was not secrecy in our society but sensibility. The best that can be said for these efforts to expose these events, which might normally have been predicted as the inevitable consequence of the conduct of a larger policy that was quite public, is that they helped contribute to the general loss of social confidence which made the phenomenon of Watergate possible (in Haward 1974 p. 125).

On the one hand, texts with a political content rarely effect change single-handedly. Yet, on the other, the early seventies was manifestly a period when the texts of Woodward and Bernstein had led directly to the removal of an incumbent president. In addition, we have already demonstrated that these texts bear a strong relation to the corpus of thrillers that we are discussing. In fact, the events depicted in *Three Days of the Condor*, for example, where Robert Redford takes his story to the New York Times can be said to be analogous to the paradigm of political effectivity represented by Ellsberg et al. Depiction of such events cannot usually be expected to be more politically effective in isolation than real versions of such events. The question of the political character of the paranoid - or, indeed, any other - texts is far more complicated than Jameson and Mandel will allow. If the discourses of news, non-fiction and the thriller can be demonstrated to overlap then the investments which fill the texts' potential indeterminacies create a political character. It is here that the 'political' can be located and here also the site of generic innovation is to be found.

In order to conclude the issue of how the paranoid texts represent innovation in genre, a few comments on their constitution as a corpus is required. As we have mentioned, there are serious consequences for a historical reading if one is to assess paranoid thrillers solely in terms of their formal characteristics. The texts we have discussed are therefore grouped together in terms of the likely regimes of reading in which they might have existed in the contemporary period. Some of these texts deal with Nazism, some with assassinations, some with McCarthyism and so on, and some with a mixture of elements of paranoia that we have mentioned. In terms of action, a film like *The Conversation* is much different from *Capricorn One*; in terms of views on the resolution of conspiracies, *The Holcroft Covenant* is much different from *The Parallax View*. Moreover, the victims of conspiracy in, say, *The Conversation* and *Marathon Man*, are outsiders with regard to American society; in Ludlum's novels they are not. Yet all these texts are bound together by virtue of probable contemporary readings of them in terms of a justifiably paranoid fear of contemporary American authority structures. In

this way, a text such as *Serpico* belongs firmly in this chapter although for purposes of theory which we have made clear, it is discussed under the rubric of the non-fiction thriller. In a period far posterior to that of their first appearances, these texts could probably be reconstituted in a new corpus and said to belong to a wider sub-genre characterized by a broad set of formal characteristics. That this is possible serves to alert us to the nature of generic innovation: if there are certain regimes of reading of a text, then it is these, we have argued, that shape the contemporary experience of it. Rather than a tangible change in the formal structure of a text in putative reaction to some concomitant change in the social formation, generic innovation resides in the manner in which a reading of the text is arranged, the means by which its potential indeterminacies are filled, thus always already effecting a transformation of the text in flux. In this chapter we have outlined the numerous ways in which the reading formation of the paranoid thrillers was organized around the distrust of authority in various forms and through various discourses. It is almost possible to say that this effectively serves to blur the borders between the logic of Watergate as it is laid out elsewhere in the period and the paranoid thrillers' incorporation of it. The realm of the political is therefore difficult to pin down and cannot always be tied to one privileged discourse as Jameson might have it. It is also notable that many of the extra-textual cues surrounding the paranoid texts expressed disdain for their depiction of paranoia and, often, for their lack of resolution. All the paranoid texts we have discussed - as well as some that we have not, such as *The Boys from Brazil* - have largely inconclusive endings. In this sense, the political can even be said to spill out into the future, into the potential indeterminacy of the text's very end. Furthermore, this spillage can also find another location in texts within a different reading formation. We have noted how the paranoid thriller utilizes certain notions of idealism and the attempted resolution of the contradictions with which it meets; the final chapter will deal with a corpus of texts which seem to address just one of these attempted resolutions.

CHAPTER 10

Revenge: From *Dirty Harry* to *The Exterminator*

It's not simply vengeance. It's about doing justice.

Professor Mike McConville, Director of the Legal Research Institute of Warwick University
This Week (1992)

They don't want justice. They want blood.

Professor Harry Chisum in Brian Garfield, *Death Sentence* (1977 p. 73)

I believe in justice/ I believe in vengeance/ I believe in gettin' the bastard/ gettin' the bastard

New Model Army, 'Vengeance' (1986)

If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer 'leading', but only 'dominant', exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear (Gramsci 1971 pp. 275-276)

Introduction

It would be foolish to say that the revenge narratives of the 1970s simply evolved out of the paranoid texts. To begin with, there is no way to provide a temporal hierarchy in which we are able to assert that paranoid narratives came first and vengeance narratives followed. As we have suggested before, the development of the thriller is far more complicated than this. As far as the 1970s is concerned the key revenge narrative of the period effectively ushers in a seemingly new breed of thrillers. This narrative, *Dirty Harry*, appeared in 1972. What the paranoid narratives and the texts of vengeance do have in common, however, is the potential for political readings of the theme of betrayal. Such a theme is, of course, not new. As far as the thriller goes, it can be seen not only as a central investment point but also one that is often highly problematized. A film such as *Act of Violence* (1949), for instance, takes as its central character a man (Van Heflin) who has betrayed his comrades in a German POW camp during the Second World War and is subsequently pursued on American soil by a limping veteran (Robert Ryan); while it is clear that the narrative allows for a great measure of sympathy for the Heflin character it is equally clear that his nemesis (Ryan) possesses a convincing measure of righteousness. So betrayal and retribution are themes in thrillers which carry a certain amount of ambiguity. They are also significant investment points for political readings by audiences, as we will discuss. In the last chapter we have reiterated features of the 'naïvety' and idealism of the pre-Watergate/Vietnam period which is transformed into cynicism in the seventies. We have also examined the ways in which some of the paranoid narratives have dealt with this: if the idealism of the earlier period can be seen to have been *betrayed*, then there is the possibility of enacting *retribution* in these narratives. So, partly because of the temporal overlap of the paranoid texts and the revenge narratives, it must be remembered that the two themes we have mentioned have at least a residual meaning associated with idealism even when they are to be found in texts that can be said to be mainly about some kind of vengeance.

A possible general demonstration of the range of meaning to be found in the theme of revenge concerns the role of Israelis in 1970s thrillers. The most salient example of this is the book *90 Minutes at Entebbe* (1976) by William Stevenson with Uri Dan, and the films *Victory at Entebbe* (1976), *Operation Thunderbolt* (1977) and *Raid on Entebbe* (1977). All were inspired by the daring and successful raid by Israeli commandos to rescue hostages held by Arab guerrillas at Entebbe airport, Uganda, which took place in 1976. The raid - 'Operation Thunderbolt' - can easily be cast in terms of a revenge motif; an extract from the blurb on the back of the Stevenson/Dan book illustrates such a possibility succinctly:

For years Arab terrorists had shocked the world with skyjackings and wanton murder of innocents. Then guerrillas hijacked an Air France jetliner, flew the passengers to Uganda and, during a week of agony, bargained for lives. Only hours before the deadline, Israeli commandos in Hercules prop-jets raced over 2500 miles from Israel to Entebbe airport, and in a blaze of gunfire, free 103 hostages.

Moreover, the overlap of the thriller aspect of the raid, its non-fictionality and the role of the Israelis echoed the kidnapping of Eichmann in the previous decade. Clearly, the reporter, Uri Dan, who co-authored *90 Minutes at Entebbe*, made the most of this link in his Nazi hunt thriller co-authored with Edward Radley, *The Eichmann Syndrome*.¹ The investment in Israeli intelligence that the Eichmann episode provides was, of course, demonstrated in a number of thrillers prior to the Entebbe raid. For example, the international bestseller of 1972, *The Odessa File*, has its hero (Peter Miller) kidnapped by crack Mossad agents who guide his penetration of an ex-Nazi organization. Also, the theme continues in post-Entebbe thrillers involving Israeli intelligence, for example, *The Secret List of Heinrich Roehm* (1977; originally 1976).² From another angle, the links between the texts of revenge can be seen in overlap of personnel: *Raid on Entebbe* starred Charles Bronson who, only three years earlier in

¹ The front cover of the American edition of this novel mentions that Uri Dan is the co-author of *90 Minutes at Entebbe* in letters which are the same size as those for its title. (The words 'with Edward Radley' appear in very small print below the title).

² One of the sample extra-textual comments which appears on the inside front cover of the American edition of this novel is the following:

"A clever counterespionage chess game with Odessa-like verisimilitude".
- KIRKUS REVIEWS

Death Wish (1974), assumed a star identity that would accompany him for the rest of his career: that of the vigilante.

So, it can be shown that, in thrillers at least, there is a reasonably strong link between the idea of retribution and Israel. In this way, Kael's comment that *Marathon Man* is a Jewish revenge fantasy (see Chapter 9, above) has an extra dimension and is more understandable in terms of the thriller. It also draws us to a terrain contiguous to, but other than, that of Israeli intelligence operations, allowing for specifically American investments. Nazi hunting in the paranoid texts does often take place on American soil; however, there are other ways in which the revenge motif can be linked to such operations as Entebbe in a manner which is specific to the United States. Robin Moore's thriller *Search and Destroy* (1978) involves a raid which can be compared with that of Entebbe; however, it is thoroughly imbued with contemporary American themes; and in such a way that its sub-generic status is in question. The front cover of the American edition of the paperback foregrounds the revenge element of the narrative:

A CRACK BATTALION
OF VIETNAM VETERANS OF
SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSIONS
TAKE REVENGE!

Yet, on the back cover, its generic designation has changed:

A
'DISASTER'
BLOCKBUSTER
in the great tradition of *Jaws*,
The Poseidon Adventure, and
Towering Inferno.
SEARCH AND DESTROY
team, America's most highly
trained and efficient
technicians and killers, all
veterans of Vietnam, gathers
together once again to carry
out the most dangerous
mission of their lives:
capture, isolate and plunder
that most epic of American
sports citadels, The Houston
Astrodome.
SEARCH AND DESTROY
is the most terrifying disaster
novel of the year.

These facts draw us back to issues which we discussed in Chapter 2. As we noted, generic classification is often tied to constituting the corpus in histories of the thriller. An example that we used to demonstrate the dangers of this at the beginning of Chapter 3 is pertinent to the issues of this section of our discussion. *Black Sunday* (1975) has been reconstituted into the corpus of Thomas Harris' novels which are dominated by serial killers as we have mentioned; yet it also bears quite a close resemblance to *Search and Destroy*. In turn, *Search and Destroy* bears resemblances, through the idea of a crack team of ex-Vietnam soldiers, to a record-grossing film which appeared seven years later: *Rambo: First Blood II* (1985). What this means is that, in assessing the revenge narrative of the 1970s, we must be careful not to reconstitute it into a corpus constructed after the fact. The oblique way in which Vietnam is incorporated into revenge narratives, for instance, has a historical significance for the 1970s audience. A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate the ease with which a failure to historically situate generic texts can take place. The inaugural novel of a series about a detective called Ryker contains the following extra-textual cues:

RYKER didn't get to be the best first grade detective in the New York Police Department by playing politics and kissing hind-end in the brass section.

RYKER hates the human garbage he dumps in the slammer just a little more than the fixers and the crooked fuzz who send him out to do Society's dirty work.

RYKER loves and hates his work, but he gets it done. This time he was after a murderous psychopath, a Vietnam veteran with a sniper rifle and a grudge (from the back cover of Nelson de Mille, *Ryker #1: The Sniper* [1974]).

As we will see, the plot as it is laid out is very much like that of *Dirty Harry* and it trades on the same kind of lawless distinctiveness of its hero. At the same time, though, it can be seen that the novel would be easily placed in the same 'ruthless cops thwart serial killer' genre as occupied by eighties writers such as James Ellroy. However, the context for a contemporary reading of *Ryker* must always be much different; most importantly its reading will take place in the seventies against a backdrop of the failure of the Great Society programme, a fragile liberal consensus and the difficulties of assimilating Vietnam veterans into American society. With regard to this last issue in particular another example of a revenge series character is even more pertinent. The

inaugural novel of the character called Detective Sergeant Joe Keller, once again authored by Nelson de Mille,³ carries the following comments on its cover:

DET. SGT. JOE KELLER doesn't take crap from anyone. He tells them all - the criminals, the courts, the cops - to shove it if they don't like his brutal methods. He gets the job done and that's all that counts (from *The Cannibal* [1975]).

This establishes Keller's character; but where the plot of this particular narrative is concerned, the cover blurb adds:

While in Vietnam, Kondor was trapped in an underground bunker and forced to feed off the decaying remnants of North Vietnamese soldiers. At first, he choked down the putrid meat only to survive. But back in New York, he found that human flesh was the only thing that could satisfy his obscene compulsion. It was Det. Sgt. Keller's case and he was hungry for the kill.⁴

The figure of the cannibal killer in thrillers has gained an international prominence in the late 1980s; yet the cannibal in this novel appears a full six years before Hannibal Lecter is introduced in Harris' *Red Dragon* and sixteen years before the character becomes an international figure in the film of *The Silence of the Lambs*. This is not to say for one moment that De Mille's introduction of a cannibal killer represents a stunning innovation that has been previously unacknowledged. However, it is to say that what is outstanding about such a character is not necessarily that he eats human flesh, but that he allows for specific investments. On the one hand, the cannibal in the novel by De Mille is a Vietnam veteran and the narrative represents a general inability to assimilate the experience of the veteran as anything but a marginal and deviant one. In addition, one can also speculate that the novel inflects a blurring of morals in the period which might allow for reading it in terms of the social problems brought about by urban decay; towards the end of the narrative Keller has trapped Kondor who is virtually paralysed by a gunshot wound to his spinal column; Keller leaves the cannibal in a sewer to be feasted upon by rats (an image we will meet again at the end of this chapter) whereupon it is narrated that

³ De Mille, according to the blurbs in his later novels, was an U.S. Army intelligence officer in Vietnam before becoming an author. He went on to write a much different sort of wide canvas thriller exemplified in *By the Rivers of Babylon* (1979) and *Word of Honour* (1986).

⁴ This exaggerated means of dramatizing the difficulties of demobilizing and re-attuning the veteran to American civil society is reproduced to an extent in the Russian roulette scenes of *The Deerhunter* (1978) which have been repeatedly shown to have no basis in fact (see, for example, the introduction in Walsh and Aulich 1989 p. 2).

There was more humanity in the rats and cockroaches than that which passed between the two dying men (p. 188).

So, more than any possibility of being claimed for the serial killer corpus, such narratives were, at the time, far more invested with the themes of urban blight and/or the difficulty of assimilating the Vietnam experience. The two novels we have just discussed are quite pointed instances of this historical reading; further texts that we will discuss in the rest of the chapter will often seem to inflect such concerns in a far more oblique and problematic way.

Dirty Harry

Probably the first thing that should be said about Harry Callahan is that he is a series character portrayed in a number of films by Clint Eastwood. In the seventies he appears in three films: *Dirty Harry* (1971), *Magnum Force* (1973) and *The Enforcer* (1976). It should be stressed that while the character of Callahan in each movie bears the surface veneer of a maverick and ruthless cop, each film is very different in terms of potential readings of its political character and in terms of possible readings of Harry's actions and motivations. Although contemporary extra-textual cues might lead readings in the direction of an interpretation of Harry Callahan as an archetypal right-wing hero an examination of each of these narratives in terms of other cues reveals that they are far more ambiguous than is often allowed. In fact, Harry Callahan's character and actions provided an area of political dispute from the moment he first appeared in the reviews of *Dirty Harry* in early 1972. Overwhelmingly, these extra-textual cues served to portray Harry as a lawless right-wing vigilante; yet there were voices which immediately dissented from this view. This being the case, a detailed scrutiny of aspects of the narrative of the film will enable us to examine the kinds of readings that it allows.

The film opens with a shot of a large plaque at the offices of the SFPD which reads
In tribute to the San Francisco Police who gave their lives.

Two possible readings of this sentence can be made immediately. The first might be that the plaque refers to all those officers who die in the line of duty; the second might refer to the fact that some police operatives devote almost the whole of their waking life to police work, either in the present or in the past. The shot that follows the view of the plaque is a close-up, looking along the barrel of a rifle and into a telescopic sight that is pointed at the camera. This scene establishes that the rifle belongs to the killer in the film (Andy Robinson) who calls himself 'Scorpio'. Clearly, the juxtaposition of the two shots tends to bear out the first reading of the plaque, such that Scorpio is one more direct threat to the lives of police operatives who try to protect the public. But equally, within the unfolding of the narrative, the subsequent revelation of Harry Callahan's dedication to the job, manifested most strongly when he tells Chico's wife that he is a widower, enhances a retroactive understanding of the plaque in terms of the second reading. That the film can be shown to allow multiple readings and multiple investments is crucial especially when the syntactic dimension of the text is used to show that the film is simply reactionary and exploitative. Many critics relied on the bare outline of the plot of the film to iterate their general distrust of the film's putative ideological stance, and it is indeed possible to see that the events of the film could be construed as an affirmation of a right-wing mentality. Following the shots that we have just mentioned, the sniper aims, fires and kills a girl in a swimming pool. The next scene - which takes place simultaneous with the opening titles - shows Harry walking down a San Francisco street, entering a building, and then scouring its roof for clues, eventually finding a spent shell from Scorpio's rifle. So, from this moment onwards, Harry Callahan is on the case. The rest of the film can therefore be seen as the narrative of Harry's attempts to bring Scorpio to justice. However, Scorpio not only tells of his plans to kill again and again but also taunts the city authorities in various letters, including one in which he demands a ransom for a kidnapped child. Harry wishes to implement direct methods in order to apprehend Scorpio but is constantly thwarted by the bureaucratic/liberal measures taken by his superiors. The fury of contemporary

reviewers revolved around the issues as they are laid out in this kind of outline of the film.

One of the key aspects about the film that seemed to infuriate contemporary reviewers was that the film was found by them (and contemporary audiences) to be so entertaining despite supposed reactionary values. Harry's outlook on life is, on more than one occasion in the film, dovetailed with a wry disarming humour which is stated in such a way that it convinces the other protagonists, at least. At the end of the first scene which follows the opening titles, the Mayor (John Vernon) refers to a previous case in which Harry has used his gun to stop a man raping a woman. The Mayor is worried that Harry has apprehended someone without a felony having taken place, to which Harry says that he recognized 'intent'. Then:

'Intent? How did you establish that?'

'When a naked man is chasing a woman in an alley with a butcher knife and a hard on I figure he's not out collecting money for the Red Cross'.

The scene which follows almost immediately is the famous one which involves Harry entering a cafe for a hot dog and noticing that a car with its engine running is parked outside a nearby bank. As he asks the proprietor to ring the police the bank's alarm sounds. Still chewing his hot dog Harry emerges from the cafe as the armed robbers run out; he draws his gun, fires at the car, hits a number of the robbers, gets a minor hit in the leg himself; the car swerves into a fire hydrant, spraying water as Harry advances on a robber who lies injured but conscious on the steps of the bank. As the robber reaches for his rifle Harry says,

I know what you're thinking: did he fire six shots or only five? Well, to tell you the truth, in all this excitement I kinda lost track myself. But bein' as this is a forty four magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world and could blow your head clean off, you've got to ask yourself one question: do I feel lucky?

Well, do you, punk?

The injured robber draws his hand from the rifle and Harry picks it up and walks away; the robber calls to him

I gots [sic] to know.

Harry nonchalantly walks back and raises the gun to the head of the now horrified robber. As Harry squeezes the trigger the gun lets off a hollow click and Harry sniggers, walking away once more. Taking just these two examples of the humour in the movie it is possible to make a case in which what is depicted is not just gratuitous, not just brutal and not simply brutalizing. Against the idea that the violence in the film is simply harmless, cartoon violence is the argument that the film is very serious in parts. The quiet scene where Ann Mary Deacon's corpse is lifted from the manhole and when Mrs Russell, the mother of the young boy killed by Scorpio, grieves over her son are quite clearly different from other scenes in the film. In a sense, it could be said that these scenes work to 'justify' the violence of Harry; but at the same time it can be said that an audience would recognize the difference between the contexts and modes of violence. One feature of the film that would assist this is the performance of the actors: Harry's dialogue in the bank robbery scene is reproduced in the final scene of the film; where it was nonchalantly delivered in the former, it is delivered through gritted teeth in the latter. The humour of the dialogue in the first of these scenes, then, receives a very ironic recasting in the final scene. Clearly the terms have changed: the robber is involved in a game with Harry and is cautious enough to leave his rifle alone; the killer is psychotic and lunges for his own gun. Like a microcosm of the film as a whole in its different reading formations, the dialogue and the violence of these scenes reveal that, even though their basic structure remains similar, their possible meanings need not.

At this point it is worth considering a commentary on the film by a British critic which appeared a number of years after *Dirty Harry* was first on release. Alan Lovell (1975) draws specific attention to the treatment of race in the film, positing a dominant ideology of the text:

The links in the chain of black people are the black homosexual who is one of the killer's intended victims but who is saved when the police helicopter spots the killer; the black boy who is murdered; the black gang who rob the bank; the black beating-up specialist; the black doctor who attends to Harry after his fight with the killer. In that it crosses the division between law and crime this chain can be seen as a neutral one, part of an accurate description of the racial composition of urban society in the United States. But if account is taken of the weight of the different links, the neutrality disappears.

The black doctor is completely incidental. The murdered boy (and his grieving mother) have a more substantial role in that the sequence when his body is discovered is a key one in establishing the menace of the killer. Against this one substantial sequence has to be put the high excitement of the bank robbery and the symbolic resonance of the direct and sadistically violent confrontation between white and black with which the sequence ends. The same symbolic resonance attaches to the beating-up scene where a dimension of sexual perversity is added to the violence between white and black. Apart from the dramatic weight of these scenes, they are also caught up in the chains of sex and violent crime. In the face of this the apparent normality of the black chain disappears and the chain becomes one of the defining characteristics of the breakdown of law and order (p. 42).

It must be said that Lovell's general argument is not unsophisticated: the conclusion he reaches is that there is room in *Dirty Harry* for more than one reading despite the rigidity of the textual structures. However, the passage we have quoted in which he attempts to prove the inherent racism of the film is based on entirely fallacious premises. To begin with, the black doctor whose role he claims to be incidental, does not attend to Harry after the latter has fought with the killer. He actually attends to Harry's leg immediately after the scene in which Harry has asked the black bank robber whether he feels lucky. That the robbery scene involving a black antagonist should be directly followed by a scene with a black doctor would seem to be far from coincidental and far from racist. Moreover, this scene is followed quite closely by one in which Harry takes his new Hispanic rookie partner and sociology graduate, Chico (Reni Santoni) to an office containing a detective called Fatso who has known Harry for some years. Within earshot of Callahan, Chico and Fatso have the following exchange on the subject of the nickname 'Dirty Harry':

'Harry hates everybody. Limeys, Micks, Hebes, fat dagoes, niggers, honkies, chinks'.

'How's he feel about Mexicans?'

'Ask him'.

As Harry walks towards the camera to exit from the scene Chico looks at him enquiringly and Harry says

'Especially spics'

winking at Fatso without being seen by Chico. Given what we have said about the jokiness of the bank robbery scene it is clear that certain parts of the film can be read for their humour and some for their pathos. That the dialogue is able to deal with racism in such a knowing manner, taking it as a given and then dismissing it - note that Fatso claims Harry hates 'honkies' (where 'honkies' presumably designates White Anglo-

Saxon Protestants) as well as ethnic minorities - rather invalidates Lovell's argument.

But, more than anything, the false premises of Lovell's argument are to do with his assertions about symbolic resonance and dramatic weight. What more symbolic

resonance can there be than in the scene where Mrs. Russell cries over her dead son?

One could also argue that the drama of this scene derives not from the race of the victim

but the social background. The scene is very brief and can be said to be presented very

much as an example of the everyday awfulness of police work. Mrs. Russell, in this

context, is important not because she is black but because she is poor and

unglamorous. Scorpio had fired his rifle from the roof of a housing project and the boy

has died on waste ground; Chico, visibly sickened, moves out of the camera shot when

he sees the boy's mutilated face and at the conclusion of the short scene Harry wryly

utters to him

Welcome to homicide.

The wry comment is very far removed from the humorous asides he makes earlier in

the film, and it is followed by a zoom out from a rostrum camera, which frames the

whole scene as an appalling vignette. So, in general, Lovell's comments on dramatic

weight are unfounded, but also specifically, the drama of the early humorous scenes is

qualitatively different from that of the later ones involving the killer. This illustrates the

problem of positing a 'dominant ideology of the text'; not only is it difficult to dismiss

numerous readings but it is difficult to prove that such a dominant ideology exists

objectively in a narrative.

A little should be said about other semantic aspects of the film. If, for instance, the film

can be said to contain a kind of comic-book violence at certain stages then this would

seem also to be at odds with the quasi-realistic camerawork which characterizes the

narrative. A good example of this is the scene involving the jumper in the first part of

the movie. Harry and Chico receive a call during the course of their evening of duty in a

patrol car and race to a downtown scene. There is a very wobbly shot of a building

which almost exaggeratedly suggests a hand-held - and by association, perhaps, news

agency - camera. The building is lit by a single spotlight in such a manner that suggests the light source is provided by the fire department on the ground rather than the filmic apparatus. When Harry arrives at the scene, crowds are milling around at the foot of the building and looking to the roof. A fire department officer speaks with Harry and apologizes for calling him; the camera is once more unsteady and the soundtrack is very unclear, making their conversation barely audible above the clamour of the crowd. It becomes clear that Harry has agreed to confront the building jumper who has, in the meantime, been shown clinging to the edge of the roof of the building in a series of ill-lit, unsteady close-up shots. Harry, visibly apprehensive, climbs into the fire department crane and almost unbalances the swivel box in which he has to stand. Bathed in a single light source, Harry is elevated on the crane and there is a steady shot from directly beneath as he goes up, followed quickly by a steady shot of Chico looking upwards into the camera as it pulls away. A series of shots follow: a medium shot of Harry's ascent, shots of the jumper and a final shot from a vantage point close to the jumper of Harry's arrival at the top of the building. The dialogue between the two that follows is shot by means of alternating close-ups with the jumper caught by a shaky camera in full light and Harry by a steady camera and light just emphasizing his contours. In the latter case, the opacity of Harry's motives are emphasized. This is appropriate as Harry tells the jumper that he is only here to take down his details in case they cannot be found in the carnage that will ensue after the suicide leap has taken place; he also spins a yarn about an ex-colleague who was pulled down by a jumper at the last minute and how, after hitting the ground, the limbs of the two people could not be distinguished. The jumper makes as if to be sick and then lunges at Harry who catches him, punches him unconscious and delivers him safely to the ground. Descending from the crane, Harry says wryly to Chico

Now you know why they call me Dirty Harry - every dirty job that comes along.

The whole scene has been working up to this moment and the dark humour of Harry's discourse at the top of the building can be partly construed as an aspect of the comic-strip style of the story. Mingled with this is the quasi-newsreel style which suggests

'realism' or that what is to be depicted is serious, plus a more figurative use of light and other elements of mise-en scène which suggest something about the character of Harry when counterposed to that of the jumper. The juxtaposition of such styles suffuses numerous parts of the film although it could be said that the comic aspect fades in the second section. The moment when this happens is crucial: Harry, after having been attacked by the killer, has his wounds tended and tracks down the killer to his lair in a sports stadium. The killer escapes onto the sports ground and Harry follows as his partner (Fatso, this time) switches on the floodlights. Harry points his magnum at the gibbering killer who is on the ground and stands on the stab wound he has inflicted earlier. As the killer screams the camera pulls back shakily, but steadily gains speed until the shot actually becomes a blurred aerial one high above the stadium. It is a mockery of a conventional ending and appropriately so as the killer has not been apprehended conclusively: the next scenes are concerned with the judicial and bureaucratic obstacles which prevent Scorpio's case being brought to court. But although it apes the ending of numerous other films which conclude on a long zoom-out shot, it does also mark a real ending. It does this in the sense that it mirrors the shot which ends the scene with Mrs. Russell and it also serves as an iconic demonstration of the pain Harry inflicts on Scorpio who would jump as high as the camera were it not for Harry standing on his leg: from this point onwards the film becomes much bleaker. So, any account of the film must consider the different styles in each part of the narrative and their possible meanings. In all of this, the film is not that different from other films that use different modes of narration; however, it is crucial to emphasize the multiplicity of a film such as *Dirty Harry* which extra-textual cues have so often attempted to reduce to a container for right-wing ideology.

The process of reducing the multiplicity of the narrative of *Dirty Harry* began with the first reviews. As Jay Cocks states

"Dirty Harry" is bound to upset adherents of liberal criminal rights legislation (Cocks 1972).

There were those who were also unable to look at the film in any manner approaching objectivity. Chase (1972), for instance states outright that the film is sick and profoundly dangerous (p. 13).

More explicitly he adds that

Don Siegel's latest film, *DIRTY HARRY*, is an elegiac, necrophiliac, fascist love poem (Chase 1972 p. 13).⁵

Playboy also believed that they were able to decipher the intent of the director of the film when they asserted that Siegel's

message has the disconcerting tone of someone calling out the vigilantes (*Playboy* 1972).

Such views will certainly be important for us when we consider other texts which depict lawless retribution. More immediately, for our purposes, it is worth pointing out that the *Playboy* review identifies that the 'message' of the film is effective because it is borne by a Trojan horse:

"Dirty Harry" wraps a vaguely reactionary argument for law and order into a rip-roaring entertainment package (*Playboy* 1972).

More than any other feature in the reviews it is emphasized that the film is entertaining and therefore seductive in its reactionary tendencies. As often was the case in the 1970s, the one critic who demonstrated a desire to engage with such problematics was Pauline Kael in *The New Yorker*. In her review of the film can be seen either fully developed or in embryonic form, the grounds for nearly all the dominant criticisms of the revenge texts that we will discuss in the rest of this chapter. Her view of the opening shot, for instance, is much more one-sided than ours:

This is a rather strange opening for 'Dirty Harry' since it isn't about the death of a police officer. The tribute, however, puts the viewer in a respectful frame of mind; we all know that many police are losing their lives. The movie then proceeds to offer a magically simple culprit for their deaths: the liberals (Kael 1972).

The liberals to whom Kael refers, it must be mentioned, are not as magically identifiable as it seems. More accurately it could be said that Harry is pitted against

⁵ No extended comment need be made on Chase's article here but the flavour of this particular quote is enhanced if one knows the title of the piece in which it appears: 'The Strange Romance of "Dirty Harry" Callahan and Ann Mary Deacon'. So, on top of everything else, Harry Callahan's crusade against Scorpio masks a latent necrophiliac/paedophile desire which Chase is in the privileged position of being able to discern.

bureaucrats in both Palmer's (1978) use of the word to describe thriller protagonists and in the more usual sense of the word. Correct procedure is counterposed to direct action; Kael's argument goes on to reveal an inner contradiction in this way:

'Dirty Harry' is not about the actual San Francisco police force; it's about a right-wing fantasy of that police force as a group helplessly emasculated by unrealistic liberals. The conceit of this movie is that for one brief glorious period the police have a realist in their midst - and drive him out (Kael 1972).

Kael's here posits first that the SFPD is ruled from outside by liberals in the film, then goes on to say that the liberals are within the police and they drive Harry out. This is one way of papering over the cracks that the film confronts: rather than presenting the whole police department as a righteous force it can be argued that the film explores the conflict of bureaucracy versus direct action. The sticklers for correct procedure - apart from the Mayor and the DA - are actually in the police department as managers.

Couched in these terms, *Dirty Harry* seems like a much different proposition.

However, Kael's reading of the film is backed up by convincing comments on what the contemporary audience might recognize in the film: for example, she points out that the law professor consulted by the police over the release of Scorpio is clearly signalled as being from the university at Berkeley; other universities closer to the department and providing more expertise may have yielded a more worthy consultant, but Kael argues that Berkeley quite clearly represents a hotbed of post-sixties bleeding-heart liberals. As a film that targets contemporary liberalism, then, Kael believes that it is a sophisticated version of a novel by Ayn Rand:

"Dirty Harry" is a kind of hardhat "The Fountainhead" (Kael 1972).

What *Dirty Harry* has, for her, contested most strongly is the abuse of certain rights established by contemporary liberalism; Scorpio is actually playing the system. She notes that this was appreciated by the audience:

The movie was cheered and applauded by Puerto Ricans in the audience, and they jeered - as they were meant to - when the maniac whined and pleaded for his legal rights (Kael 1972).

That Puerto Ricans found this film laudable in the way that Kael mentions, suggests that there may be more contradictions in its narrative than she allows. As we have mentioned, there are a number of possible readings of the film's stance on race; but the

film's integral consideration of liberalism implies further complications. Firstly, as Kael notes, Harry's direct action is in contravention of legal bureaucratic procedures; so, the only way that Dirty Harry - the dedicated trouble-shooter who gets the dirtiest assignments - can protect the women and children of the city is to disobey orders (Kael 1972).

She adds,

Eastwood throws his badge away therefore he doesn't respect the law; he stands for vigilante justice (Kael 1972).

Harry is therefore outside the law in a way that is reminiscent of the frontier hero. It is no accident that Clint Eastwood was previously famous for a series of 'spaghetti westerns' which featured a lawless hero without a name. Also, in another film made three years earlier with Don Siegel, *Coogan's Bluff* (1968), Eastwood played a modern day Arizona cowboy-sheriff pursuing the law in contemporary New York. In both cases, the contradictions of society in the narrative can be said to be effaced by a protagonist from 'outside' that society who resorts to regenerative violence. Such violence marks a return to a pre-Constitutional period. It would not go unnoticed, therefore, that the character of Dirty Harry has overtones of the Western frontier hero; following the traditional American mythical pattern which we mentioned with regard to Spenser in Chapter 7, it is notable also that the white protagonist is partnered by a man of ethnic origin. In this case it is Chico, the Mexican. Clearly, we would not wish to suggest that such American archetypes are constant in their meaning, but what the residues of the frontier hero do seem to provide is a fusion of the vigilante aspect of the narrative with an ambiguous view of race in America. The American archetype, coupled with the film's set-pieces, is presumably what Kael is referring to when she writes that

It would be stupid to deny that "Dirty Harry" is a stunningly well-made genre piece, and it certainly turns an audience on (Kael 1972).

While Kael provides a convincing argument for the film's attack on contemporary liberalism, we have suggested that that argument contains minor inner inconsistencies. Despite the fact that numerous academic writers such as Lovell have largely agreed with Kael, it is by no means the case that *Dirty Harry* was unilaterally received by reviewers

in this way. In *Rolling Stone*, Paul Nelson mentioned with some consternation that the reviews by Sarris, Kael, and Canby all give the impression of the film as

'a disturbing manifestation of police paranoia' and 'a deeply immoral movie', essentially the story of a killer cop who shoots first and ask questions later (Nelson 1972).

Challenging these views, Nelson holds that Canby et al.

translate minor tendencies into the wrong major premises (Nelson 1972).

In fact, for Nelson, there is a measure of subversiveness in the film. This, he claims, manifests itself in generic contraventions:

In radical 1972, the idea of a cop-as-genre-hero seems subversive to many, and, as a result, both Siegel's primary intentions and the nature of Eastwood's character have been widely misunderstood and badly distorted (Nelson 1972).

Following on from Kael's hint that Harry Callahan is a frontier hero, Nelson actually pursues his argument in genre terms showing that such archetypes actually provide a terrain for contesting meanings. Nelson's key point is that

what the movie is really about [is] the triumph of Harry Callahan's individuality (Nelson 1972).

However, he shows, in his own way, that 'individuality' is not univalent. Instead, it is bound up with a set of generic expectations:

On its most basic level, "Dirty Harry" aptly and ingeniously combines, draws upon, and redefines the strengths of several American action genres - the classic Western, the more modern Clint Eastwood film, and the myriad faces of the traditional thriller: the police procedural private eye, and chase movies - all put to use at a pace so fast that, upon first reflection, Siegel's primary concern seems to be to make a film composed entirely of high-action set pieces with scarcely a minute left for characterization (Nelson 1972).

What the film combines for Nelson is the question of the vagaries of individualism and its distancing by means of an archetype. He suggests that the film is a

Gut-level mythological genre exercise in the romance of individual violence that moves forward by its own speed and by its own set of dreamy rules and highly stylised logic (Nelson 1972)

which, when the question of individualism is raised, makes the narrative

about a cop who asks *himself* the questions and then is not afraid to shoot (Nelson 1972).

What this raises for Nelson is something far removed from anything that Kael dares to countenance. It might be said that her review relies on a traditional notion of politics where a consensus exists as to what political complexion an act can be said to have.

Nelson's implicit argument is that certain acts are rooted in individual responses to

circumstances and have a historically determined political complexion. Thus, he writes of the director of *Dirty Harry* that

Siegel's philosophical position about the law would seem to be not dissimilar to Daniel Ellsberg's, namely, that the law itself is not sacred; in certain instances it would be immoral for an honourable man not to break it. The questions are, of course, who is honourable? and in what instances? (Nelson 1972).

Put another way, it can be said that Kael's reaction to the film presupposes that the liberal consensus - the grounds upon which she assesses the film - self-evidently exists. Yet, the popularity of the film suggested, perhaps, that such a consensus was either fragile, or incorporated wider imagery within its political purview than Kael would allow. It is possible therefore that contemporary readings of the text do not simply represent a residual liberal backlash; instead, it could be argued that a historical reading of the film can be based on a recasting of certain liberal imperatives in terms of pressing social concerns, in this case, particularly those of crime.

A brief consideration of the role of the villain in *Dirty Harry* will demonstrate how contemporary readings of the film might operate in terms of a recasting of the illusory liberal consensus. As Kael asserts, the setting of the film is of paramount importance:

In New York, where crime is so obviously a social outgrowth, the dregs belong to the city, and a criminal could not be viewed as a snake in paradise. But as everyone knows, the San Francisco light and the beauty of the natural setting transform and unify the architectural chaos; even poverty looks picturesque, as in other tourist traps, and crime can be treated as a defiler from outside society (Kael 1972).

What this means is that, if it was not clear before, the villain in *Dirty Harry* is 'outside' society. This is not because he is associated with various counterculture values as Kael et al. claim; for instance, he has a black homosexual hippie in his rifle sights at one stage. Instead, it is simply because he is a killer. At the same time, though, it has been suggested by Cocks, among others, that the theme of the film relies on the premise that both cop and killer are renegades outside society, isolated in combat in their own brutal world (Cocks 1972).

Numerous cues within the film suggest this, but most importantly the fact that Harry repudiates bureaucratic procedures. If this were not enough, the posters for the film carried the following legend:

Detective
Harry Callahan
He doesn't
break
murder cases.
He smashes
them.

Detective Harry Callahan.

You don't
assign him
to murder cases

You just turn him
loose (Publicity Brochure for *Dirty Harry* 1974).

It is worth mentioning here that, if both killer and cop are essentially 'outside' society, then presumably their operations which take place within society can be said to have different meanings depending on the audience's investment in the character. For instance, Harry, in plain clothes, tracks Scorpio to a strip club - the camera does not linger over the flesh there and there is reason to suppose that no moral censure is offered: Harry, after all, has already looked through a window at Hot Mary entertaining a client and ogled a naked hippie woman through his binoculars while on a surveillance assignment. What is perhaps most important is that Harry *must* be marginalized in society in order to deal with Scorpio. As Kael points out with regard to the killer

The variety of his perversities is impressive and one might say that no depravity is foreign to him. He is pure evil: sniper, rapist, kidnapper, torturer, defiler of all human values (Kael 1972).

Like the shark in *Jaws*, Scorpio is definitely a threat to peaceful society; but, as we have noted, Quint also poses a threat to that society. Similarly, being 'outside' of this civilized society can have connotations of a pre-Constitutional America; we have seen this both in the hard-boiled stories of Robert B. Parker and in the pseudo western scenarios of Elmore Leonard. Exploring these connections further, it becomes quite clear that being marginalized or 'outside' society is contiguous with posing a criticism of that society. The narrative makes this quite clear with regard to Harry Callahan. But what of Scorpio? One way of reading his character is to make reference to his presumed real-life counterpart. A serial killer calling himself 'Zodiac' has been thought to have been operating in the San Francisco area since at least 1968 (see Graysmith 1992). Moreover, *Dirty Harry* can be said to have prefigured some of Zodiac's activities: in

October 1969, Zodiac sent a letter to the SFPD threatening to hijack a school bus. This is exactly what happens at the climax of *Dirty Harry* over two years later. However, the Zodiac letter containing the threat was only made public in 1992 (Graysmith pp. 102-103). This is one more example of life imitating art or, more accurately, fact being re-invested in terms of a work of fiction. What the Zodiac connection makes apparent, though, is that Scorpio can perhaps be read in these terms: whether the character was read as such by a number of non-San Franciscans in the contemporary period is open to question.⁶ The other way in which the character may be read was offered most explicitly by two critics writing long after the film was first shown. Auster and Quart (1988) assess Scorpio by asserting that he

seems such a mass of contradictions that one might conclude he is a blend of Charles Manson and Lee Harvey Oswald with a bit of F. Lee Bailey thrown in for good . . . but the Vietnam implications are clear (pp. 48-49).

We will not comment on this at length here but we will return to it later. What this comment provides is a way of linking both the most severe form of political criticism - assassination - with the alienation of the Vietnam experience as they are inflected in fictional works. Both represent what is 'outside' society and both can be said, in their depiction, to constitute a certain kind of criticism of the social order. Before we return to this we must add a few extra dimensions to the theme of retribution that works itself out in thrillers of the seventies.

Death Wish

If one major text can be said to clearly represent the theme of revenge in the seventies it is *Death Wish*. The novel by Brian Garfield was published in 1972 and was followed

⁶ The links between the texts of Scorpio and Zodiac are intriguing if not worthy of extended study: the name of the real life killer is thought to be derived from a Dick Tracy cartoon strip run in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1969 which featured a group of astrological killers called the Zodiac group led by a character called Scorpio (Graysmith 1992 pp. 118-119); Graysmith mentions that *Dirty Harry* was the best of a number of Zodiac films of the period and claims that it even reproduced a letter by the real killer (ibid. pp. 179-180); and the character of Gemini in the sequel to *The Exorcist*, Blatty's *Legion*, is also apparently based on Zodiac (ibid. p. 184).

by the controversial film version directed by the Briton, Michael Winner, two years later. Unlike Harry Callahan, the actions of the protagonist of *Death Wish* place him explicitly and irrefutably outside the law. In summary, the story of both the film and the novel is concerned with an accountant, Paul Benjamin (architect/development engineer Paul Kersey in the film), whose life and liberal values are shattered when his wife and daughter are brutally attacked in his apartment. Finding himself helpless when his wife dies soon after and his daughter lapses into a catatonic state, Paul takes to the streets of New York, retaliating, assaulting and then executing criminals. Both the cinematic and print narratives are far more complicated than this, however, and they have certain crucial differences. Sutherland (1981) discusses some of these differences at some length, usually to the detriment of the film version (pp. 154 ff). The most important of these for us is probably that the film version loses Paul's Jewish identity and substitutes it for Bronson's fledgling seventies impassive killer persona (see, for example, *The Mechanic* [1972], *The Stone Killer* [1973] and the Elmore Leonard scripted *Mr. Majestyk* [1973]). Sutherland points out (p. 156) that Bronson himself believed that Dustin Hoffman should have been given the Paul Benjamin/Kersey role, a fact which has links with the remarks that Kael makes about *Marathon Man* (see above). This reminds us that even if it is possible to identify a strand of revenge thrillers in the 1970s their existence is by no means isolated from other texts and is not available to be read as such. Sutherland's main point about the film and the book is that the latter does not have the violent knee-jerk liberal backlash against liberalism that is attributed to the latter. Given that the film's controversy precedes it now in a manner much different from the situation of reading for the contemporary audience, and given that the film has been followed by three sequels which have shaped readings of the first film (for example, *Death Wish* has only been shown on terrestrial TV in Britain once and, unlike the sequels, has been unavailable on video since 1983) it is worth examining the narrative of the two texts closely.

The novel begins with a conversation over urban crisis. Paul and his fellow accountant, Sam, discuss the disadvantages of the city and the pros and cons of suburban life:

'Look at this mess'. Sam waved his cigarette at Times Square, the crowds, the traffic. 'It just doesn't make sense any more. You can't get a guy on the phone because he's always in a taxi stuck in a traffic jam on his way to a meeting. The phone system's no good, the mails don't get through'.

Sam threw his hands up hopelessly; he enjoyed exposition. 'The sanitation trucks grind down my street in the middle of the night like Sherman tanks with busted mufflers and they spent a Goddamned hour slamming garbage cans around right under the window. If we get a snowstorm it takes them a week to clean the streets. It's madness. Only one answer to it'.

Paul smiled a little. 'All right, since you obviously want me to feed you your line. What's the answer to it?'

'Only one solution to it. Abolish the environment. There won't be anything left to pollute' (p. 9).

Almost of a piece with the turmoil and moral turpitude on display in New York City is the series of business scams in which Paul is involved and which are narrated in the pages which follow this passage (pp. 16-17). These two features of the early part of the narrative become relevant very quickly; when Paul speaks with his lawyer son-in-law, Jack, at the hospital the earlier points about business and blurred morality are fused. Jack responds to Paul's verbal attempts to attribute some kind of cause or meaning to the attack on his wife and daughter and Paul counterattacks:

'Don't humor me. I've seen you in court trying to make innocent victims out of your slimy little clients. I don't -'

'Pop now you listen to me. Whoever did this to Mom and Carol, they're guilty of first degree murder. It's the law - the felony murder law. Any death that results from the commission of a felony is first degree murder even if the death was an accident, which God knows Mom's death isn't. They were committing a felony - assault with intent to commit robbery - and they're guilty of Murder One, guilty as hell. My God, do you think I'm arguing against that? Do you honestly think I'd -'

Yes I think you would!' He hissed it with furious force. 'Do you think your nice neat pigeonholes of legal technicality can explain away all this? Do you think these savages deserve all that complicated fine print?'

'Well then what would you suggest?' Jack was cool, soft, deliberate. 'Catch them and string them up from the nearest rafter, is that the idea?'

'It's better than they deserve. They ought to be hunted down like mad dogs and shot on sight. They ought to -' (pp. 39-40).

This is the first major indication in the narrative that the impulse for Paul's revenge will feed on the topsy-turvyness of the world as he sees it, particularly with regard to the most revered of institutions. This feeling goes hand in hand with a more individual problematizing of conventional values: for example, Jack tells a tale of having met a girl

who was gang raped but believes it was her fault for going into Bryant park late at night. Jack concludes,

It's a weird time we live in (p. 42).

So, on the one hand, there is a view of the world as individually and psychologically unbalanced. On the other hand, there is Paul's location of the present moral dilemmas in terms of their institutional underpinnings. To state this may be to overcomplicate matters; yet it is important to examine the varied roles of revenge in these texts. Like paranoia in thrillers, revenge cannot be simply explained away. In addition, it is clear that the paranoia featured in the texts that we discussed in the last chapter has broadly the same source as the revenge in the texts in this chapter; that is it is based on a sense of betrayal by society of individual freedoms. One of the most important factors in an assessment based on the novel in these terms would be that Paul is an avowed sharer of liberal values. At one point he says,

I've never hit a man in anger in my life. Never called a black man 'nigger' or stolen a penny from any man. I've given money and my own time to a dozen worthwhile causes from block associations to the N-Double-A-C-P (p. 44).

Yet, his critique of liberalism which follows is based on what can be construed as a far more liberal view than that prevailing in the institutional hegemony that he has come to distrust. If there is a liberal consensus at this time, it is, for Paul, one which has lost sight of the paramount importance of the freedoms of the individual. It is significant that in a dialogue with himself after becoming a vigilante, Paul initially criticizes two homosexuals for being out late and acting so casually; then

He backed up: that was wrong. They had a right to walk unmolested; everyone did (p. 156).

In this way, Paul's disdain of liberalism can be said to be a critique of its inner contradictions, that the American doctrine of individual liberty is based on a sham. It is this which justifies his revenge in the narrative; earlier in the book he is involved in the following exchange with Jack:

'Justice - or revenge?'

'What difference does it make what you call it?' (p. 45).

The implication of this is clear: justice in the eyes of society can never be attained, and the likelihood of the police finding the culprits is very slim; when transposed onto the purely individual level, revenge becomes justice as it concerns transgressions against individuals rather than societal law. What is morally right for Paul stems from the fact that society at large is not concerned with individual cases of crime; the contradiction of the narrative comes when the vigilante becomes a celebrity, demonstrating clearly that society at large is concerned with the doing of justice.

The impulse to resort to pre-Constitutional modes of law in *Dirty Harry* is given far more exegesis in *Death Wish* and it would seem that the narrative problematizes knee-jerk liberal reactions to its contents. If *Death Wish* is anti-liberal in any sense it is *knowingly* anti-liberal and it critiques liberalism from within. One could almost say that, as an extension of *Dirty Harry*, the narrative allows for a consideration of the inner contradictions of the contemporary liberal consensus. When he meets a clearly bigoted blue collar worker in a bar, Paul starts to see his point of view, not necessarily as a bigot himself, but because he sees the basic personal requirement of protecting one's immediate environment (pp. 94-94). However, it should not necessarily be assumed that Paul is suddenly going to embrace all right-wing views wholesale; a colleague at his office comments indirectly on the attack suffered by Paul's family:

'A disgrace', Ives said again, and held up a finger as if to forestall an interruption, which no one had offered. 'These young scum grow up in a welfare state where they see that violence goes unpunished and the old virtues are for stupid pious fools. What can we expect of them that's any better than this random vicious despair? These radicals keep arsenals in their attics and advocate the overthrow of an economic system that has graduated more people out of poverty than any other system in history. They arm themselves to attack honest hard working citizens like you and me, and to shoot down beleaguered policemen and what happens? The public is propagandized into outrage over the behaviour of the police in defending themselves and the public (pp. 73-73).

Absolutely no comment is offered on this speech by the narrative prose except that other colleagues of the speaker look on with tolerant patience. No indirect interior monologue of Paul's makes comment on it directly. Moreover, the police department to which Ives refers was, at the time this novel was published, suffering the most thoroughgoing investigation into corruption in its history, as the narrative of Frank

Serpico's career makes clear (see Chapter 5). However, while we can posit the idea that Paul's anti-liberalism is not of the same old-fashioned and naïve variety as Ives', the former does start to make known his views on the topic very soon after:

That night across the dinner table he said to Sam, 'We're all born into this society congenitally naïve, you know. And those of us that don't outgrow it become the liberals [. . .] It came to me a while ago what we really are, we liberals. We demand reforms, we want to improve the situation of the underprivileged - why? To make them better off materially? Nuts. It's only to make ourselves feel less guilty. We rend our garments, we're eager to show how willing we are to accept any outrageous demand so long as it's black, or youthful, or put by someone who thinks he's got a grievance. We want to appease everybody - you know what a liberal is? A liberal is a guy who walks out of the room when a fight starts' (pp. 74-75).

It is very possible that a contemporary reading of this statement would recognize a pointed critique of the Great Society programme of the sixties and, perhaps more obliquely, a disillusionment with inflation, rising crime, and the problem of resolving the impact on American society of the Vietnam war. However, this is also the grounds of a traditional right-wing critique which calls for action in the face of social problems that cannot be resolved on an individual basis; such right-wing ideologies commonly efface socio-economic determinants with agency. What is different about Paul's view is that he is aware of its implications, and he is aware that his critique of liberalism can be easily fused with evil views. On the subway he muses:

The train lurched and swayed on its worn-out rails. Motes of filth hung visibly in the air. Some of the ceiling lights had blown out; half the car was in gloom. He found he was looking from face to face along the rows of crowded passengers, resentfully scanning them for signs of redeeming worth: if you wanted to do something about overpopulation this was the place to start. He made a head-count and discovered that of the fifty-eight faces he could see, seven appeared to belong to people who had a right to survive. The rest were fodder.

I should have been a Nazi (p. 92).

Because the critique of liberalism and Nazi ideology can be seen to fuse so effortlessly it would be easy to denounce Paul in these terms. But *Death Wish* also treads the same ground as the liberal-oriented paranoid narratives. From the outset, Paul recognizes the necessity for a paranoid outlook when he says of the search for the meaning of the attack

We always have to make sense of things, don't we? (p. 26).

Not long after this he fantasizes about various locks, devices and booby traps he might employ in his apartment, eventually concluding

stupid idiot, paranoid fool (p. 60).

Understandably, such a paranoid impulse is transferred onto his experiences on the street; like Bob Woodward - although for slightly different reasons (see Chapter 5) - the streets are now full of peril in their emptiness:

There was no one in sight down the entire length of the street; the shadows were sinister and the heavily masked buildings threw dangerous projections into the street - steps, awnings, parked vans: killers could be hiding behind them, or in the narrow service alleys . . . (p. 97).

What *Death Wish* and, say, *All the President's Men* can be said to share here is a consensus that there is every need to be worried about the streets. Paranoia is now justifiable. Where they differ, perhaps, is in the fact that the kinds of violence that may be met on the streets of *Death Wish* are far more immediate and unco-ordinated than those that might threaten Bob Woodward. This difference will lead to different investments in the threat offered by the street; nevertheless, the similarities are telling. *Death Wish* therefore shares with the paranoid narratives a loss of belief in the efficacy of the existing American system and hints at the need to reclaim and utilize a mode of law from another period in America's history. In the paranoid narratives this often involves a closer adherence to certain dictates of the Constitution: the First Amendment is of particular importance in this formulation. In revenge narratives the same dynamic usually involves a critique of the prevailing liberal consensus which, in turn, identifies a set of contradictions growing out of Constitutional law. The rejection of liberalism in revenge narratives, then, represents a *knowing* return to old values and, in this way, is not far removed from the strategies attributed to the New Right in the same period (see especially Peele [1984]).

The specificity of revivals of old styles of lawmaking in *Death Wish* have a number of determinants. One of these is probably the decline of the Western in the seventies both at the level of generic expectations and at the level of the actual production of texts. The amorality of the world depicted in the novels of Elmore Leonard, for instance, we have seen to be akin to that of the world of the Western (see Chapter 8). In addition, Leonard was a famed Western writer before his career changed direction in the seventies. The

latter fact - as an extra-textual cue - serves to complement the potential intra-textual cues in some of his novels which indicate that the narratives are modern urban Westerns.

The same situation is repeated in *Death Wish*: as Sutherland (1981 p. 158), points out, Brian Garfield had been a noted Western writer for about ten years before writing his vigilante novel. So, in this sense, the revival of past modes of lawmaking is generically situated: the narrative offers a possible reading of it as a modern Western. When Paul is alone in his apartment not long after repelling an attack by a mugger he muses on the fact that there has never been a successful TV series about a Ghandi; Robin Hood, private eyes and so on, he believes to be just variations on the theme of the gunslinger (p. 104). Having seen off one mugger he feels the thrill of combat and wants to repeat it which, although it is framed within a reference to Westerns is also possibly reminiscent of those Vietnam veterans who had trouble adjusting to life after combat. It is not long after this incident that Paul goes on a business trip to Arizona, real Western country. It is here that the character of his revenge and the Western theme begin to crystallize, although not in a straightforward political sense. The knowingness of Paul's return to Western values is captured in his meditations on the state of Arizona:

They were all right wing down here, it was Goldwater country. He hadn't lost his contempt for their attitudes on almost everything. They supported free enterprise for the poor and socialized subsidies for the rich. They insisted on your right to die if you didn't have enough money to afford expensive private medical treatment. They saw Communists behind every bush and wanted to drop Nukes on Moscow and Peking. You had a right to good transportation if you had the price of a Cadillac. Tucson had no public transport to speak of.

But they had a hard-nosed fundamentalist attitude toward crime and he knew now they were right about that (p. 115).

All the so-called right-wing characteristics Paul mentions in the first part of his indirect internal monologue are things that he explicitly rejects from his liberal standpoint. There should be little doubt that Paul's view of Arizona values is very sardonic here.

However, he expresses confidence in their policy on law and order. His own views on the topic have recently been transformed by the tragedy that has befallen his family and this is no small point. As we have discussed in Chapter 3, concerns over the most fundamental unit of social organization were frequently mobilized to some effect by the New Right in the 1970s. Attending to such concerns might provide a good political

trade-off to voters who might not usually support the other measures that Paul views with contempt in the Arizona package. Todd Gittlin makes essentially the same point from a different angle; referring to the failures of the antiwar movement in its misguided attempts to forge a wholesale revolution and the backlash that resulted, he writes:

When demonstrators started chanting 'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh', this was a moral corrosion that has become all too familiar in the twentieth century: the know-it-alls bringing absolute truth to the benighted masses. It was the left-wing version of 'winning hearts and minds'. And so, years later, the revolutionists helped return the moral title to conservatives, who are still swollen with it (in Salisbury 1984 p. 75).

Paul does not come to embrace all the right-wing values for which he previously had contempt. However, the kind of moral title to which Gittlin refers, and which is based on such political moves as support for traditional family values, would make the embrace of other parts of an associated political programme that much easier. It is from a lofty moral position that Paul can indulge in the following indirect internal monologue:

Times Square was a running sore, jostling with the chalky bodies of hookers, open-mouthed tourists, swaggering male prostitutes, men slipping furtively into peepshow theatres and porno bookstores. Cops in pairs every few yards: they were all on the take because if they weren't, half the people in sight would be under arrest. These were the dregs, this was their cesspool. Their dreary faces slid by in the overpowering neon daylight and Paul turned quickly uptown, full of angry disgust (p. 147).

This could, for instance, be the view of a Victorian social reformer. However, it must be remembered that Paul's rejection of this 'running sore' is a knowing one, even if that knowing is based on a highly personal incident involving his family. If the narrative does not offer this as a possibility at this stage it certainly does when Paul reads a very long article (reproduced in the narrative) in which a psychiatrist explains the vigilante phenomenon to an interviewer (pp. 169 ff). With regard to other press coverage of his activities Paul muses,

He had the options of free will. The editorialists were wrong of course; he wasn't psychotic, it wasn't an uncontrollable obsession, he wasn't compelled by diseased brain-cells to keep slaughtering innocent victims until he was caught - he was no crazy strangler begging for punishment through self-hate. *I'm a nut, of course*, he thought, but it was only by comparison with the insane norms of society that he was abnormal (p. 162).

Following this, a colleague of Paul's then tells him how his children are very 'pro-cop' as a result of the threat of assault from junkies (p. 162). Then comes the long article, and the psychiatrist, Dr. Perrine, mounts a very informed argument devoid of the

caricatural brands of psychoanalysis that are to be expected of such articles. For example, Perrine notes that

In terms of practical effect, these killings are having about as much effect on total the crime picture as you'd get by administering two aspirin tablets to a rabid wolf (p. 174).

He also situates Paul very accurately, stating that he is a man alone, a confused liberal and that he has recently suffered an attack on his family, who have possibly been killed by criminals. Paul's reaction to the charge of being ineffectual is fairly negative:

Well that was wrong. He'd had a staggering effect on the city. It was all in the media. It was the only topic of conversation. Cops were stating publicly that they applauded the vigilante (p. 182).

This provides at least two ways of reading the sequence. Either Perrine is absolutely correct and Paul is suffering from delusions of grandeur - a powerful reading in light of Perrine's accurate portrait of the vigilante. Or, Perrine has failed to fully comprehend the social phenomenon which Paul embodies. This is distinctly possible: if we bear in mind that there has been a statement of the pro-cop attitudes of children immediately prior to the reproduction of the article, it tends to throw into jeopardy Perrine's claim that there is a consensual rejection of individualism amongst youth and, by association, there exists a liberal consensus (p. 178). In addition, the interviewer ends the article by writing

if Dr. Perrine is right - and he has the reputation - then be on the lookout for a middle-aged, middle-class liberal who has just lost his family, possibly to criminal attackers.

It could be anyone, couldn't it. Someone I know, someone you know. It could be you (p. 179).

Perhaps unwittingly, the writer of the article has overturned the whole premise of Perrine's argument. The vigilante is not now the outsider, a confused liberal kicking at a liberal consensus. Instead, he is the representative of a new socio-political phenomenon. In the sequel to *Death Wish*, entitled *Death Sentence* (1977; originally 1976), the lawyer, Irene, says that

Revenge is a very personal thing, while justice is a social thing (p. 73).

This argument can be the basis for a reading of *Death Wish*: the personal is in the process of being transformed into the social and political in a manner that Perrine fails to understand. One way in which this can be said to be finally demonstrated is in the last pages of the novel. Paul has been tracking some young vandals who are heaving

blocks of cement onto a passing train. He manages to shoot nearly all of them only to realize that he has been observed in the process by a lone cop. The cop simply removes his hat and turns his back: he is not worried that Paul will shoot him and he is not concerned that Paul has shot the youths (p. 189). A new social agreement is therefore in force.

One way to throw the issues involved in *Death Wish* into some kind of relief is to consider briefly the celebrated case of which it was a precursor. In December 1984, an unassuming middle-class man called Bernhard Goetz shot four alleged muggers when he was accosted on the New York City subway system. The shootings became a nationwide *cause célèbre*: after initial widespread media and public support Goetz was finally charged only with the illegal possession of firearms. In terms of the actual vigilantism involved in the case, it appears that *Death Wish* was prophetic; more simply, however, one can say that the shootings were simply re-invested by the public in terms of a fictional text. In a book length study of the case, Lillian B. Rubin (1987) refers at the start to the 'death wish' killer (p. 5). Rubin makes clear in the book that the vigilante becomes the site of a struggle for meaning: a New York lawyer (presumably Goetz' ultimate defence lawyer, Joseph Kelner) states

He has expressed a blow for freedom - freedom from assault, freedom from rape, freedom from fear (p. 9).

Others, taking into account that the injured youths were all black and two were shot in the back, find overtones of racism in the case. Rubin is clearly in the second camp: as a psychotherapist, she demonstrates in a characteristic way that the killings were the result of a combination of Goetz' damaged adolescent psyche plus racism, although she does not offer an explicit connection between the two in this case. Her book is therefore concerned mainly with unmasking the media hype to reveal distortions of the case's details as well as the 'true' reasons why the killings took place. This leads to some very pat reasoning:

The enemy dehumanized just as in a war. It justified our slaughter of the Indians, the Turks' massacre of the Armenians, Stalin's murder of his political enemies, Hitler's extermination of the Jews. It is this

that made our soldiers' behaviour at My Lai possible. And it is also the mark of our urban wars today (p. 55)

as well as further reductionism with regard to texts:

The same feelings, the same fantasies, that have turned films like *Death Wish*, *Rambo* and *Dirty Harry* into smash hits, that have made national heroes of Charles Bronson, Sylvester Stallone and Clint Eastwood, are at work here. These movie stalwarts dazzle us with their audacity, thrill us with their daring, give legitimacy to our most violent fantasies. They assuage our anxieties about our own vulnerability, allow us to believe in justice again, leave us almost breathless with excitement and admiration.

Long before Bernie Goetz rocketed into our consciousness, we had made him up - in the characters portrayed by Bronson, Eastwood and Stallone who enact for us the orgy of retribution we cannot permit ourselves. Charles Bronson sits on the subway with a bag of groceries, just like any ordinary guy carrying home his supper, and waits for some thug to come along and try it. Clint Eastwood points a gun at a man's head and taunts, 'Go ahead, make my day'.⁷ Bernie Goetz walks into a subway car and sits down in the middle of four black youths. Life and art stand in a reciprocal relation to each other (pp. 79-80).

The reciprocity of art and life are worth noting in the quote from Rubin but her reductive formulation of readers' responses to texts should alert us to the faults in her assessment of the Goetz case and, in turn, to the potential readings of *Death Wish*. The public support must provide the starting point for any assessment of the political character of the Goetz case; instead, Rubin simply believes that the public were duped by media distortions. What is important is that the shootings touched some kind of nerve in the *social* lives of (especially) New Yorkers rather than in their putatively media-fuelled fantasy lives. The initial public reaction to the Goetz case, it could be argued, involved very little concern with veracity of justification; rather than this it involved a seemingly non-politically pre-determined everyday practice. Retaliation against street crime does not have to necessarily bear a right-wing complexion; although it is done disapprovingly, Rubin nevertheless quotes Harvard professor James Q. Wilson on the case:

There are no more liberals on the crime and law-and-order issue in New York because they've all been mugged the normal partisan divisions no longer obtain in a situation of this sort (p. 104).

This is suitably suggestive for an approach to the *Death Wish* texts, especially as critics' responses to the film were so much at odds with the pronounced responses of audiences.

⁷ Although he might say this in *Sudden Impact* (1983), he does not say it in *Dirty Harry*.

As we have mentioned, a discussion of the main differences between the film and the novel of *Death Wish* is contained in Sutherland's short chapter on the text. Rather than retread the same ground it is worth pointing out a few features of the film's narrative lest it be forgotten in the wake of publicity surrounding its sequels. The first thing that is noticeable about the film is its use of realistic modes of presentation to the point where it appears manifestly a low-budget presentation. No studio sets seem to have been used and there is a great deal of outdoor shooting. The quality of the film has the kind of grainy effect achieved by shooting on 16mm film and projecting onto a 35mm screen in the manner of some documentaries of the period. The film's incidental music (by Herbie Hancock) is quite complex, but the recording of it often sounds out of synch or not fully integrated into the film's soundtrack. In addition, the dialogue is occasionally inaudible, the actors stammer or make mistakes over their words, and sometimes speak over each others' lines. In this way the narration of the film is reminiscent more of the work of Ken Loach and Tony Garnett, such as *Kes* (1970) or, particularly Garnett's *Handgun* (1983), than it is of Hollywood action films of the period. However, this quasi-documentary aspect of *Death Wish* does bear some resemblance to parts of *Dirty Harry*. At the level of what is narrated, the key change from the book is the ending: the policeman following Kersey's case (Vincent Gardenia) confronts him in hospital after the latter has been injured in a pitched battle with muggers. Effectively, he runs Paul Kersey (Charles Bronson) out of town after revealing that he knows he is the vigilante. Other parts of the narrative which have been singled out as being an over-exaggeration of the book's premises are actually more ambiguous than commentators allow. The sequence where Paul's wife and daughter are attacked is shown in the film; it is not made clear that the violence is necessarily sexual but the intruders are disturbed during their attack. The emotiveness of such a scene might be attacked as gratuitous; however, in its defence, one might say that it reveals that the attackers are led by a white man (Jeff Goldblum). Similarly, the very first scene in the film is a romantic one with Paul and Joanna Kersey (Hope Lange) enjoying the beach in Hawaii, a scene which makes the intruders' attack that much more of a

violation. Moreover, it is a part of the film's semantic aspect: shot in bright sunlight it is related to the scenes in Arizona where Paul is given the gift of a hand-gun by his client, Jainchill. In contrast, the rest of the outdoor scenes of the film are dominated by darkness, in Central Park at night for instance. Clearly the film is a far different proposition from the book and Bronson's star persona probably adds to this. However, it is easy to overstate the supposedly gratuitous violence of the film. There is little blood on screen and there are no dramatics; in contrast to the sequels, it can be argued that Bronson's impassive demeanour connotes sadness and pathos rather than robotic retribution. However, it is clear that audiences were invited to read the film in certain ways. Critics, as we have noted, were often condemnatory; but there were those who also found the film laudable and incorporated into their reviews reports of favourable audience reactions.

Those reviewers who disliked the film did not mince words. Penelope Gilliatt in the *New Yorker* bluntly asserted that

It degrades audiences (Gilliatt 1974d).

Such a statement demonstrates a considerable faith in the powers of film to have an effect on an audience. Gilliatt's main contention, however, is that the film constitutes an assault on New York City, and it is crucial for her that the director of the film is a Briton. She writes

Characters who voice every bigotry about New York run rampant in the rest of the world, which seems to believe that New York's upper middle classes had better move posthaste to the suburbs before their wives were raped or their children learn Spanish, and that the bums who make up the rest of the city are just 'freeloading off welfare with a switchblade in every pocket' (Gilliatt 1974d).

It is worth taking Gilliatt's review of the film as an example of a hostile assessment of *Death Wish*, not because it focusses more exclusively on putative right-wing tendencies of the narrative but because it puts New York City in the position of victim. Essentially, Gilliatt's opinion is not too different from the press office of the mayor of the city, which said of *Death Wish*:

We won't dignify the film with comment. New York is the greatest city in the world (quoted in Robinson 1975).

What Gilliatt and the mayor's press office do more effectively than any in-depth exegesis of the narrative is to emphasize the social phenomenon that the film embodies.

Michael Winner's riposte to the mayor's indirect statement makes this very clear:

I think if a city had two thousand people mugged every week, someone's entitled to make a film about it sooner or later (quoted in Robinson 1975).

What this statement draws attention to is not that the film is simply a thriller with a neutral theme but that its narrative involves complex social investments, the political complexion of which is far from being resolved. The issues of vigilantism are matters which cannot be repressed in a modern city with such high crime rates; yet the topic seems to be for Gilliatt politically pre-designated. It is clearly meant as a damning criticism of *Death Wish* when she writes of

The film's inane hope of showing that it is 'unbigoted' by using equal numbers of black white and Puerto Rican bad men (Gilliatt 1974d).

Yet one could argue that it would be more than likely for street crime to be committed by a large proportion of black or Puerto Rican youths in New York City. This was certainly an issue in the Goetz case: Goetz had been mugged by three black youths in 1981 before he shot the four in the subway in December 1984; it was difficult to ascertain his exact views on race issues thereafter (Rubin pp. 57-58; pp. 181 ff). What he did make explicit in his statements, however, is that he hated New York and particularly its criminal justice system, a hatred fuelled, perhaps, by the six hour police interview he underwent following his mugging in 1981 compared with the two hour interrogation undergone by one of his assailants on that day (pp. 56). Although there is definitely a race issue in the Goetz case and *Death Wish*, it is more complex than the formulations of Gilliatt and Rubin will allow. Their initial premise - that hatred of a city and a criminal justice system which exacerbates crime involving black youths is naturally synonymous with racism - involves a considerable leap of logic. One way that this might be approached more fruitfully by Gilliatt, though, is in her statement that implies the film is a paranoid vision:

As I write this, on the West Side the film would have us believe is impossible to live in, Central Park is full of people playing softball, picknicking, jogging, bicycling, lying under trees, spending a Sunday afternoon in love together. It is not a city that this film would recognise (Gilliatt 1974d).

Whether the film is unnecessarily paranoid or whether Gilliatt views the world with rose-tinted spectacles cannot be answered here. However, once the argument moves onto the plane of the film's degree of realism other positions on the narrative are available. Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun Times* suggest that the realism of the film should be a minor issue:

We don't take exception to "El Dorado" in which John Wayne clears out the bad guys without the benefit of a badge. So why object to a 1974 updating of the same frontier code (quoted in Malcolm 1975).

While there are benefits in such a view it was clear that the film generated enough emotions among audiences to prevent arguments about it remaining on this plane.

In addition to the depiction of New York, the key way in which the narrative of the film was offered as an arena of social investment was in the events that it was thought to have immediately 'inspired'. A British newspaper reported on the phenomenon across the Atlantic:

Two men have been shot in two days here who would be alive today had they not carried a gun to protect themselves. New Yorkers feel that a new film called "Death Wish" is inspiring a resurgence of the old American vigilante tradition, encouraging people to arm themselves in this way (Rosen 1975).

Before the film came to Britain and before it was shown outside of New York reports were circulating that audiences in cinemas were openly cheering Bronson's actions in the film (ibid.). Amongst the details of 'copycat' antics among New Yorkers were the cases of a sixty year-old Bronx grocer who shot a mugger and a Manhattan furrier who drew his gun only to be shot first by the mugger whom he wished to retaliate against (Rosen 1975). As we have suggested, the film is not so unsophisticated that it simply sustains a series of gung-ho heroics, but various extra-textual cues might support such a reading. Posters for the film carried a selection from the following captions:

JUDGE, JURY AND EXECUTIONER ALL IN ONE

HE'S THE MIDNIGHT VIGILANTE

MUGGERS BEWARE

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN A MUGGER KILLS YOUR WIFE?

CHARLES BRONSON IS THE VIGILANTE, CITY-STYLE! (*Death Wish* Press Book Paramount 1974).

The third and fourth of these captions seem to be much different in tone from each other, the former offering a far more aggressive version of the film's events. Other cues on posters included extracts from reviews:

"A PROVOCATIVE, SHREWDLY MADE SHOCKER!

When Charles Bronson begins to shoot the bad guys, it's difficult not to cheer him on with loud shouts of encouragement. And so New York has its first vigilante and perhaps its first real crime deterrent: IT ALL WORKS"

- Kathleen Carroll, *N.Y. Daily News*

"DEATH WISH IS A ROUSER FOR EVERYONE WHO WANTS SAFE CITIES - WHAT I CALL THE FED-UP GENERATION. IT'S A FIRST-RATE THRILLER! Bronson gives a bang-up performance!"

- Gene Shalit, *NBC-TV*

"A VERY IMPRESSIVELY MADE FILM! It taps every urbanite's fears and exasperations about the spread of crime in the streets. It's certainly the kind of film that will have some kind of profound social impact!"

- Kevin Sanders, *ABC-TV*

'A TIME-BOMB OF A MOVIE, exploding at just the right moment in a glare of truth that will touch and terrify us all. It crackles with the electricity of dangerous big city streets, and is so timely in its terror that the switchblade seems to prick the viewer's skin, the bullet seems to whiz along his ear. A WINNER!

- Norma McLain Stoop, *After Dark*

(*Death Wish* Press Book Paramount 1974).

Given the evidence of these cues it would seem that one way of reading the film would be in the gung-ho fashion which we have suggested is not fully merited by the film's style of narration or by its narrative alone. This is not to suggest that the 'copycat' vigilantism is directly caused by the operation of such cues; it must be borne in mind before making such equations that the most direct determinant of the mentioned events is crime in the real world. However, it is possible to say that the cues offered a reading of the film which played up its straightforward thriller aspects, making them explicitly indissoluble from the social content of the narrative. The odd review out on the posters is the following:

"A FIRST-RATE SUSPENSER! What makes the fantasy work is the superb performance of Charles Bronson. The breath-stopping denouement and tidy-twist resolution will satisfy every base instinct 'we liberals' are heir to!"

- Judith Crist, *New York Magazine*

What is notable about this quote is that it attempts to separate the assessment of the film as a narrative from the film as a reflection of social reality in a way that the other cues avoid. It seems very telling that the social reality to which this film refers should play

so heavily on the minds of seasoned reviewers and be reproduced in the cues to facilitate a certain reading of the film. Put another way, it could be said that the majority of such cues emphasized that the film produced knowledge of social reality solely through thrills. On the other hand, it can be argued that the low-key nature of the narrative which might be found in a reading of the text which is *divorced* from these cues emphasized more strongly the film's realism and the imperatives of urban crime. As we have stressed before, the extra-textual cues do not necessarily provide the ultimate authority for the reconstitution of a historical reading of a text. However, they do indicate the general terrain upon which readings might be made. In the case of *Death Wish*, the theme of 'revenge' across the texts is transformed into a complex of social imperatives. From the moment that Paul decides to take some kind of action the texts open up an arena of overdetermined potential social investments. *Death Wish* is comparatively explicit about this: the ills which befall individuals in contemporary society are to do with a complex of determinants which can be generally identified in the idea of a liberal consensus. Furthermore, such a formulation proves itself to be far less ethereal than it sounds by focussing on fundamental, but hitherto buried issues of the period, specifically the ideals of family and law-and-order which would provide so much grist to the mill of New Right politics. It is this comparative specificity - albeit one which need not be demonstrably politically pre-designated - which is manifest in *Death Wish* and which can be said to provide a frame of reference for other revenge texts of the period. As we will see, those narratives that we will discuss below inflect the social objects of revenge in a far more oblique way.

The Executioner and First Blood

In the 1976 thriller by Noel Hynd entitled *Revenge*, Richard Silva returns from Vietnam having been mercilessly tortured when he was a prisoner of war. He knows that his vicious torturer bore the nickname 'The Imp' and he knows that he was a

French speaking European rather than a North Vietnamese soldier. The first chapter of the novel following the prologue has as one of its opening paragraphs the following:

There was the personal torture. There was the execution of William DeMeo. There were the sixteen other murdered soldiers. And there were two other related deaths. Those of Mr and Mrs Raymond Silva, Richard's parents (p. 19).

Richard Silva feels that his period of captivity is at least partly responsible for the deaths of his parents and the indirect interior monologue concludes

It wasn't fair. For this, too, the Imp would pay (p. 20).

Silva enlists as an intelligence operative for the American government and his quest consumes him in the midst of his job. He finds himself drawn into a plot concerning the kidnap of an American diplomat's wife and child in France. The narrative makes clear that Silva now has the chance to track his erstwhile tormentor, the Imp, who is back on French soil. As the narrative reaches its climax, with Silva about to realize his moment of truth in executing the Imp, a final twist is revealed: the Imp is not a terrorist or criminal; he is involved in the kidnapping of the diplomat's family by virtue of being the key French intelligence agent on the case whose movements the narrative has detailed from an early stage. The twist exists for potential readers of the narrative only; for Silva there is no expression of surprise, concern or even knowledge. The story of Silva as a Vietnam veteran seeking revenge takes place in a milieu which is more akin to that of *The Day of the Jackal* than either *Death Wish* or *Dirty Harry*. However, the narrative of Silva's actions and the potential social investments that might accrue to them in the period are closely related to two more famous characters within the revenge subgenre of the 1970s thriller. The fundamental idea in *Revenge* that an individual (Vietnam veteran) wishes to mete out retribution for his suffering not to foreign aggressors but to agents internal to Western society is almost identical to the same concept that is embodied both by Rambo and Mack Bolan. Although we will see that their targets are different and their narratives are seemingly wholly dissimilar, *First Blood* (1973; originally 1972) and *The Executioner* both allow for the activation of a complex of related social investments.

The series of books featuring the character of Mack Bolan (dubbed 'The Executioner') and authored by Don Pendleton began to appear in 1970 with the first Executioner title, *War Against the Mafia* (1973a). As Gibson points out

Mac [sic] Bolan achieved extraordinary popularity in the 1970s with some print runs reaching 300,000 copies with over 75 per cent sales rates. There were four issues a year (in Aulich and Walsh 1989 p. 34).

What unites all the Executioner books is the theme of Bolan's largely solitary violent crusade against the Mafia in various locations which are often named in the titles of the books: *Washington I.O.U.* (1974b; originally 1972), *San Diego Siege* (1974a; originally 1972), *Assault on Soho* (1973f; originally 1971) and so on. In terms of variety, this does not sound at all promising; however, it is a mistake to indulge in the kind of unrigorous thinking which simply assumes that a rigid formula is foisted onto an unthinking passive reading public. Gibson, for instance, asserts that

Bolan slaughters his way across the United States in a 'warwagon' van for the first thirty-eight volumes in the series, each book a stop at a city where he kills dozens of Mafiosi and takes their illicit funds to finance more killings in other cities. Bolan dresses completely in black for his missions, wears a .44 Automag (a huge custom-built pistol) and a special silencer-equipped Baretta 9mm that fires three-shot automatic bursts.

Pendleton graphically describes almost every shot and its impact on human flesh (op. cit. p. 32).

This statement is simply untrue. For instance, there are hundreds of shots in the novel series whose trajectories and targets are not fully detailed at all. Even if the elements described by Gibson could be found in perhaps one or two novels in the Executioner series this does not sanction the generalization about cultural artefacts in which Gibson indulges. It is almost inconceivable that academic works operating at this level of gross over-generalization are ever even published. One might imagine the results if the same lack of rigour was applied to the work of a canonised author or to a period in history. Given that this is the case, the Mack Bolan novels must be examined with a little more caution in spite of the daunting task of assessing them in their entirety as a cycle. One feature that requires attention is the concept of seriality. As we suggested in our consideration of the hard-boiled hero in Chapter 7, despite the fact that series characters in novels do not partake of identical features to those embodied in TV series characters, there are certain points of similarity. In fact, given that novels in the Executioner series

appear, on average, once every quarter, there is probably a greater degree of similarity between Mack Bolan and a TV character such as say, Kojak, than there is between Spenser and the same. So Bolan's story continues from novel to novel with similar details given for the motivation behind his anti-Mafia vendetta in each prologue, for example. The Executioner stories are not simply about suspense, then, and Gibson's exaggerated description of the texts' identical structure is largely redundant. It is precisely the fact that Bolan is a series character involved in largely the same kind of adventures which makes the changing semantic features so crucial. Moreover, as we have continually stressed, a change in the investment of the semantic aspect of the genre text will forge a change in its syntactic aspect. Bolan should, therefore, be considered as a figure in Denning's sense of the word; despite the apparent limitations of his character that a superficial reading such as Gibson's attempts to emphasize, the Executioner has the capacity to act as a site for a range of changing social investments.

Bolan's character and his story since the days of Vietnam are recounted in a prologue which precedes each of the narratives. Quite clearly these prologues provide a far more explicit cue to the reading of Bolan's character and a possible meaning of his exploits in the narrative that follows. Before we consider this in any depth we will examine the fourth book in the Executioner cycle, *Battle Mask* (1973d; originally 1971). At the beginning of this narrative, Bolan has just escaped after the Pittsfield War described in *Death Squad* (1973c). He has done great damage to the Californian operations of Mafia boss, Julian DiGeorge but has narrowly escaped death. The first part of *Battle Mask* finds him on the run with a price on his head, fuelled by a personal obsession:

There was Bolan's utter disgust and cold hatred for everything Mafia. There were the brains of a very professional soldier, and the determination to win this lousy war (1973d p. 11).

These words from the prologue serve as a bolster to various events in the novel. In the early pages of the book Bolan is once more pursued by Mafiosi who track him to a garage-cafe. He is aided in his avoidance of his pursuers by an old man who sneaks him into his truck, and tells Bolan

Want you to know, you got most of the people behind you. You're a national hero . . . know that? (1973d p. 19).

Within a short space of time after helping Bolan escape the old man has been killed by the Mafia, much to Bolan's shortlived regret:

His anger was directed mostly toward himself; he'd had no right to involve the old man in his war. Sorrow was a luxury Mack Bolan could not afford. He cleared his mind of the old man, directed the car onto the business district and abandoned it in a darkened public parking lot (1973d p. 23).

What this short passage makes clear is that the Executioner is an outsider. This is fairly obvious from numerous other features of the narrative, but what is important is that the nature of Bolan's crusade is such that a great deal of public support is denied him. The old man may know of a cult following that Bolan may have but it cannot ever be one that is concomitant with the mainstream law makers of contemporary America. One of the two policemen on Bolan's trail in California is also riven by doubt; Braddock is forthright in his attempts to end the crusade of the Executioner but his subordinate, Sergeant Lyons, has more complicated feelings:

Lyons was, of course, in no small measure responsible for Braddock's failure to apprehend the Executioner. This was a sore point to his conscience and a constant irritant to his sense of personal ethics. In this context of understanding, he had pursued the only course open to him in his handling of the Bolan case. Twice he had turned his back and allowed the Executioner to walk away from him. Braddock had never known of this treachery, of course, and Lyons himself simply could not regard his actions as treacherous. The life of one good man hung in the balance, and even Big Tim Braddock and his ambitions had been outweighed on the scale of Lyons' ethics (1973d pp. 90-91).

The moral ambiguity entailed in this passage lends a complexity to the Executioner narratives that Gibson's caricature of them, for instance, will not allow. As in the *Death Wish* narratives it is no longer clear that moral choices can be made without equivocation, and so policemen apply personal ethics to the judgment of activities labelled as 'lawless', rather than the yardstick of written legislation. Lyons, as an officer of the law, is compelled to bring Bolan to justice and curtail his personal battle; yet Bolan's battle is specifically with organized crime, a sector of society that Lyons and other police operatives should also, by rights, be called upon to apprehend. Lyons is therefore not dissimilar to the patrolman who turns his back at the end of the novel, *Death Wish*. If this situation is not complicated enough then it can be juxtaposed with a narrative such as *Serpico*, or even the Kojak pilot film, *The Marcus-Nelson Murders* (1973; see Appendix 1), in which large proportions of the police are shown to be on the

take. The Mafia, then, is a potent symbol for a sense of corruption in the American society to which Bolan has returned. In *Battle Mask*, Bolan has received plastic surgery to change his identity and enable him to penetrate the household of Mafia family head, Julian 'Deej' DiGeorge; having accomplished this, Deej then tests Bolan by sending him out to eliminate Lou Pena who has been caught by the police and who Deej says may incriminate all the local Mafiosi. Pena is a lethal henchman who is high on loyalty but low on intelligence in a manner very similar to that of Luca Brasi in *The Godfather*. The prominence of the myth of the Mafia promulgated by *The Godfather* in the 1970s cannot fail to penetrate readings of the Executioner series at some point; what is crucial to note for our purposes is that such a myth makes the Mafia integral to the fabric of the American social formation. In an important sense what Bolan is fighting is an entity which is very American and represents a burgeoning part of the contemporary United States.

The internality of the Mafia theme in America is worth stating when one bears in mind the way in which the figure of the Executioner, in opposition to this internality, represents a sense of externality as a result of being a vet. Both internality and externality as themes in the novels may seem self-evident but the contradictions effaced in their narrative cohabitation must not be overlooked. As a representative of law as it is carried out by the book, Braddock reflects on Bolan:

Lately, however, an AWOL soldier who seemed to think he could bring Vietnam tactics to American streets was raising a large question mark around the kindness of Tim Braddock's personal fates (1973d p. 29).

The difference between the law making of Braddock and Bolan, then, hinges on the importation of alien methods into the resolution of American social problems. What Bolan is does is to wage war on an implicit guerrilla force, the Viet Cong on American soil. Although the narrative prose continually carries out the task of providing comment on Bolan's motivations, as with the hard-boiled hero subsidiary characters also serve to provide a commentary on his actions and character. When Bolan goes for plastic surgery - the 'battle mask' of the title - the surgeon is an ex-Vietnam military doctor and

acquaintance of Bolan's named Brantzen. Brantzen reflects on Bolan's career in Vietnam as a military assassin, how he carried children into hospital and how he did each of these without any sense of swagger or bravado:

Some men, Brantzen had decided, just had too much sense of dedication for their own good. If Vietnam had been an unwinnable war, then Bolan's one-man campaign against the Mafia could only be an impossible one. Hounded from both sides, by both law and the underworld, there could be only one outcome for Mack Bolan (1973d p. 33).

The potency and coherence of Bolan's actions against the Mafia rely on a knowledge of his history, particularly the first book in the series, *War Against the Mafia*, where the details of his family's fate are narrated most fully. Here it is revealed that Bolan was called home during his second combat tour of duty in Vietnam to oversee the funerals of his family. While Sergeant Bolan has been serving in Vietnam his father has been the victim of a Mafia loansharking and intimidation operation which has resulted first in Bolan's sister becoming a prostitute, followed by his father, pushed to the edge of endurance, shooting both Bolan's sister and mother. This source for Bolan's vendetta against Mafia operations worldwide is usually signalled more or less obliquely in the prologues to each volume. However, the rest of the narrative makes it quite clear that there is a strong equation between the war in South East Asia and the war on American soil. In *Battle Mask* a further conversation between Bolan and Brantzen emphasizes the point:

'It's not just an idea, Jim'. Bolan dropped the mirror onto his lap. 'It's a commitment. I have no choice. I fight until I win or until I die'.

'It's 'Nam all over again', Brantzen said sorrowfully.

'That's about what it is', Bolan agreed.

'The meek shall inherit the earth', the surgeon reminded his patient, smiling solemnly.

'Yeah', the Executioner said. 'But not until the violent have tamed it' (p. 49).

On the face of it, Bolan's crusade has very little objective coherence; but psychologically, especially to him, it makes a great deal of sense. This is mirrored in *Battle Mask* by the other key sympathizer with Bolan's cause: Palm Village police chief, Robert 'Genghis' Conn, is a World War II veteran who has learned to settle down, yet in Bolan he recognizes a valiant soldier (p. 38). Proof that Genghis's

grudging allegiance is well-placed is offered by the fact that he is soon wiped out by the Mafia himself. The specific forging of the bond of externality and internality - represented by Vietnam and the Mafia, respectively - that runs through the Executioner series is accomplished in *Battle Mask* when Bolan has successfully insinuated himself into the DiGeorge household. His ruthlessness and his streetwise criminal expertise promotes faith among the DiGeorge henchmen and it is quickly whispered that Bolan (under the cover of Frankie 'Lucky' Lambretta) will soon achieve the position of *capo* (pp. 105-106). Bolan's externality, embodied in his combat expertise, when transformed into a specific kind of criminality, allows him a measure of internality with regard to the American social formation. We will return to this paradox in a moment; the immediate consequences of this for the narrative, though, is that, like the serial killer novels of the eighties and like the other revenge texts of the seventies the message is clear: the enemy can only be vanquished on their own ground using *their* methods, however sordid. In Vietnam, Bolan has been a lone Executioner, a fact usually pointed out in the prologues or in such parts of the narrative as Brantzen's reference to a military assassin. This detail is crucial to *Battle Mask* when, towards the climax, the connection between the guerrilla warfare of the Viet Cong and the Mafia operations are made clear. Lou Pena escapes the police and is on the way to blow Bolan's cover; Bolan, however, is on his trail and arrives at Jim Brantzen's house just after Pena leaves:

He found Jim Brantzen clad only in pajama bottoms, stretched out on the dining table, his head dangling over the edge. Bloodied pliers and wirecutters lay beside him on the table. Bolan winced and a guttural snarl tore up through the constrictions of his throat as he inspected his friend's mutilated body. Of all the atrocities Bolan had witnessed in the hamlets of Vietnam, he had never seen anything to equal the ferocity of this obvious interrogation. They had twisted the nipples out of his chest, probably with the pliers. The entire torso was a raw pulp of mutilated meat. The ribs gleamed through bare spots where the flesh had been stripped away. The surgical fingers of the right hand had been whittled to the bone. Both earlobes were missing, his nostrils were slit up both sides, laying bare the bridge of his nose, and deep grooves had been carved beneath each eye. Worst of all, to Bolan's way of thinking, the hideously tortured surgeon was still alive . . . and aware (p. 118).

The following scenes involve Bolan crashing his car into the vehicle of the Pena entourage and then assessing the damage. Bolan approaches each of the passengers of the crashed vehicle as they have been scattered over the area or are trapped in the

wreckage. Whether they are dead, fatally injured or in a position of potential recovery, Bolan shoots each of them between the eyes (p. 126).

As we have suggested, it could be argued that Bolan's fixation on the Mafia as a target for revenge might be logically shown to be without real justification. Clearly, the Executioner series presents various reasons for equating the war against the Mafia with the war in Vietnam which could be shown to be based on paranoid delusions. Here it is possible, therefore, to see a further link between the themes of revenge and paranoia. But perhaps of more relevance for a reading of the contemporary political character of these texts is a remark we encountered earlier spoken in Brian Garfield's *Death Sentence*: when Irene, as a lawyer, utters the conviction that revenge is personal and justice is social, her statement can be read in terms of a blurring of the lines between the personal and the social (1977 p. 72). What revenge texts such as the Executioner series can be said to offer is a reading of the concepts of justice and revenge as inseparable. Bolan's crusade against the Mafia may seem purely personal, but it takes place on social grounds, in the same way as participants in the war in Vietnam may be said to be motivated by personal factors but are actually involved in a mobilization of far larger political forces. A passage from the prologue of *Continental Contract* makes this clearer:

Now it appeared that Bolan, along with many others, had lost his own soul in that conflict - a point which many homefront moralizers were hastening to make. He had been editorialized as a 'government-trained mad dog', and lamented on the floor of the U.S. Senate as 'America's military sins coming home to roost'.

All this was inconsequential to Mack Bolan. He had not expected medals for his war at home. He would admit, even, that his initial strike against the Mafia had been largely motivated by a desire for vengeance (1973b p. 7).

This passage also obliquely states an important related problem in American social life: the difficulty of assimilating Vietnam veterans into American society is exacerbated by a blurring of the lines between the social and the individual. This grey area which has been acutely emphasized by the Vietnam conflict and the return of soldiers provides a fertile ground for the imaginary themes of revenge in thrillers of the period and their

potential for a range of social investments. The brute reality of the objects of Bolan's revenge, for instance, is very much overdetermined:

Staring down at him Bolan was thinking of Doc Brantzen and Genghis Conn and a sweet-faced little lady he had met only in death. He saw the face of pain and surprise on Big Tim Braddock, and he saw the embalmed faces of his own father, mother and kid sister. He saw the seven grotesque remains of his death squad, and the scores of Mafia dead and dying who had met the Executioner's guns . . . and then he saw only Julian DiGeorge, squirming in the dirt of a kingdom that had not been worth it, and Bolan wondered if anything was worth it (p. 151).

These killings, then, are a blow against organized crime, a corrupt social system and quite simply a war. In this way Bolan bears traces of the pre-Constitutional hero that we have discussed and this introduces a further paradox. The Vietnam tactics which mark the Executioner's externality or exteriority are really the mark, simultaneously, of his internality to American culture. This is rather an abstract concept, but it is possible that it provides the unspoken parameters for potential social investments in the Bolan series. In a more flowery mode, John Hellmann writes

We can see that the deeply flawed past, from which the nation began by declaring its independence, is truly our father. But we can also see that only a second failure of nerve would cause us to draw back from the American frontier, from our own better dreams. Mythmaking is an active, not a passive, process. Perhaps, from the landscape of our Vietnam failure, we can find a new determination to brave the opening expanse (1986 p. 224).

The Executioner can be said to contribute in an oblique way to the mythmaking that Hellmann mentions. If the idea of Bolan as an American Adam seems strange, then his relation to this notion may seem less bizarre in the light of the following quotes, from *Continental Contract* and *Chicago Wipeout* respectively:

When Bolan killed enemies in Vietnam he was decorated for his heroism and applauded by the bulk of his society. When he killed the enemy at home he was charged with murder and hounded as a dangerous threat to the same society. In that other war had been respites from combat, a reasonably safe place to lay the head and rest the soul; in this new war were no places to pause, no zones of safety, no sanctuaries for the man whose battlefield was the entire world and whose enemies were both infinite and often invisible (1973b p. 6).

In his personal journal, he had written: 'It looks like I have been fighting the wrong enemy. Why defend a front line eighteen thousand miles away when the *real* enemy is chewing up everything you love back home? I have talked to the police about this situation and they seem to be helpless to do anything. The problem, as I see it, is that the rules of warfare are all rigged against the cops . . . what is needed here is a bit of direct action, strategically planned, and to hell with the rules. Over in 'Nam we called it a "war of attrition". Seek out and destroy. Exterminate the enemy. I guess it's time a war was declared on the home front. The same kind of war we've been fighting in 'Nam. The very same kind' (1973e p. 10).

But the Vietnam experience is not the sole determinant of Bolan's existence as a figure in the sense used by Michael Denning. The appearance of the Executioner series in the

1970s is quite clearly connected to a complex political conjuncture. This idea is made manifest, for instance, in the prologue of *Chicago Wipeout*; although the narration refers to the long-term corruption of the city it is quite easy to make Chicago stand in for the contemporary political and ideological position of the United States as a whole:

Bolan's challenge was knowingly hurled into the teeth of that vast empire which was characterised by the *Chicago Tribune* as:

A world in which wrong is right - in which all incentive for honor, justice, suppression of crime, and even fundamental discipline has disappeared from broad divisions of the police department, the courts, and the all-pervading political party machine that has a strangle-hold on Chicago proper.

What sort of man would single-handedly invade such a province of power with the intention of subduing it, of 'sinking their house down', of breaking the chains which had held this city captive for decades? (1973e p. 7).

What can be said about the Executioner series, then, is that through its central figure, it offers the potential of a series of investments explicitly to do with America's post-Vietnam existence. More specifically, it depicts the marginalization of a veteran and dramatizes his externality; at the same time, his externality is shown to be a simultaneous internality in such a way that it sheds light on the American social formation. That is to say, America is at war with itself. Given the fragile state of political affairs which externalize Bolan and given the target of his retribution, it is evident that revenge is not simply a right-wing mechanism in narratives but a theme which provides a terrain for diverse and sometimes contradictory investments. The fixation points of Bolan's retribution in this formulation are therefore far from arbitrary.

At first consideration, the revenge of Rambo and that of the Executioner would not seem to be all that similar. In *First Blood* by David Morrell, Rambo takes on a police chief in what seems, at first, quite a minor affair. However, if we consider a later novel by David Morrell, *Testament* (1977; originally 1975), it may provide a bridge between the Executioner and Rambo. In *Testament*, Reuben Bourne, a freelance journalist, has written an article which exposes a man called Kess and his secret paramilitary organized crime syndicate; Bourne finds himself and his family under threat from Kess' organization and has no alternative but to flee to the country. The narrative is taken up with the organization's pursuit of the Bourne family and Bourne's attempts to turn the

tables. Already in this outline of the plot there are overtones of *All the President's Men*, the resurgent Nazism of the paranoid narratives and the double-cross motif of Elmore Leonard's crime novels. Where *Testament* provides a thematic bridge is that it features an attack on the domestic setting which provokes the desire for revenge; as in *Death Wish* and the Executioner series, it shows the tables being turned on aggressors, and it dramatizes the rural setting as in *First Blood*. What is apparently missing from *First Blood* is the direct motivation for revenge on Rambo's part: there is no domestic dimension to his character stated in the narrative at all. Therefore, the revenge aspect of *First Blood* is far more oblique than in the other narratives, but it can be argued that the novel clearly provides a terrain for investments on this basis. What should, perhaps, be made clear about the character of Rambo is that he has appeared in texts other than Morrell's *First Blood*. He is the central character played by Sylvester Stallone in *First Blood* (1982) directed by Ted Kotcheff; he is in the limelight even more in *Rambo: First Blood II* (1985), directed by George Cosmatos; and in *Rambo III* (1988), directed by Peter Macdonald, the role is reprised once more. Although we have stressed that texts and their meanings cannot be neatly periodicized, I would suggest that these later texts of Rambo (with the exception, perhaps, of Kotcheff's film) offer the potential of a far different range of investments than those of the novel *First Blood*. The main reason for this is that, at a certain point in the 1980s the meaning of the Vietnam war gradually began to change for Americans; films like *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *Hamburger Hill* (1987), as well as *Rambo*, were felt to represent such a turnabout in opinion that critical works such as those by Adair (1989) and Auster and Quart (1989) were devoted to an exegesis of them. Wimmer, in an article which completely fails to mention *First Blood*, argues that the release of Rambo was well timed; whereas Vietnam veterans used to be bad news they had suddenly become good. He writes that established detective heroes such as Mike Hammer and Matt Houston casually revealed their past as Vietnam veterans in early 1985, something that would have been unthinkable a few years earlier (in Aulich and Walsh 1989 p. 186).

What must also be noted about these later Vietnam texts is that they are more closely related to the Entebbe texts which we discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The

revenge that they may be said to embody seems to be of the more explicitly 'social' or 'national' variety than most of the texts we have considered in detail. More specifically, in *Rambo*, there is a concern with the fate of American soldiers fighting in South East Asia who were 'missing in action' (MIAs), the number of which was put around 2,474 in 1984 (see Taber in Salisbury 1984 p. 211). The issue of MIAs and the possibility of their rescue was by no means a new one; a documentary book of 1971 told of a drop into North Vietnam to rescue American prisoners of war and contained a foreword by H. Ross Perot, the independent Presidential candidate of 1992 who supported action on MIAs for many years (see David 1971). However, the issue became reinvested in the 1980s in such a way that veterans no longer bore the stigma of outcasts as often as they had, and MIAs could be said to offer the residue of a meaningful active American involvement in South East Asia.

The point to bear in mind when considering possible contemporary readings of *First Blood*, then, is that the resonance of references to Vietnam and combat is different in the 1970s and in the 1980s. In this way, both *First Blood* and the Executioner series, in presenting veterans as heroes, are far more complex than might be thought on the basis of a superficial analysis. One interesting feature of Rambo in the novel, in contrast to veterans in the texts of the eighties is that he is constantly referred to as a 'kid'. He is introduced in *First Blood* as follows:

His name was Rambo and he was just a nothing kid for all anybody knew, standing by the pump of a gas station at the outskirts of Madison, Kentucky. He had a long heavy beard, and his hair was hanging down over his ears to his neck, and he had his hand out trying to thumb a ride from a car that was stopped at the pump. To see him there, leaning on one hip, a Coke bottle in his hand and a rolled-up sleeping bag near his boots on the tar road, you could not have guessed that on Tuesday, a day later, most of the police in Basalt County would be hunting him down. Certainly you could not have guessed that by Thursday he would be running from the Kentucky National Guard and the police of six counties and a good many private citizens who liked to shoot. But then from just seeing him there ragged and dusty by the pump of the gas station, you could never have figured the kind of kid Rambo was, or what was about to make it all begin (p. 9).

This will have its purpose in the novel. The rest of the narrative is concerned largely with a battle that takes place between the police chief in Kentucky and a defiant Rambo. Early in the narrative, it becomes clear that the police chief, Teasle, does not want

Rambo in 'his' town and attempts to run him out on two occasions. This is reminiscent of a typical Western scenario where a sheriff will forcibly remove an outlaw from a frontier village, but it is also similar to the close of the *Death Wish* film where Paul is told to leave New York. Paul's last word to a mugger before passing out and being delivered to hospital has been the command

Draw.

He now asks of the policeman

Inspector? By sundown?

The Western reference in the eviction of Rambo to a position outside the town's boundaries is not so explicit but it is almost as clear. So, from the outset, it is established that Rambo is an outsider - he reveals that he has absolutely no form of identification, for instance (p. 29) - but not necessarily discredibly so. His continued return to the town and his final resistance to Teasle's harassment mark him as the eternally returning repressed. This makes sense of Rambo in that he flees from a police station to the hills after killing one of Teasle's deputies and the police chief is forced to pursue him. If one wished to see Rambo as the repressed aspect of America then he is visible as such by virtue of his oneness with the landscape. This split between wilderness and civilization is expressed when Rambo is pursuing Teasle later in the novel: Teasle is overjoyed to reach a fence and then a road which, banal though they might be in everyday life, represent for him the force of civilization (p. 135). For Rambo, however, exactly the opposite is the case: in the first of a number of dialogues with himself he considers telling Teasle at the beginning that he is tired of being run out of town for various reasons. All the reasons for his tiredness and all the reasons for his feeling of antagonism and resistance all stem from the war however objective he tries to make his arguments:

I don't have to explain myself to him or anybody else. After what I've been through, I have a right without explanation.

At least tell him about your medal, what it cost you.

Too late to stop his mind from completing the circle. Once again he returned to the war (p. 19).

For Rambo, the war has put him outside all of the niceties of contemporary society; it is almost as if the American social formation is completely alien to him even though he has been partially nurtured by it.

The way in which Rambo's exteriority is most clearly manifested, of course, is in his revenge. Part of the suspense of the story derives from the fact that Teasle never expects him to take revenge at all, he does not know that he is a Vietnam veteran with honours and he assumes, instead, that Rambo is just a young bum. When Teasle tries to force Rambo first into a wet cell and then into a haircut, he is completely unaware of the memories it triggers off in his prisoner of captivity enforced by the Viet Cong. Moreover, the quality of Rambo's desire for revenge and its determinants are also lost on Teasle. When the party pursuing Rambo into the hills sustains casualties the narrative states Teasle's own desire for revenge in an indirect interior monologue:

Teasle was going to track the kid forever, grab him, mutilate him. He would never let up. No more because of Galt, because he could not let somebody who had killed one of his men get away. Personal now. For himself. Father, foster father both shot. The insane anger of when his father had been killed, wanting to strangle the kid until his throat was crushed, his eyes popping. You bastard. You fucking sonofabitch (p. 103).

This is revenge of a very personal kind. Rambo, on the other hand, represents a socially overdetermined revenge on a much larger scale, as Teasle comes to realize:

What if he doesn't want just one target, and he's waiting down there for the whole lot of us to get careless and show ourselves' (p. 108).

Once more, as in the revenge of the Executioner, there is no purely reason why Rambo should subject Teasle and his men to guerrilla warfare: they are not directly and personally responsible for the specific burden of ills that Rambo carries. However, it is likely that Rambo's continuing dialogue with himself speaks for those potential reader investments through which he is put in the position of hero in the narrative:

He had been lying sheltered under the bushes, watching the top of the cliff for another target, thinking how Teasle had made him into a killer once more and had got him wanted for murder; growing angry as he thought about all the months, two months at least, that he would have to run and hide before he reached Mexico; and for now, by God he was going to turn the game and make Teasle run from *him*, and show him what it felt like. That bastard was going to pay for this.

But you asked for some of it yourself. It wasn't only Teasle, you could have backed off.

For the sixteenth time for crissake? No way.

Even if it was for the hundredth time, so what? Backing off would have been better than this. Leave it alone. End it. Get away.

And let him do it to somebody else? Screw. He has to be stopped.

What? That's not why you're doing this. Admit you wanted all this to happen. You *asked* for it - so you could show him what you knew, surprise him when he found you were the wrong guy to try and handle. You *like* this.

I didn't ask for anything. But damn right I like it. That bastard is going to pay (pp. 113-114).

The narrative does not make Teasle a villain; in fact, it can be argued that the facts about his life that are offered by the narrative foster a great deal of sympathy for him.

However, it is quite obvious that he 'must pay'. The first reason for this is that he acts like the typical Mid-Western 'redneck' to be found in numerous thrillers. (The example that most readily springs to mind in the texts that we have discussed is the bigoted deputy fought by Frady in the film of *The Parallax View* - see Chapter 9). Teasle's dislike of Rambo is based solely on the veteran's appearance and youth, which leads Teasle to associate him with counter culture values:

'Now get it clear', he said. 'I don't want a kid who looks like you and doesn't have a job in my town. First thing I know, a bunch of your friends will show up, mooching food, maybe stealing, maybe pushing drugs. As it is, I've half a notion to lock you up for the inconvenience you've caused me. But the way I see it, a kid like you, he's entitled to a mistake. It's like your judgement's not as developed as an older man's and I have to make allowances. But you come back again and I'll fix you so you won't know whether your asshole's bored, bunched, or pecked out by crows. Is that plain enough for you to understand? Is that clear?' (p. 17).

Rambo is therefore an outsider on numerous counts as far as Teasle and the values of the town he represents is concerned. This should not give Teasle the reason to deny him basic human rights; part of the potential investments in Rambo as a hero, then, derives from Teasle's shock at the enormity of his mistake both in terms of humanity and in terms of self preservation. At a point near the middle of the narrative Teasle receives a garbled radio message that upsets him:

'I can't hear you!' Teasle shouted.

'... sure picked ... guy to try and hunt ... Green Beret ... Medal of Honor'.

'What? Say that again' (p. 107).

Further grounds for Teasle's victimization in the novel lie with his inability to recognize the differences between himself and Rambo as veterans. To an extent, Teasle's place in the narrative is determined by his past combat experience. At a very early stage Rambo

recognizes from an American Legion pin that Teasle is a veteran of the Korean war; Teasle, of course, has not recognized Rambo as an ex-Green Beret. As we have noted before, the difference between Vietnam and other wars is used as a signal in seventies thrillers. Spenser, for instance, has an altercation with a Vietnam veteran police officer as we noted in our discussion of *Looking for Rachel Wallace* in Chapter 7. Bolan is grudgingly admired by World War II vet Genghis Conn in *Battle Mask* (see above). In *First Blood*, the differences between vets is worked out a little more fully. When Rambo remembers his time as a POW in North Vietnam he switches imperceptibly to memories of his training:

Soon they had him doing more chores, heavier one, feeding him less, making him work longer, sleep less. He came to understand. Too much time had gone by for him to know where his team would be. Since he could not give them information they had fixed his wounds so they could play with him some more and see how much work he could take before it killed him. Well he would show them a long wait for that. There was not much they could do to him that his instructors had not already put him through. Special Forces school and the five miles they made him run before breakfast, the ten miles of running *after* breakfast, heaving up the meal as he ran but careful not to break ranks because the penalty was ten extra miles for anyone who broke ranks to be sick [. . .] (p. 40).

Apart from being a Green Beret, Rambo has gone through different training to that of Teasle. The commander of the unit that trained Rambo, Sam Trautman, comes to the assistance of Teasle and the National Guardsmen; he tells the police chief

This is not Korea and the Choisin reservoir (p. 159).

What makes this wholly a different situation from the one that a veteran like Teasle might expect is that Vietnam was a different kind of war; as a result, Rambo has had diverse experiences made necessary by the exigencies of guerrilla warfare. Trautman adds,

He's an expert in guerrilla fighting, he knows how to live off the land, so he doesn't have the problem that you do of bringing up food and supplies for your men. He's learned patience, so he can hide somewhere and wait out this fight all year if he has to. He's just one man, so he's hard to spot. He's on his own, doesn't have to follow orders, doesn't have to synchronize himself with other units, so he can move fast, shoot and get out and hide some place else, then do the same all over again. Just like my men taught him (p. 149).

Teasle has totally miscalculated. Rambo is an outsider to him whether he is a war hero or a hippie. In other ways Teasle demonstrates that he is totally at odds with the world of moral uncertainty that Rambo represents; he tries to explain the differences between himself and Rambo to Trautman:

'I don't kill for a living'.

'Of course not. You tolerate a system that lets others do it for you. And when they come back from the war, you can't stand the smell of death on them' (p. 164).

Trautman's reply to Teasle is almost the ultimate riposte; but not quite. Teasle still tries to clutch at a straw of moral certainty when he muses on Trautman's words:

He looked at Trautman asleep under the army blanket on the floor, and realized he was coming to see the kid from Trautman's view. Not totally, but enough to understand why the kid had done it all, and even to sympathize a little.

Sure, but you didn't kill anyone when you came back from Korea, and you had been through almost as much as him (p. 173).

As Teasle's initial attitude towards 'the kid' has revealed, he is hopelessly out of touch with the contemporary world. For him, the liberal values of contemporary America are as alien to him as Rambo's Vietnam experience. He is therefore offered the chance of changing when confronted by the new social challenges; rather than accept the world outside his small town, though, he embraces Rambo. In fact, Teasle becomes him:

Kern frowned in question at Trautman and the two policemen. 'What's been going on with him while I was back there? What's happened?'

The one policeman shook his head queerly. 'He thinks he's the kid'.

'What?'

'He's gone crazy', the other said (p. 226).

Teasle's identification with Rambo could be said to represent his break with the contemporary world, opting to go for the wilderness inhabited now by Rambo. If his final identification were not enough to suggest a reading of this kind then the final conversation Teasle has with his wife should confirm it: there is absolutely no reason for the breakdown of the marriage given and their conversation seems almost wholly aimless (pp. 206-209). Rambo's role in the whole drama can be said to be akin to that of the shark in *Jaws*; in a sense, he represents all the contradictions of new, relentless social forces. The ironic ending of the narrative only serves to emphasize that Rambo can never be a hero, he can only be a force: he accidentally shoots and kills Teasle and then Trautman tells that he shot Rambo with shotgun (pp. 236-238).

We have seen that the figure of the Vietnam veteran in thrillers invariably reveals a number of contradictions in American society. In this way vets are potent representatives of the theme of revenge, as they crystallize various social conflicts that arise from the failure of the liberal consensus that was characterized by the Great Society programme. What we are suggesting by this is that Vietnam veterans are assimilated into fiction in quite an ambiguous way. On the one hand there is the oft noted difficulty of assimilation into fiction which results in the depiction of a psychotic or marginalized figure. Figley and Leventman observe that

In the homecoming period of the early 1970s, the mass media - electronic and print, entertainment and news - played roles in the negative labeling of Vietnam veterans. One label veterans resent particularly is 'PVS' or 'post-Vietnam syndrome'. Apparently the term surfaced following a *New York Times* story about a black Medal of Honor winner killed while involved in a Detroit robbery. The reporter accounted for the incident by suggesting that it was war-related. Indeed, the Vietnam vet was under the care of Army psychiatrists at the time, but less-informed journalists - and later several psychiatrists - generalized the incident to all Vietnam vets and PVS was born. Veterans themselves believe its use implies they 'have' PVS automatically as a result of being associated with Vietnam - whether or not one served in combat, whether or not one acts strangely. News stories of violent crimes do single out, where pertinent, the factor of the perpetrator being a Vietnam veteran to account for 'psychopathic' actions. On television, prime-time cop shows further the negative image of veterans by portraying them as major antagonists, addicts, rapists, mass killers, and particularly morally offensive criminals (1980 xxviii).

The stigma of Vietnam, Figley and Leventman suggest, is enough to put a character - or even a real person - in this period beyond the pale. That this was a widespread attitude in the media is suggested by Camacho who estimates that a criminal veteran appeared, on average, in one crime series per month in the seasons from 1974-1976 (in Figley and Leventman p. 270). As we noted in Chapter 3 (above), Thomas Novelli points out that during the war there were only two Hollywood movies set in Vietnam, and one of these was the gung-ho propaganda film *The Green Berets* (1968). For the duration of the war it seems that the *events in Vietnam* were just not assimilable into fictional narrative, particularly film. When the veterans began to return, *they* also were unassimilable to *American society*. In both cases, the cause can be considered in its most reductive sense as an incompatibility with existing discourses. In the first case, a nation predominantly concerned with bringing the boys home would be the wrong place to attempt to sell another film like *The Green Berets*; it would appear that, after 1968, the majority of the public were less concerned with patriotism in Southeast Asia

than with American lives. In the case of the veterans, the breadth, diversity and otherness of their experience literally made them the outsiders of contemporary American society. However, with regard to those features of the veteran experience that we have discussed certain narrative fictions did attempt to address the plight of the veteran. Unfortunately for the veterans, most fictions only took the surface veneer of the alienation which returning veterans manifested. Worse still, the psychological motivations for such alienation were either missing from narratives, presented in other terms, or replaced with other motivations altogether. The pressing need to re-assimilate people who were once ordinary American citizens perhaps explains why their largely involuntary resistance to assimilation was played out in a fictional arena, possibly in the unarticulated hope that some imaginary resolution to the problem could take place. Moreover, it goes some way toward explaining why the drama was played out in the 1970s. The actual events of the war in Vietnam would be played out in the films of the 1980s, as we have mentioned. But, as far as fiction was concerned, the assimilation of the veteran experience - albeit in an unduly distorted way - into narratives still allowed room for a range of investments and the texts that we have discussed in this chapter indicate that there was another side to the veteran experience even as it was assimilated into fiction. In a study based on interviews with nearly 400 veterans on various general feelings about their experiences, Wilson was able to draw the following conclusion:

Our findings supported this idea that there was a left-wing shift in ideology and a loss of faith in political leaders, democratic political processes, and loss of belief in the trustworthiness of authority and institutions . . . It is of little wonder then that they have found it difficult to trust leaders and their ideologies since that form of naïve trust involved them in a war they came to hate. The various stress-producing events in Vietnam were too profound not to generate a process of ideological reexamination. Hence a simple set of conventional values could no longer be subscribed to with naïveté. The moral dilemmas posed by atrocities and fraggings, the senseless and unjustifiable deaths of buddies, the controversy over the war, and so on, produced within the individual a significant amount of cognitive dissonance and disequilibrium that lay dormant until a moratorium could be constructed to permit the conflicts to be assimilated into a more conclusive perspective. It is no surprise then that the paramount philosophic issues centered around conceptions of authority, power, trust, legitimacy, equity, fairness, justice, love, and altruism. These basic beliefs and values, central to human existence, had been violated too many times by the exigencies of war. The meanings of these principles and values were now no longer academic abstractions. Rather, they resonated deep within the conflicted and anguished soul of the returning veteran. What was important now was the need to reestablish self-trust in order to make personal commitments to trustworthy authorities, politics, and institutions who would somehow safeguard liberty, justice, fairness, and provide equitable opportunities for a meaningful involvement in society (Wilson in Figley and Leventman p. 144).

This is a fair summing up of a possible reading of the veteran experience as represented in the narratives we have discussed. That Vietnam veterans in the guises in which they appear in these narratives could become very popular tends to suggest that, as figures, they are not necessarily invested in a unitary way and that their marginalization is not as straightforward as it may seem. Very often they expose contradictions in American society, stemming from the fact that they are simultaneously *of* America but also irreducibly alien in their experience of life. Being cast out, like Lucifer, Vietnam veterans in fiction justifiably seek revenge, but not always in a manner which is so direct that it can always be labelled the act of a psychotic that must be eradicated. Choosing an object of revenge is the work not only of veterans but also of other fictional (ex-)members of the American social formation, as we have seen. Before we make any further comment on the potential social investments of readers in this act of displacement, we will discuss a text which sheds light on the mechanism while in the act of virtually repressing the Vietnam veteran theme of its narrative.

Taxi Driver

The film, *Taxi Driver* (1976), unlike any of the cinematic narratives that we have discussed in this chapter, won the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival. This does not give the film any superiority over the others that we have discussed, nor does it suggest that the film has a greater grasp of the social determinants of the theme of revenge in the 1970s; in fact, it could be comfortably argued that *Death Wish*, for instance, is far superior to *Taxi Driver* in this respect. However, the idea that *Taxi Driver* is more than 'simply' a revenge thriller, or that it is the work of significant auteurs, has become part of its reading in various writings on the film. Scheuer says that the film is

A profoundly disturbing story about urban alienation and, finally, madness (1983 p. 676).

This is the tenor of the bulk of the commentary on the film, and it could be argued that this body of criticism, more than anything else, prevents the film's proper entry into the thriller corpus. Contemporary critics took a similar view; however, there were still those who equated the film with the texts that we have discussed. Writing long after the film's first release, Auster and Quart pay lip service to the label of profundity attached to the film; however, in discussing the film in terms of its reference to Vietnam, they also add

Taxi Driver is much more a reworking of 1940s *film noir* conventions and an expression of Schrader and Scorsese's personal visions and fantasies about guilt and redemption than an evocation of the plight of the returned veteran or a critique of corrupt, 1970s American culture. This corruption, often perceived by Hollywood in the 1970s as a product of the radicalism and permissiveness of the 1960s, placed Bickle and other Vietnam veterans in the company of civilian film crusaders against the 1960s ethos. Among these were the white working-class backlash of *Joe* (1970), the vigilanteism of Charles Bronson in *Death Wish* (1971) [sic] and the redneck populism of Joe Don Baker in *Walking Tall* (1974). The archetype for this mood, of course, was San Francisco police inspector Dirty Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) (1988 p. 48).

In trying to refute the links between *Taxi Driver*, *Death Wish* and *Dirty Harry* Auster and Quart seem to make them stronger. As we will see, there is a tension in the potential themes of the film which provides a space for the contemporary investments of audiences. When the director of the film, Martin Scorsese, says of the main character, Travis Bickle, that he is

Somewhere between Charles Manson and Saint Paul (quoted in Adair 1989 p. 61)

it indicates that the film can be seen as a psychological study of character, and many critics emphasized this. However, while the film does not dodge the issue of its social meanings, it can be argued that the breadth of them is not given sufficient attention by the filmmakers or some of their critics in their assessments of the film. It is clear from contemporary reviews that there are a range of possible contemporary social investments which are left out in a reading of the film as a purely psychological study.

The plot of the film concerns an insomniac ex-marine veteran of Vietnam, Travis Bickle (Robert DeNiro), who, at the beginning of the narrative, takes a job as a night-shift cabbie in New York. A voice-over narrative charts his disgust with the people he meets on the New York streets:

Thank God for the rain which has helped wash the garbage and trash off the streets Some day a real rain will come and wash all this scum off the streets . . .⁸

He becomes involved in a very short-lived relationship with a political campaign worker, Betsy (Cybill Shepherd), and when this fails, buys guns which it seems he intends to use in order to assassinate the Presidential candidate for whom Betsy is working. Meanwhile, he has also decided to help a prostitute called Iris (Jodie Foster) who is in her early teens and has a pimp, Matthew, also known as 'Sport' (Harvey Keitel). The narrative builds to a powerful and bloody denouement. A plethora of cinematic techniques are employed at various stages in the film's narrative: there are lots of long panning shots (for example, of Travis' apartment) while dialogue continues off screen; there are many straightforward 'realistic' fixed camera shots of the New York streets; there are point of view shots where the camera will show Travis looking in a certain direction and then the next shot will be of what he looks at; there are subjective camera shots from the front point of view of the taxi; there is the bizarrely-lit climactic shoot-out sequence where the action is often shown as if the film has not been projected at the correct number of frames per second; this is followed by a very unusual long interior aerial tracking shot of the carnage; nearly all of these sequences are accompanied by powerful music by Hitchcock's composer, Bernard Herrmann. The film does not, therefore, adopt one realistic style of narration and while this does not necessarily make it different from other thrillers, the diversity of the styles it utilizes is notable. The first three shots of the film provide an interesting foundation for our discussion of it. Before the opening titles the screen is shrouded in a mist and then a yellow taxi drives slowly through the mist and the titles begin, continuing through the next shots. The camera views the taxi from a low right-hand angle and its emergence from the mist is accompanied by surging music which, with its roll of drums, reaches a military style crescendo. More than one critic (see below) has mentioned the affinity of *Taxi Driver* with *Jaws*; this sequence, in particular, is reminiscent of the menacing movement of the shark in the latter film which was actually released a year earlier. The

⁸ The redemptive nature of a vast amount of water is a metaphor which is used in a number of seventies texts that we have discussed, especially the disaster movies (see Chapter 6).

next shot is a close-up of Travis' eyes as he drives along in the taxi; they are tired and the neon of the street lighting reflects on them and the part of his face that is visible. Then there is a cut to a view of the street through the windscreen of Travis' taxi. It is a slow exposure shot and the street lamps and neon signs have all become long swirls of colour on the screen. Clearly these first three crucial shots establish something important about the film's themes. The taxi emerging from the mist allows a reading of it as an unstoppable (social) force clearing away the fog which traditionally suggests a clouded mind. The shot of Travis' eyes in close-up is of the sort that is usually assumed in film language to indicate strong emotion; the shot delineates the 'psychological study' aspect of the film. The next shot, out of the windscreen, in conventional narrative terms, presents Travis' point of view from the last shot of his eyes and is accompanied by music which is dominated by a saxophone that is both suggestive of romance and sleaziness at the same time. The music will recur both in scenes where Travis is involved with Betsy and where he is driving through districts where sex is on sale. The screen is bounded by the edges of the windscreen which shows that the boundaries are within the film's narrative rather than imposed by the exigencies of the cinematic apparatus. Throughout the film there will be numerous occasions when the frame is further limited and the camera will show only what Travis can see in his driving mirror. The distortion of the light and the limits of the view, in addition to the fact that they follow the shot of Travis' eyes, tend to suggest that the narrative will present Travis' view of things without comment. This, combined with the voice-over narrative, is probably the nearest that an iconic system such as film can get to an equivalent of indirect interior monologue as discussed in Chapter 8. If these three shots can be said to stand for the film's themes as a whole then the possibility of social investments is probably high; the first shot and the third shot quite definitely open out onto a social terrain where the drama of the narrative will be played out. Despite the highly personal nature of Travis' psychological difficulties which are depicted in the film, it must not be forgotten that they are largely determined by a very specific social configuration.

The first thing that our outline stresses is that Travis is a Vietnam veteran; it is possible that the script-writer, Paul Schrader, and the director, Scorsese, wished to play down the Vietnam angle in light of the way it had been exploited in some of the texts to which Camacho refers (above) in the seventies. Whether this is the case or not is open to question; however, the Vietnam theme is inflected in different ways in both the original screenplay and the finished film. Although the general audience would not have known the details of the screenplay at the time, it is worth looking briefly at the changes. In both texts, the opening scene in the cab garage has Travis referring to his honourable discharge (1971 in the screenplay and 1973 in the film; for former, see Schrader 1990 p. 3). The two crucial scenes where the Vietnam reference is changed begin with the second time that Travis goes to the campaign headquarters of Presidential candidate Palantine (Leonard Harris) to say a bitter farewell to Betsy. In the screenplay the following is offered:

(A drama is acted out at Palnatine headquarters: TRAVIS, groggy and red-eyed from lack of sleep, walks into the campaign headquarters about noon. BETSY is standing near the rear of the office; she ducks from sight when she sees TRAVIS enter. TRAVIS's path is cut short by TOM's large-framed body. There is no live sound). I realise how much she is like the others, so cold and distant. Many people are like that. Women for sure. They're like a union. TRAVIS tries to push his way past TOM but TOM grabs him. TRAVIS says something sharply to TOM and the two scuffle. TOM, by far the taller and stronger, quickly overcomes TRAVIS, wrenching his arm behind his back. TRAVIS kicks and protests as TOM leads him to the front door. On the sidewalk, TRAVIS's efforts quickly subside when TOM motions to a nearby policeman. TRAVIS quietens down and walks off) (pp. 34-35).

Where the finished film differs is that Travis is more openly aggressive and more directly messianic; he shouts at Betsy

You're gonna die in hell; you're just like the rest of them.

When Tom (Albert Brooks) tries to escort him out of the building, though, Travis suddenly assumes a stance which indicates familiarity with oriental martial arts. It would be quite foolish for Tom to get involved any further. Briefly, this reflects Travis' training as a marine to which he instantly reverts. Yet it could easily be read in a different way; Travis as played by Robert DeNiro is a much smaller man than Tom and it could also be read as quite ridiculous for him to assume this martial arts stance which is almost identical to those made popular in movies of the period starring Bruce Lee

(see Appendix 1). The reference to Vietnam, then, very much relies on a level of cultural knowledge which begins with the fact that the film is set around 1976, but requires also further relevant knowledge regarding the details of marine training. The next explicit reference to Vietnam in the screenplay is deleted from the finished movie. When Travis pays the manic arms salesman, Andy, in the original screenplay the latter asks Travis about his past

(TRAVIS pulls out a roll of crisp one-hundred-dollar bills and counts off eight).

You in 'Nam? Can't help but notice your jacket?

TRAVIS: *(Looking up)* Huh?

ANDY: Vietnam? I saw it on your jacket. Where were you? Bet you got to handle a lot of weapons out there. *(TRAVIS hands ANDY the bills. ANDY counts them and gives TRAVIS a twenty and a five).*

TRAVIS: Yeah. I was all around. One hospital, then the next.

ANDY: *(As he counts)* It's hell out there all right. A real shit-eatin' war. I'll say this, though: it's bringing back a lot of fantastic guns. The market's flooded. Colt automatics are all over. *(Pockets the money).*

TRAVIS: *(Intensely)* They'd never get me to go back. They'd have to shoot me first. *(Pause).* You got anything to carry these in? *(Gestures to pistols).*

(TRAVIS is like a light-switch: for long periods he goes along dark and silent, saying nothing; then suddenly, the current is turned on and the air is filled with the electricity of his personality.

TRAVIS's inner intensity sets ANDY back a bit, but he quickly recovers) (p. 41).

This discussion is absent from the film. In the screenplay it clearly means something about the return from Vietnam. Most wars yield the spoils of battle to which Andy refers;⁹ however, in this context, the fantastic guns that Andy now has for sale are possibly a metaphor for potential violence in American society.

Such references as the screenplay makes to Vietnam rely on close readings of the dialogue; we have already seen one example of the iconic references to Vietnam in the film but the second one illustrates further the way in which the film could foster a much different version of the meaning of Vietnam from the written screenplay. When Travis goes on what can be assumed is his mission to assassinate the Presidential candidate, Palantine, the narrative allows various shots of the public speaking scene and its participants, but Travis' exit from the taxi and his movements towards the square where the speech takes place are only shown in a shot of him from the neck down. He is wearing his army combat jacket which, as previous scenes testify, allows him to hide

⁹ I personally know a number of veterans of World War II who possess Lugers, for instance.

his extensive armoury. When Travis stands still in the square and is evidently listening to the speech the same neck-down shot is offered; the next shot of Travis in this position ascends until his head is revealed, with his hair shaved into a Mohican style. This is what the camera has avoided showing, and probably the most immediate effect that it has is to mark Travis as an outsider. In fact, the way Travis looks throughout the film would mark him as an outsider to the contemporary audience. The screenplay has Travis' hair simply cut very short when he first attends a Palantine speech (p. 57), and the film also shows Travis with a severe crop in this scene. Shortly after this, he with Matthew in order to buy time with Iris. Long-haired Matthew wears high platform shoes, baggy black flared trousers, a white vest, a white link necklace and a black trilby with a thick white band. He talks in hip catch-phrases and clearly thinks that Travis is a weirdly square character; he even calls him 'cop'. What is curious about this scene is that, to an eighties audience, and possibly to a nineties audience as well, it is Matthew who looks like the weirdo; Travis' cropped hair, dark sunglasses, straight jeans, white T-shirt and lumber shirt are common garb after the seventies. Similarly, the Mohican haircut he sports in the final scenes became almost commonplace in post-punk circles on both sides of the Atlantic in the late seventies and early eighties (partly inspired by this film). However, in the context of the contemporary audience, Travis' appearance makes him a little *outré*; moreover, in the scene prior to the appearance of this haircut Travis has shown himself to be a very strange character indeed in his idiotic questioning of a secret service man at the scene of Palantine's first speech. The main scene where Travis is seen with his Mohican hairstyle is the climactic one which we have said is out of synch and portrays a horrifically violent, but also a clumsy and almost farcical, massacre. This is a possible reading of Travis' appearance at this stage. Another possible reading of the Mohican hairstyle is that it refers back to the early colonial period of pre-Constitutional gun rule proper, which is immortalised in American culture by the works of James Fenimore Cooper, particularly *The Last of the Mohicans* (1927). What is probably more likely, though, is that the hairstyle is a reference to Vietnam. Oral accounts of the war included details of crack forces who -

either consciously or unconsciously - incorporated the personal iconography, as well as the savagery in battle, of their native American forebears. One soldier recalls

A lot of them had one long braid down the side of their face. some part of their heads was shaved. Some of them had Mohicans or one braid like my man Yul Brynner had in the *Ten Commandments*. Most of the black guys had Mohicans because they couldn't get their hair long enough for the braids.

Eighty-nine and his men was Marine Recon. I had a lot of respect for them. They were all crazy, but I respected them. They were ear collectors (quoted in Baker 1983 p. 120).

The extent to which this kind of knowledge might be available to the contemporary audience is questionable; the account we have just quoted, for example, comes from a collection published long after 1976. Yet it is possible that the filmmakers used the reference in order to depict ex-Marine Travis' intense and serious preparation for 'battle'. What this shows, then, is a certain intention on the part of the filmmakers in the structuring of Travis' appearance in a special way, which can be decoded by means of a number of different strategies by the contemporary audience. The iconic reference to combat in Vietnam might, perhaps, be subordinate to a reading of Travis' appearance as bizarre. However, within the space of just a few years, this appearance was to become considerably less bizarre and the hipsters in the film increasingly part of an historical period. Although it involves a logical leap, the same could perhaps be attributed to contemporary readings of the events of the film. In the light of the favourable reception given to *Death Wish* and *Dirty Harry* it is very possible that there existed grounds for a reading of the film as a morally induced attack on the excesses of the liberal consensus. The various published contemporary reactions and readings of the film suggest that there is even some confusion about the filmmakers' intent; given this ambiguity, it is likely that audiences might incorporate readings of other films and their understandings of the contemporary social formation into the reading of *Taxi Driver*. What is evident from our discussion of the film's use of the Vietnam theme, though, is that possible readings of Travis as irredeemably 'external' only serve to emphasize his 'internality'. His sojourn in Vietnam which puts him 'outside' contemporary America allows him to emphasize America's internal contradictions when he returns. His psychological dissonance, manifested perhaps in his inability to

recognize the difference between porn films and mainstream films, gives him an ability, of which he is unaware, to reveal the internal consistencies that the liberal consensus has thrown up.

A reading of Travis as forever marginalized - which is, as we will see, the one that the filmmakers intended - can always carry the probability of its opposite. Travis' colleague, Wizard (Peter Boyle), in spite of his references to Harlem and the South Bronx as "fuckin' Mau-Mau land" has learned to accept his position and, in one of the film's set pieces ultimately says he doesn't understand Travis:

It's not Bertrand Russell but what do you want, I'm a cabbie, y'know. What do I know? I mean, I don't even know what the fuck you're talking about.

Travis, on the other hand, develops one moral certainty in his life:

Listen, you fuckers, you screwheads: here is a man who wouldn't take it any more, a man who stood up against the scum, the cunts, the dogs, the filth. Here is someone who stood up . . .

Clearly some violence has been building up in Travis during the course of the film; the rest of the narrative can be said to be only a matter of what will be its object. On numerous occasions in the narrative, including when he speaks to Presidential candidate Charles Palantine, Travis shows himself to be uninterested and even unaware of any sort of politics. However, after his break-up with Betsy, he becomes a potential political assassin. At the risk of simplifying this movement it can be referred to as 'displacement', a term used by Freud to illustrate a specific dream mechanism. For our purposes, the following definition of displacement will suffice:

The fact that an idea's emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from it and to pass on to other ideas, which were originally of little intensity but which are related to the first idea by a chain of associations.

This phenomenon, though particularly noticeable in the analysis of dreams, is also to be observed in the formation of psychoneurotic symptoms and, in a general way, in every unconscious formation.

The psycho-analytic theory of displacement depends upon the economic hypothesis of a cathectic energy able to detach itself from ideas and to run along associative pathways (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988 p. 121).

Displacement is important for a consideration of all the revenge texts but it has been delayed in this chapter because *Taxi Driver* illustrates the mechanism as psychologically determined in a more explicit manner than the other texts. In fact, the screenplay is

more direct that the film: after Travis' final visit to the Palantine headquarters to see Betsy, the screenplay has him in the next scene pick up a young man. In the film the man (Martin Scorsese) tells Travis to drive to an address and when the taxi stops he insists that Travis leaves the meter on. The man stays and tells Travis that his wife is in an apartment in the building, but adds

You know who lives there? A nigger lives there.

He then tells Travis of his intention to take a .44 and fire it up his wife's pussy. This scene is well known for the telling cameo by the director of the film; but in the screenplay it is directly followed by the scene in which Travis buys guns from Andy (Steven Prince) and specifically asks for a .44 magnum. The scenes do not follow in sequence like this in the film, but the screenplay makes clear that a process of displacement has taken place: Travis breaks up with Betsy, he picks up a fare who is breaking up with his wife and intends to use a .44, and then Travis buys a .44. The chain of association will continue so that Travis is now on a combat mission, and the focus of this mission is an assassination attempt on Palantine. Not only is the Presidential candidate Betsy's employer but he has also given Travis a very weak answer in his cab when Travis has raised the issue of the filth on the streets. The assassination attempt fails before it has really got off the ground; Travis immediately has a new target. His prey is considerably smaller following the Palantine debacle: now he makes a direct attempt to rescue the child prostitute, Iris, while killing her pimp, Matthew. Although his target is now far more lowly, it is still part of a chain of displacement which includes Palantine and the characters he meets while driving his taxi every night. The displacement which Travis manifests is therefore similar to that which dictates that Harry Callahan has a personal vendetta against Scorpio, that Paul Benjamin/Kersey wipes out minor street thugs, that Mack Bolan will attempt to liquidate the Mafia and that Rambo will cause as much trouble as he possibly can for the chief of police in the town of Madison. At the same time, though, it would be absurd to assume that this is a purely psychological mechanism in any of the above named cases. There is no doubt that a socially determined chain of association is in

operation here. There are hints in the narrative that Travis, for instance, is a racist; for example, on the pavement outside the Bellmore Cafeteria a point of view shot reveals that Travis is looking at a passing black man in a very strange and hostile way. Various similar shots in the film hint at the same. However, the chain of association involved in Travis' displacement need not necessarily lead to racism. His final act of violence results in the delivery of Iris into the hands of her parents in Pittsburgh; the last scenes of the film involve a panning shot of letters from Iris' parents and newspaper clippings which depict Travis as a hero for enabling Iris to return to her father and mother, plus a voice over which is evidently that of Iris' father giving thanks to Travis in a letter. In a recent case in Britain, a lorry driver who killed an eleven year-old boy through reckless driving was given a very light sentence by the courts; following the driver's release from a short stay in custody, the boy's father, Stephen Owen, took a shotgun and made a failed attempt to kill or wound the driver. Letters of support flooded in to the home of Stephen Owen from various members of the public who either wished the father well or congratulated him on his acquittal of the charge of armed assault on the lorry driver (see *This Week* 1992). This case and the case of Travis, of course, are very different; but the letters of support suggest that both cases are concerned with a fundamental area of everyday life where political struggle must take place. As we have discussed, the New Right in America sought to make political capital in the seventies out of grass roots concern with the institution of the family. Those threats were centred around issues to do with changing sexual mores which had increased both divorce and abortion rates and had ascribed new social roles to the sexes. Now this is not to say that Travis Bickle is necessarily a New Right politician, nor that he somehow embodies the New Right position on family values; however, the narrative of his catharsis operates on precisely the terrain of political struggle which was delineated as an area of interest by the broad coalition of pressure groups in the West which came to be known as the New Right. As the *Conservative Digest* put it in 1979,

The New Right is looking for issues that people care about, and social issues, at least for the present, fit that bill (quoted in Weeks 1989 p. 34).

Given the popularity of other revenge texts which operated on this terrain of concern over threats to family life, it would not be too speculative to assume that a reading of *Taxi Driver* in this period could be based on similar premises.

Extra-textual discourses on the film revealed a diversity of readings which have added to the reputation of *Taxi Driver* as a complex text. Not surprisingly, a number of reviews focussed on the character of Travis and the performance of Robert DeNiro.

Pauline Kael declares the film to be

a two character study - Travis vs. New York (Kael 1976).

What is interesting about Kael's observations on Travis, however, are that she sees him both as Everyman and as a lunatic at the same time. Canby makes an identical analysis, showing a desire to delineate Travis as an outsider but repressing it at the last minute in order to show that he is the common man. He writes

'Taxi Driver' is one of the most compelling portraits of a lunatic personality I've ever seen on film (Canby 1976)

but adds

Travis is every paranoid taxi driver you've ever met on your wildest nightmare ride (Canby 1976).

Kael's approach is more explicit but more riven with contradictions; she writes

'Taxi Driver' is the fevered story of an outsider in New York - a man who can't find any point of entry into human society (Kael 1976).

But she also notes that

The exacerbation of his desire for vengeance shows in his numbness, yet part of the horror implicit in this movie is how easily he passes. The anonymity of the city soaks up one more invisible man; he could be legion (Kael 1976).

Whether consciously or not Kael stresses in her review that Travis is, as Betsy calls him in the film when quoting Kris Kristofferson, "a walking contradiction". Yet it is difficult for her to pin down those details that really make Travis the site of social contradictions. Kael asserts that

Travis wants to conform, but he can't find a group pattern to conform to (Kael 1976).

She also notes that this general tone of the movie makes it like

A raw tabloid version of 'Notes from Underground' (Kael 1976).

Yet one of the other major reviewers, Richard Schickel of *Time*, makes almost the opposite evaluation of the film, stating that

The movie has an air of recent discovery, of shocked innocence about the tawdry quality of city life that is gratingly naive (Schickel 1976).

For Schickel, the film does not contain any of the existential complexities of Dostoevsky's novel; his and Kael's assessments are startlingly at odds and are just two examples of contradictory views among the contemporary reviewers. One nodal point for the discussion of Travis which might have blunted the complexity which Kael nevertheless finds in the movie is the topic of assassination. As we discussed in the last chapter, the assassinations of the 1960s provided fertile ground for the cultivation of paranoid theories in fiction. In assessments of *Taxi Driver*, the paranoia associated with assassination is taken to be more localized and more prosaic. The *National Observer* review declared that

Taxi Driver (Columbia) is about crazy people who commit murder. The movie's thematic antecedents are the exploits of Charles Whitman, Charles Starkweather, Arthur Bremer, or your own, less publicized, local sniper (Heininger 1976).

One of the reasons for Travis' psychological affinity with real-life assassins is signalled in the narrative; Schickel notes in parentheses that

(Travis keeps a diary, just as Arthur Bremer did before he shot George Wallace) (Schickel 1976; see also Dempsey 1976 p. 37 and Patterson and Farber 1976 p. 27).

The publicity surrounding Bremer's diary probably demonstrated the possibility of narrativizing the life of an assassin and, for Schickel, it is no coincidence that the film reveals the contents of Travis' diary by means of a voice-over narrative. The problem of narrativizing the experience of the assassin is referred to by Canby and incorporated into his reading of Travis as an outsider;

One of the problems may be that would-be Presidential assassins simply weren't very interesting characters, neither in fiction nor in fact. They are different from you or me. Their problems are not ours (Canby 1976).

There is no doubt that, through the 1970s, texts delineated the unbalanced character of the (potential) assassin even if it was made to be part of a wider plot. The organization for recruiting assassins in *The Parallax View*, for instance, clearly required the psychological types which would be revealed by their questionnaire, a kind of rigged

Minnesota Multiphasic Test. A more famous real-life account of assassination, the Warren Commission Report, devoted a significant amount of its conclusion to a discussion of Lee Harvey Oswald's psychological motivations, summarising them in his "deep-rooted resentment of all authority", "his inability to enter into meaningful relationships with people", his "urge to try to find a place in history", his "capacity for violence" and his "avowed commitment to Marxism and communism" (in Scott et al. 1978 p. 74). That this kind of portrait of the assassin was well-known became clearer in the early 1980s when John Hinckley, the assassin who attempted to kill President Reagan, was placed under extensive psychiatric evaluation and revealed that *Taxi Driver* had directly inspired his plans (see Shaw 1981 and 'Jury goes to the pictures' *The Guardian* 24 May 1982). The connection between psychological portraits of assassins and the figure of Travis is put bluntly by Heininger in the *National Observer*:

The film says that there are among us lonely, friendless individuals in monotonous jobs who have no suitable, socially benign outlet for the frustrations of daily life. They don't have kids to play with, don't play tennis, don't go to hockey games. According to *Taxi Driver*, they shoot people We conclude that Travis Bickle is one very weird buckaroo, and the sooner the boys in the white coats catch him the better (Heininger 1976).

This assessment of the film's treatment of psychological issues is not that dissimilar in many ways to that of the filmmakers' own assessment of their finished product (see below). However, such a reading of the narrative is very much based on the idea of an unproblematic understanding of marginalization. Kael's reading implies something far more complicated. Her reference to *Notes from Underground* could, perhaps, have been intended to incorporate the fact that Dostoevsky's narrative of the underground man begins with a first person singular narration and concludes with an ambiguous first person plural one (Dostoevsky 1981 p.1 and p.153). Kael writes,

The fact that we experience Travis' need for an explosion viscerally, and that the explosion itself has the quality of consummation, makes 'Taxi Driver' one of the few truly modern horror films (Kael 1976).

In a very condensed way, Kael is suggesting that the film presents a convergence of both violence and sex; however, it presents these potentially horrific features of the texts not as external threats to the well-being of the protagonists but as internal ones. Although this is a psychological reading of the film, it does tend toward the ascription

of a social meaning to Travis' exploits: for Kael, the horror lies in the fact that not only is Travis capable of this explosion of violence and sex but so are the other protagonists and also the readers of the text. This is Kael's way of expressing the contradictory internality and externality that we have seen manifested in the other texts in this chapter. Clearly, the outsider theme for her cannot be forever contained, especially given that the outsider in so many contemporary films can be said to provide a new orthodoxy. The outsider is therefore never effectively eradicated or even marginalized. Before we go on to comment on the trajectory of these reviews in their concentration on the figure of the outsider, let us consider a few more specific high-profile contemporary assessments of the film.

In what was probably the most widely noticed contemporary comment on *Taxi Driver* by its makers, Paul Schrader attempted to emphasize aspects of the character of Travis Bickle. In an interview, Schrader stated

You see that Travis is not to be tolerated. He should be killed.

For instance, the movie is riddled with suggestions of racism. It runs all the way through. But so far the only person to be disturbed by it was someone at The Amsterdam News. He called me up and said, 'Hey, there's something wrong with that movie of yours'. I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'Well isn't this guy something of a racist?' I said, 'You're damn right he is, and that's not the only thing wrong with him' (quoted in Arnold 1976a B1).

This is quite a strong statement. Clearly, Schrader has very little love for his character and virtually intended his script to be some kind of 'exposé'. One possible reason for this is the projected reaction of liberals to the film and it is clear that his intent was misinterpreted in this context. Rubenstein, for instance, in *Cineaste*, concludes that Travis is

an inarticulate Puritan thrown into a flesh market (1976 p. 35)

and adds that Schrader and Scorsese were obsessed with sin and redemption (p. 35).

Dempsey, in *Film Quarterly*, begs to differ, but still produces an assessment which misinterprets Schrader's intent, saying that the final scene is

like the shark attacks in *Jaws*, it provides a purely physical jolt and obtains nothing more than a reflex reaction . . . violence here is less redemptive than laxative (Dempsey 1976 p. 41).

This is actually not that far from the point that Patterson and Farber make in *Film*

Comment:

With its nearly abstract shots of the cab slowly moving like the JAWS shark through liquidy [sic] situations, the use of lush-soft, often reddish lighting for the effect of New York street jungle, and a floating camera style that finds funny angles of perception, the movie is filled with a spooky, exploratory beat (Patterson and Farber 1976 p. 26).

However, what all of these reviews have in common is a reading of the film which rests on the notion that the film celebrates or at least supports the actions of its central character. That Schrader and Scorsese intended a certain reading of the film is immaterial in this context; diverse readings existed and even the comments of the filmmakers in national newspapers would not necessarily reach everybody who saw the film, or if they did, necessarily influence them. Critics in film magazines constructed their own knowing readings of the film in any case; despite the strangeness of the out-of-synch climax Dempsey writes

During this scene *Taxi Driver* reduces itself almost to the squalid level of *Death Wish*, the kind of adrenalin-pumping, unprincipled revenge melodrama which will do anything to arouse its audience (1976 p. 41).

Patterson and Farber believe that Travis is definitely meant to be a reasonably straightforward cinematic hero in a morally dubious film:

its immoral posture on the subject of blacks, male supremacy, guns, women subverts believability at every moment in favor of the crucial decal image that floats around the world - a lean, long-legged loner in cowboy boots who strides down the center of a city street, knowing he cuts a striking figure (1976 p. 30).

These charges against the film are obviously quite serious, yet none of the critics pause to ask why the film might depict racist attitudes, for instance. None really pay any attention to possible motivations for Travis' attitudes. In connection with this it is very telling that reviewer references to Vietnam are either non-existent or oblique: Kael (1976), for instance, mentions that Travis is an ex-Marine, and although his youth will suggest that he is a Vietnam veteran she does not pursue the issue; similarly, Arnold (1976a) simply considers Travis' veteran status to be incidental when he writes of him as

a young, isolated, sexually repressed ex-GI (Arnold 1976a).

Both the reviews and the comments of the filmmakers could be said to avoid - or even repress - the Vietnam issue. If one wished to explore racism, for instance, it would be crucial in this context to examine the Vietnam veteran experience. Knightley suggests how the war might have contributed to specific racial attitudes among veterans:

All governments realise that to wage war successfully their troops must learn to dehumanise the enemy. The simplest way to achieve this is to inflame nationalistic or racist feelings, or both. Thus, American racism, which had first been aroused on a national scale in the Second World War and then revived in Korea, reached a peak in Vietnam. The enemy was physically indistinguishable from the ally. Racist hate directed at Charlie Cong the enemy made no provision for exempting those Vietnamese that the United States had intervened to save. In motivating the GI to fight by appealing to his racist feelings, the United States military discovered that it had liberated an emotion over which it was to lose control. Sartre has written that American racism - anti-Negro, anti-Mexican, anti-Asian - 'is a fundamental fact that goes very deep and which existed, potentially, or in fact, long before the Vietnam war'.

In Vietnam, racism became a patriotic virtue. *All* Vietnamese became 'dinks', 'slopes', 'slants', or 'gooks', and the only good one was a dead one. So the Americans killed them when it was clear that they were Vietcong And they killed them when it was clear they were not Vietcong . . . (Knightley 1975 pp. 386-387).

Without commenting further on these issues, we can posit the idea that reviews left out mention of certain crucial features of contemporary America which the narrative treats.

As a whole, the reviews manifest a diversity of readings but, as we have implied, it is possible to arrange these readings around an understanding of the status of the outsider. Reviews in film magazines tended to be critical about attitudes depicted in the movie and were worried that audience would find something admirable in the acts of the protagonists as a result of the seduction of the narrative. The filmmakers' comments suggested that they hoped audiences would see that Travis was not to be admired. The discussion of the status of the outsider that ensued in many reviews occasionally indicated that there was something about Travis' externality which makes him irredeemably a figure of internality, both as a psychological figure and a social one. Whether contemporary audiences did overwhelmingly read Travis as a character representing various traits which were found to be creditable can never really be ascertained. Despite the confusion among reviewers and the valorized status that gradually accrued to the film, however, the film was very popular and was one of Columbia's chief money makers in 1976 (Finler 1992 p. 120). In this it resembled the

other films that we have discussed in this chapter. We can suggest that there are possible grounds for a reading of the film in terms of its popularity in common with other contemporary texts of the revenge genre and its treading of a similar social terrain in its narrative. *Taxi Driver*, through the figure of Travis, reveals a complex of contradictions in contemporary American life, some of which stem from a putative liberal consensus. Such a reading of the text would be quite heavily influenced by the associated themes which are provoked by the contradictions embodied in the figure of the Vietnam veteran in the period. That reviewers played down the Vietnam angle might indicate that some of the contradictions of the American social formation that the war had made manifest, could still not be stated and worked through. However, what the film and reviewers' readings of it does seem to make clear in this context is that the liberal consensus and the new sexual/social mores which characterized it were not without their problems. Travis Bickle therefore operates precisely in this realm which New Right campaigners were beginning to find was an area of public concern and potential political struggle. The theme of externality can be very much a political one in this way; even Paul Schrader suggests - perhaps unintentionally - that this is the case when he says

We show you the underside of the characters that were viewed superficially in 'Dog Day Afternoon' and 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' (quoted in Arnold 1976a B1).

In Chapter 3, we stated that the family and sexual mores represented a terrain of political struggle in the seventies and that support for liberal abortion and divorce laws coexisted with concerns over the family. What I would suggest is that a contemporary reading of *Taxi Driver* would be very likely to be made within this formation. That is not to say that Travis' actions need necessarily be cast as an imaginary resolution to social problems; neither do his actions necessarily have an automatic right-wing complexion, tying in with racism and militarism, for instance. It must be remembered that the narrative of the film shows Travis, after the violent climax, presumably devoid of his racism at the Bellmore Cafeteria, with his black colleague, Charlie T, no longer tongue-tied, and able to deal with Betsy in a mature way; the narrative of the screenplay

has him tell Andy that he hated the war (see above). What it does mean is that a contemporary reading of the film could be more concerned with how a fundamental social issue is treated rather than whether it can necessarily be made to bear an affinity with other political attitudes.

Conclusion: *The Exterminator* and Generic Innovation

In order to address the issue of generic innovation in the context of the revenge narrative we will very briefly comment on a film which was released in 1980, just on the edge of our broadly defined period of study. *The Exterminator*, which was written and directed by James Glickenhaus, was a revenge text which contained many features in common with those that we have discussed in this chapter. At the beginning of the film, the narrative introduces John Eastland (Robert Ginty) and Michael Jefferson (Steve James), two American soldiers who get captured by the Viet Cong. As their captors start to interrogate Eastland, Jefferson breaks free, grabs a machine-gun and shoots all the Viet Cong in sight. The scene changes to the Bronx, New York where, some time later, Eastland and Jefferson are working for neighbouring freight depots. A white/Puerto Rican gang breaks in to a depot one afternoon and, in the process of stealing a cargo of beer, assaults Eastland. Once more, Jefferson arrives at the right time and after the bearded gang leader calls him a "nigger" he and Eastland are able to overcome them. Not long after this, however, Jefferson is in a nearby park and the same gang members attack him, breaking his neck. Eastland comforts Jefferson's wife and vows to avenge his friend who is now permanently paralysed in a hospital bed. The next scene is in a disused warehouse where Eastland has bound a member of the gang - called "the Ghetto Ghouls" - in exactly the way he was bound by the Viet Cong. He brandishes a blowtorch in order to intimidate the youth into telling him where the gang hangs out. Having got this information he goes to the Ghouls' flat and shoots one of them but keeps the leader alive yet unconscious; he drags both to a disused basement

and ties them down and leaves. Police investigating the site in the next scene report that the gang leader, although still alive, has had half of his face eaten off by a rat.

The rest of the film is concerned with Eastland's revenge on the gang and other, associated villains. One of these is the Mafia boss who runs the freight trade in New York, Gino Pontivini (Dick Boccelli). In order to extort the money from him that Eastland believes he has extorted from the workforce over the years and pass it on to Jefferson's family, Eastland cunningly drugs and kidnaps Pontivini, takes him to the warehouse and chains him over an industrial meat mincer until he tells Eastland where in his house he keeps his safe. With this knowledge, Eastland leaves Pontivini suspended while he goes to rob his safe; when Eastland is attacked by Pontivini's doberman which the Mafioso has failed to tell Eastland he owns, Eastland returns and lowers Pontivini into the mincer. Meanwhile a police inspector, James Dalton (Christopher George) is on Eastland's trail; he is worried that the city is in the grip of either a psychopathic killer or a vigilante after Eastland has sent him a letter complaining of the crime wave in New York, confessing to the murders he has committed but signing himself "The Exterminator". With their eyes on both Dalton and Eastland are two anonymous politicians who represent the present administration. They are both worried that the Exterminator has so much public support and that his capture will reveal a web of political corruption. They therefore enlist the CIA to assassinate Eastland. Towards the centre of the narrative, Eastland's revenge is made potentially more poignant because, at the request of Jefferson, he switches off the latter's life support machine and leaves him to die. Eventually, as Dalton's investigation draws near to Eastland and they meet, with both beginning to express their mutual sympathy, Dalton is shot twice and killed by a sniper. Eastland jumps from the moored ship that has been their meeting place and a blast of fire from the sniper is heard. The last camera shot of the film is a long one which shows Eastland being washed ashore and removing his combat jacket to reveal that he has taken the precaution of wearing what is either a life-jacket, or a bullet-proof vest.

The Exterminator incorporates virtually all the major features of the texts we have discussed in this chapter. Eastland is a Vietnam veteran who has seen a great deal of combat; his crusade is precipitated by the infestation of New York City with crime that violates the sanctity of his best friend's family; he takes revenge on those directly responsible for his friend's paralysis and eventual death, and then broadens that revenge. He is sickened when he travels through areas of New York where sex is sold; he takes pity on a young prostitute who has been burned and when he finds that the perpetrator of the burns was a customer at a 'chicken' parlour (a brothel catering for sex with minors) he visits the place and frees a teenage boy who has been bound and tortured with a soldering iron by a customer who Eastland shoots dead (who it is later revealed is a New Jersey senator); then he ties up the owner of the place, pours petrol over him and sets the room alight. Eastland also wears a combat jacket throughout the second part of the film underneath which he keeps what looks like a .44 magnum; to the characters that he has bound and who he leaves in the warehouse in order to go on a quest, he sardonically utters the words that are reproduced on the poster for the film:

If you're lying,
I'll be back ...

(Publicity Brochure for *The Exterminator* Rebel Films 1980 p. 1).

Virtually all the syntactic elements of the revenge texts, then, are to be found in *The Exterminator*. The film has echoes of all the texts we have discussed, be they the young prostitute who is 'avenged' (*Taxi Driver*), the basically sympathetic pursuing cop (the film of *Death Wish*), the targetting of the Mafia (*The Executioner* series) or the incorporation of the Vietnam experience, to name but a few. The film also dealt with the paranoia that results from unseen political machinations. Semantically it has very similar feel to *Death Wish* in terms of its use of locations in New York, the garb of its street aggressors, the economy and 'realism' of the violence it depicts, the grainy quality of the film and the distant soundtrack. However, *The Exterminator* was nowhere near as commercially successful as any of the texts that we have discussed in

this chapter. It did, admittedly gross enough money to generate a sequel - *The Exterminator II* (1984) - but both films were made on very low budgets (Publicity Brochure for *The Exterminator* Rebel Films 1980 p. 3).

Now, it would be folly to attempt to speculate on why the film was not as large a commercial success as some of the texts which can be considered its forebears but there are some indications here for the topic of generic innovation. *The Exterminator* preceded the period - as we discussed above - in which Vietnam veterans became more feasible characters in fiction by a few years. It also preceded by a number of years what could be said to be a genre based on almost comic-book avengers which spawned a number of commercially successful films. These included films based around such stars as Dolph Lundgren, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Sylvester Stallone (especially *Cobra* (1986) but also *Rambo* and *Rambo III*), and Arnold Schwarzenegger.¹⁰ The most famous of the last of these would be *The Terminator* (1984) which, although Schwarzenegger character is that of a villainous android, was popular enough to warrant his return as a hero in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). The links between *The Exterminator* and *The Terminator* can be seen in the sardonic remarks that have become almost the trade mark of Schwarzenegger's ruthless heroes; in *The Terminator* he tells a desk sergeant in a police station

I'll be back.

Moments later he drives a car through the front of the building. The similarity between this and "If you're lying, I'll be back . . ." is clear. Both films have this sardonic aspect in common with the later development of the *Dirty Harry* and *Death Wish* series.

Moreover, the publicity for *The Exterminator*, such as the poster, shows a muscly man in a sleeveless jerkin wearing a crash helmet and aiming a rifle low with one hand: this is almost identical to the iconography that accompanies such films as *Cobra*. While *The Exterminator* can be judged to be too early to enjoy the success of the genre involving

¹⁰ More problematically, *Robocop* (1987) and *Robocop II* (1990) might be included in this genre.

Schwarzenegger et al., it can also be said to be too late to fall into the popular revenge genre we have discussed in this chapter. All the reviews of the film were very brief and all concentrated on what was seen as excessively brutal violence, a constituent of the narrative that was considered to be what defined it and what also characterized a great deal of contemporary Hollywood output.

What can be said about *The Exterminator* as a revenge narrative is that it was arranged as a text to be read in a particular reading formation which was partly made up by the reactions of reviewers to contemporary 'violent' films such as *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *Dressed to Kill* (1980). More important than this, perhaps, is that it appeared at a time when the subject of revenge did not have the same pristine quality that it did for the early texts. This must not be confused with the idea that the theme of revenge in the thriller had suddenly gone stale after about 1977. In fact, revenge in the thriller had never been new: in the American thriller alone, revenge has dominated texts as diverse in content and time as William McGivern's *The Big Heat* (1987; originally 1953 - filmed [1953]); William McGivern's *Rogue Cop* (1957; originally 1955 - filmed [1955]) John D. MacDonald's *The Executioners* (1967; originally 1957) (filmed as *Cape Fear* in 1961 and 1992); Richard Stark's *Point Blank* (1962) (filmed in 1967) and Sol Yurick's *Fertig* (1968; originally 1966). If revenge has had such a permanent place in the American thriller it is difficult to see how a generic innovation in the seventies resulted in the development of a particular kind of thriller based on narrative features that can be 'objectively' observed. What is important is not so much a change in the 'structure' of the revenge thriller in the 1970s as how the revenge narrative was read. In a mythical 'objective' reading it is probable that the same syntactic features could be generally shown to characterize say, *The Big Heat* and *Death Wish*. However, the syntactic dimension of a genre text does not really exist in isolation; instead, it is inseparable from a semantic dimension. The consequences of this become clear when we briefly mention the theme of revenge in the context of a text outside the thriller genre. In the film *Batman Returns* (1992), two characters, Penguin (Danny DeVito) and Cat Woman

(Michelle Pfeiffer), are motivated primarily by a revenge that is both personal (against individuals who have hurt them), and social (against the institutions in Gotham City that those individuals might represent). Considered 'syntactically', the theme of revenge in *Batman Returns* is almost identical to that in the revenge texts we have discussed in this chapter. However, the film's iconography or semantic dimension activates a whole set of expectations for the audience which delineate it as a text of fantasy rather than a thriller and therefore to be read in reference to a specific 'fantastic' verisimilitude as opposed to the ideological verisimilitude of the thriller. This hopefully illustrates the process at work in the revenge text of the seventies; if we extend this a little, we can say that not only will generic expectations be activated by the semantic dimension of these texts but, because of the thriller's specific ideological verisimilitude, it will open up a series of expectations to do with the depiction of the real world.

The most prominent aspect of the real world that the revenge texts can be said to depict is a state of decay and popular dissatisfaction that results from it. As we have seen, revenge in these texts entails taking action in a world where changed social mores have made liberal courses of action untenable. Chief among these, because it is common to thrillers, is crime: the bureaucratic measures that are needed to combat crime in a modern social formation are not prone to narrativization; the kind of direct action that thrillers depict, therefore, supplants the procedures which are more proper to a liberal society. Revenge texts can be said to depict a crisis in contemporary American society: liberal ideas that have brought about changes in criminal law as well as laws regulating sexual matters and issues to do with the family have created a world of changed social mores in these texts. Yet this liberal consensus has brought with it its own inconsistencies, most important of which are seen to be rising crime rates and threats to the fundamental forms of social organization to which citizens are inextricably attached, such as the family. One further aspect of this liberal consensus is that it attempts to marginalize individuals: such individuals have been nurtured by a social system that, in many cases, predated changing social mores; while they were risking their lives in

Vietnam on behalf of that social system, the system was changing; on return from the war they were rejected from the new consensus while the old seemed dead. Through their rejection by this new 'consensus', these individuals - Vietnam veterans - could be said to represent the new system's contradictions which are based on a purported striving for freedom and openness while denying it to some members of the social formation.¹¹ That Vietnam veterans were made up of what was part of the nation's youth in the sixties only served to underline the contradictory status of what we have called 'internality' in seventies America. The struggle for hegemony on a liberal battleground which is depicted in the texts is more explicitly signalled in the real world by the actions of the New Right. However, in the texts, the objects of revenge seem far less instrumental than the areas demarcated for political struggle in the real world. We have therefore posited that the line of association from the event which precipitates revenge resembles the psychological process called displacement, but that this displacement involves a heavy social investment.

What we will suggest is that the struggle for hegemony that specifically characterises issues to do with the liberal consensus in the seventies, is reproduced in the texts of revenge not in a straightforward way but in a way which involves offering a terrain of investment for the reader. In one sense, this terrain is created by the specific displacements of protagonists in the narrative. In a more rigorous sense, however, this terrain is a result of the always already filled potential indeterminacies of the text's

¹¹ Having said this, it is not necessarily the case that the presence of Vietnam veterans in texts transforms those texts into revenge narratives. Those prominent texts which deal with veterans in the seventies are not always manifestly revenge thrillers. However, they all seem to incorporate a veteran's revenge in some way: the actions of Converse against the drug smugglers and organized crime in Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers* (1976; originally 1974 - later filmed as *Who'll Stop the Rain?* [1978]) could be considered an act of revenge; so too could the actions of the veteran in *Coming Home* (1978) who, wheelchair bound, chains himself to a gate in protest against the war at the film's denouement and the veteran in *Tracks* (1977), who, at the climax of the film, emerges from his friend's grave wearing a helmet, carrying a rifle and screaming. Newton Thornburg's *Cutter and Bone* (1988; originally 1976 - later filmed as *Cutter's Way* [1981]) features a veteran called Alex Cutter who uncovers a grand murder conspiracy and cover-up involving a monopolistic businessman called J.J. Wolfe. The narrative could easily have fitted in to a discussion of paranoia in Chapter 9 or revenge in Chapter 10 of this thesis and demonstrates the difficulties entailed in making taxonomic generic categories hold water (see Appendix 1).

existence in a specific reading formation. The generic innovation that constitutes most of the texts in this chapter - and which does not seem to have, in terms of the extra-textual cues, constituted *The Exterminator* in the same way - seems to be based on a specific convergence of a powerful emergent concern with crime and threats to the family in the real world, and semantic changes in the revenge thriller which offer its contents as a terrain to be socially invested. Extra-textual discourse about the revenge text often belied a prescriptive liberal and intellectual admonishment of them while popular response seems to have been far more favourable. Grass roots feeling, then, clearly gave a different meaning to these texts than was generally prescribed by reviews. However, the extra-textual discourses cannot automatically be considered redundant. As we have seen, the concerns of the reviews, despite their ultimate lack of authority in contemporary readings of texts, contributed to the specific organization of revenge texts as texts to be read; that is to say, the area of dispute over externality/internality in the narrative - the area in which social investments probably took place - was partly constructed by extra-textual discourses. Generic innovation in the revenge narrative, then, results from a complex convergence of forces in the contemporary readings of the texts.

Conclusion

I'm against the eighties/ I don't care what you say/
Denim, 'I'm Against the Eighties' (1992)

'Is there any end to this shit? Does anything ever change in this racket?'

'Hey Foss', the prosecutor said, taking Clark by the arm, 'of course it changes. Don't take it so hard. Some of us die, the rest of us get older, new guys come along, old guys disappear. It changes every day'.

'It's hard to notice, though', Clark said.

'It is', the prosecutor said, 'it certainly is' (Higgins 1973 p. 159)

If we had to ruthlessly summarise the preceding chapters we could do worse than suggest that they constituted a direct challenge to a passage to be found in Jerry Palmer's book on the 'genesis and structure' of the thriller. On the political complexion of thrills in the genre Palmer writes

I once met a man who was writing a thriller in which the villain was a multinational corporation and the hero a Trotskyite intellectual. I doubt if it has been published, but that isn't to say it couldn't be: if the climate of political opinion shifted sufficiently leftwards, it would be perfectly possible. In any event, this apparently trivial fact points to something fundamental: the basic apparatus of the thriller can accommodate more or less any set of political beliefs, precisely because they constitute only a superficial layer (1978 p. 67).

This, in a nutshell, is the conception of the genre with which we take issue. In the mid-eighties, not long after the writing of the present thesis began, a series of thrillers were published by the left-wing press, Pluto. These purported to be 'politically correct', avoiding sexism, militarism, jingoism and so on, as if these '-isms' were forever integral to thrillers published elsewhere. It is worth noting also that, far from appearing during a leftward swing of general political opinion, these novels were published while Britain was in the throes of Thatcherism. Clearly, fictional production and its supposed political complexion operate in ways which are more mysterious than mechanistic theories will allow. What links these thrillers to our criticism of Palmer's statement, however, is that their political correctness was largely redundant and there are clear reasons for this.

Although it is manifested in vastly different ways, Palmer's book and Pluto's publications betray the belief that, to a greater or lesser degree, thrillers coerce and cajole readers into adopting political attitudes. Palmer's consideration of the 'genesis' of the thriller, which he locates in the concomitant establishment of certain structures of industrial capitalism, mean that, for him, the thriller is eternally a capitalist vessel, accommodating and containing potentially subversive content. This is captured in his statement above on the superficiality of the layer represented by, for example, a Trotskyite content. For Palmer, the thrills yielded by the structure of thrillers can characterize the genre for the reader, while the sociologist finds in them the incarnation of an ideology of competitive capitalist individualism; but, Palmer adds

objectively they are both, equally and simultaneously (1978 p. 66 [emphasis added]).

This last statement reveals the foundation upon which Palmer's analysis rests and also delineates the character of our departure from his early work. Since Palmer's book first appeared there has been a great deal of work in cultural studies devoted to the role of the reader in *creating* fictional texts. We have discussed some of this in the preceding chapters and demonstrated its consequences for understanding genre. What is of paramount importance is that texts are no longer regarded as mechanisms for the interpellation of readers but as the grounds for an interaction. In this way it can be argued that readers take an active part in the process of textuality and that texts do not have meanings as such which are intrinsic to them; rather they exist as empirical entities whose meanings may be imputed to them by readers in a variety of ways as a result of a variety of complex determinants. This consideration is far reaching: it suggests, for example, that 'left-wing' thrillers are not necessarily read according to putative political intentions; it also suggests that thrillers of a different political complexion are also not read in certain politically prescribed ways.

The ways in which thrillers might have been read in the 1970s has been the concern of this thesis. We have pursued an argument in which thrillers cannot be demonstrated to actually be something 'objectively'; rather, the changing nature of generic texts can only be apprehended in *readings* of them. Thus far we have made a preliminary consideration of the possible determinants of such readings as they might exist in the 1970s and it is clear that such an approach immediately problematizes previous formulations regarding the relationship between genre, history and generic innovation. Those static formulations of genre that we encountered in Chapter 1 had to be rejected in favour of a more dynamic model which analysed the flexibility and adaptability of genre through periods of social change. This meant that not only the existing corpus of the thriller genre had to be reconsidered in terms of its adaptability over time but also that the entire concept of constructing a generic corpus had to be rethought. The relation of thrillers (or any other kind of text) to history cannot simply be discerned by singling out various texts on the

basis of some putative criteria of excellent craftsmanship concocted in the present. This kind of method of constructing a corpus entails rejecting certain texts which might have had an important role to play in contemporary assessments of the genre by readers; moreover, these texts may also have provided the frame of reference within which a reading of the texts chosen for the corpus took place. It is crucial to analyse this feature of the history of a given genre in order to understand part of the frame of reference for reading generic texts.

More important than this, however, is the way that the historical period in which a generic text appears is mediated for understanding by the reading public of the genre. The availability of historical events through specifically textual media led us to certain conclusions: in the 1970s, we have argued, a struggle for hegemony took place in the realm of meaning assignation. That is to say, how events were to be decoded was determined by their characterization in a *range* of texts. These texts, in turn, were always already lent a general measure of validity in their presentation of history as a result of their designation as non-fictional discourses. Moreover, there were certain points at which these non-fictional discourses overlapped with fictional generic texts and these were found to be crucial in the assessment of a genre as it was read in the contemporary period. Previous studies of generic and other fictional texts have posited two distinct realms in which various elements are operative in different modes: these are the realms of 'narrative' and 'ideology'. Although they are very old and now palpably dated, Terry Eagleton's formulations in this area have been influential. In *Criticism and Ideology* (1978; originally 1976), he assembles categories for a materialist criticism which include 'General Mode of Production', 'Literary Mode of Production', 'General Ideology', 'Authorial Ideology', 'Aesthetic Ideology' and 'Text'(pp. 44 ff). A text, for Eagleton, is therefore

the product of a specific overdetermined conjuncture of these elements or formations (p. 62).

Although this involves complicated permutations the schema in general is laid out by Eagleton thus:

history -----> ideology -----> literary text (1978 p. 68).

What is most striking about this argument is that the reader is absent. But, perhaps more important than this is the fact that history, ideology and the text are represented as distinct entities; this is a position that can only be maintained by asserting that each of the entities has an eternal 'objective' existence. When the reader enters the equation the possibility of an established unitary meaning of texts vanishes and a range of diverse meanings takes its place. Furthermore, there is nothing intrinsic to the structure of these entities which proves that they have any epistemological precedence over the others. As we have discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 (above) the category which has perhaps the most claim to epistemological primacy - 'history' - is a thoroughly mediated entity; moreover, it is an entity which is mediated in a manner very similar to that of other texts, by means of narrative.

The line that we have pursued in this thesis is based on a radical reorganization of Eagleton's categories. For us, the fact that 'history' is a thoroughly mediated entity does not mean that it is separated off from 'ideology'; the separation between the two is abolished to stress the fact that historical documents constitute what we know about history. Secondly, given that both 'history' and 'the fictional text' are entities which are thoroughly mediated (particularly by narrative), they are theoretically inseparable. This is not to say that they may not be experienced as different, but that difference rests upon how 'history' and the fictional text are designated. The separation of 'narrative' and 'ideology', therefore, implies an objectively observable epistemological primacy on the part of history, whereas a recognition that that primacy relies on a set of changing relations with regard to the designation of discourses allows for a dynamic and flexible understanding of the changing relation between the generic text and the social and historical formations in which it exists. Such an understanding, as we have demonstrated, is absolutely essential for an assessment of a category of texts which are so popular, have survived, have experienced resurgences in the popularity of their sub-genres over time, have depended upon the loyalty and expectations of readers, and which

rely so heavily on a number of changing imperatives in order to exist within their generic category

Rather than positing a complicated arrangement of determinants in the production of fictional texts prior to readers' engagements with them, our assessment of genre has rested on the notion of a reading formation. The notion of reading formation precludes the option of delineating intrinsically different realms of epistemological functioning which can only communicate with each other through filtering or distorting or reflecting barriers which are, in turn, 'objectively' identified for eternity. It also indicates the existence of a realm where various determinants operate to effect a specific production of the text by the reader. When applied to the analysis of generic texts, the concept foregrounds the importance of non-fictional discourses as well as various 'dominant' texts. Within the reading formation of the 1970s thriller we therefore found that such texts were integral to an understanding of the contemporary receptions of the genre. Having redrawn the terms for an analysis of genre it is possible to consider what happens when generic innovation takes place and what characterizes the 1970s American thriller. Firstly, it is no longer tenable to assume that generic innovation is located solely in the text; instead, it must be taken to exist in the specific production of that text by the reader acted upon by determinants in the reading formation. This is not to say that a measure of textual mutation does not occur; rather that, for such mutation to represent any kind of generic innovation for the reader it must do so in accordance with its designation as such by the reading formation. These are the grounds on which we have identified the American thriller of the 1970s as a relatively distinct corpus.

Numerous factors were at work in the reading formation of 1970s America. Even though it is somewhat arbitrary to construct a reading formation around a country, a decade and a genre, as a heuristic device the concept allows us to identify some of these numerous factors. In the contemporary history of the 1970s - that specifically hegemonic configuration of discourses that we have identified - it is clear that conspiracy is high on

the agenda. The reporting of Watergate and Vietnam in the wake of a number of years of political radicalism provided fertile ground for the proliferation of conspiracy narratives which specifically located the source of conspiracies predominantly with either government operatives or agents of the political right. This is of paramount importance if we are to posit the notion of a 1970s thriller; in a very general sense, the reading formation of the period assisted in the creation of a specific body of texts which took a right-wing conspiracy as their theme. However, as we have seen, this is by no means the end of the story as the 1970s thriller and the concomitant reading formation are far more diverse than such a formulation would allow. Also high on the agenda of non-fictional discourses were concerns about rising crime, the family and the difficulty of re-incorporating the Vietnam experience and its physical representatives into American society. These features of the history of the period, as we have seen, also had their purchases on thrillers. In addition to strictly non-fictional features of the historical reading formation, however, there are other factors at work. It could not be ignored that the seventies saw a series of record-breaking fictional texts which received an unprecedented amount of publicity, some of which involved their designation as thrillers. As we have suggested, these texts had the potential to exercise quite an influence on their contemporary and sometimes distant generic relatives. In this way, these blockbusters which, like non-fictional thrillers, were generic texts themselves, can be said to have exerted a significant amount of determining power in the reading formation of the 1970s thriller.

Those sub-genres of the thriller that we have discussed clearly overlap with each other in various places as well as with the other discourses in the reading formation. However, their specificity as it is rendered in a reading of them marks the site of generic innovation. The hard-boiled story, which experienced a renaissance of sorts in the seventies can be shown to represent, in some ways, a quite rigid structure allowing only a limited range of meaning. However, our discussion reveals that this very structure can also be said to be where a profusion of meaning takes place; the function, and indeed the existence, of such

an objective structure is therefore called into question. The hard-boiled story in its seventies guise is usually signalled by extra-textual cues as being updated 'semantically'. We have argued that change in the semantic dimension of a text - or, put another way, the potential of a new set of investments in the semantic dimension - effects a concomitant change in the syntactic dimension as it is invested. The updating of the hard-boiled story is therefore, in some sense, real; it is a generic innovation in that its designation as 'updating' will stimulate a new set of readings of the texts. Moreover, we have found that these new readings are likely to be based around a set of investments derived from contemporary concerns manifested in discourses outside the text. This is also the process that is at work in the crime story. Its incorporation of various narrative strategies concerned with presenting certain 'views' of what is narrated does not necessarily inscribe the reader into a rigid position vis-a-vis the text. Instead, these focalization techniques allow for their own designation as a site of generic innovation and as a place where competing readings might co-exist. One reading of these texts which might enhance their potential innovation, we have suggested, would revolve around the diversity and complexity of criminal activities. If specific focalization techniques were read as somehow 'appropriate' to the rendering of modern crime then it is very likely that the texts which incorporated these would be considered to be generically innovative.

If the case for the understanding of generic innovation that we have laid out is at all correct, then its most significant representative is the paranoid thriller. As we have seen, there is a brand of paranoia which is thought to be specific to the thriller and is tied up with the notion of conspiracy. If one takes conspiracy to be central to the thriller as, for instance, Palmer does, then the paranoid texts do not represent any departure whatsoever from the classic mould already established in the generic corpus. But, as we have attempted to demonstrate, the 1970s paranoid texts are, in their reading, very different from their sub-generic predecessors and descendants. They represent a specific moment rather than an evolutionary point in the thriller's history. In general, we can summarize Chapter 9 by saying that a specific configuration of forces in the reading formation of the

seventies paranoid thriller determined that the sub-genre featured conspiracies that emanated from right-wing sources. Even though one might argue that the fear of conspiracy is fundamentally a 'right-wing' mechanism itself, that it covertly entails the reader adopting right-wing attitudes, these texts were presented as texts to read in such a way that representatives of the government and the establishment in the narratives were not to be trusted. This not only seems like an innovation but also the forging of a new genre which has spawned further texts in the post-Watergate period. Our eschewal of the latter formulation is based on the requirement that regimes of reading must be considered before a text's status can be ascribed. The revenge narratives, which overlap with all the sub-genres we have discussed, also emphasize the importance of attempting to understand regimes of reading. Most salient in this respect is the status of the Vietnam veteran as he might be read in these texts in the seventies. It is very evident that the meaning of the whole Vietnam experience in America has undergone a transformation in the last twenty years, and it is clear that the role of the Vietnam veteran would be read much differently in the 1970s than it would in the mid- to late 1980s. Another area where the revenge texts might be presented as generically innovative is in their depiction of a liberal backlash: although the modes of social action that they depict are by no means new, the fictionalized social world in which they take place is. This semantic element assists in making the syntactic dimension, the resolution of the conspiratorial threat, seem all the more distinctive. Extra-textual cues in the reading formation of these texts were largely concerned with the question of the texts' depiction of the social world and the appropriateness of the social action that takes place in the narratives. This assisted in drawing attention to the importance of the semantic aspects of the narratives and the resultant investment, we have argued, acted to concomitantly transform the syntactic dimension. Revenge was by no means new in the thriller at this time; but the organization of investments in its semantic components was.

All the thrillers that we have discussed represent generic innovation in the general way that we have formulated. Moreover, there are plenty of thrillers of the period that we have

not discussed that also represent generic innovation; but, as we have been at pains to point out throughout this thesis, the breadth of popular fiction is such that analyses of popular genres can never consider their entirety and they can never produce rigid taxonomies. Appendix 1 (below) constitutes a significant testimony of this. Further considerations of the 1970s thriller would almost certainly have to devote a considerable amount of time to police genres, particularly crime series on TV, but also novels by authors such as Joseph Wambaugh and Dorothy Uhnak and films such as *Super Cops* (1974). Another subgenre which would have to be discussed is the black thriller in novels by Donald Goines and B.B. Johnson and films such as *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) and *Shaft* (1971). As these two brief examples show, there is still work to be done on the 1970s American thriller but already there are difficulties of generic classification. Apart from suggesting further sub-genres which would merit study, this thesis also touches on some questions which, although they are not pursued to the full, still merit further research. The most obvious of these is the question of gender. Work on this topic has been carried out in the eighties by the authors contributing to Longhurst (1989) especially Glover and Bromley; however, there is a great deal more which can be studied with regard to relations of gender, narrative dynamics and readers' investments in thrillers. The other area for further research that is not unconnected to questions of gender is the depiction of social roles and social milieu in the thriller, particularly the realms of private and public life. We have occasionally touched on the way investments might be mobilized by the encroachment of the domestic world on that of public life and vice versa. However, the topic is worthy of a more thorough exegesis in the context of a discussion of its general relation to social change rather than in its more specific manifestations as discussed in this thesis. There are other topics which are related to this study of the seventies thriller and which would reward further research but those we have mentioned seem to be the most salient.

What we have demonstrated as a whole in this thesis is the importance of reading relations in the understanding of generic texts and the concept of genre. That meaning

does not reside in the text alone has enabled us to question the concept of genre far more extensively than might have been the case if we had assumed that the generic text experienced transformations and innovations only immanently. What we have found to be important within the text is the concept of the syntactic and semantic dimensions. Throughout this thesis we have stated that these terms cannot be shown to exist independently and that they are overlapping so often that the distinction between them almost seems invalid. Clearly the conceptualising of the semantic and syntactic requires further work in subsequent studies of genre and history, and the means by which these textual dimensions of genre interact in a regime of reading might gradually become clearer. Similarly, our work based on the concept of reading formation has also been of a very preliminary nature. We have argued that the specific complex figuration of relations of reading within which a generic text is enmeshed must be analysed before any theory of generic innovation can proceed. What the work of Fish and Iser has done, for instance, is to reformulate the role of the reader's interaction with the text; however, despite their opposed positions regarding indeterminacy, Fish and Iser are united in their reluctance to actually theorize the realm of determinations that act upon readers in a given situation. The kind of work over the last ten years or so which has been responsible for such studies of readers has been the kind of work on focus groups that we have mentioned briefly in Chapter 1. As far as extending these studies into an attempt to *reconstitute* an *historical* audience there has been very little serious work carried out except that by Bennett, in his own studies and with his collaborator, Woollacott. The lack of work in this area may be related to the concentration of theorists such as Iser and Fish on valorized texts from the literary canon; both have signalled a resistance to consider texts which might be considered, at present, popular fiction and Fish's work on 'interpretive communities' in particular relies on merely an abstract formulation of possible learned reading strategies with regard to canonic texts (see especially Fish 1980 p. 172 ff).

It is understandable that such theorists fight shy of considering popular fiction and the myriad of determinations of a popular text's reading: there are so many factors to be

accounted for that the whole topic is almost a theoretical minefield. This can be seen in the present attempt to theorize the determinants at play with regard to the 1970s thriller audience in America; we have only been able to touch the tip of the iceberg of possible extra-textual cues which are at work. As a result, we have looked mainly at reviews and publicity; to even begin to do justice to the role of extra-textual cues in affecting readings of a text we would have to consider a plethora of discourses from marketing reports on the strategies and results of publicity to everyday gossip. Clearly, the task of reconstituting the historical audience ultimately faces difficulties that it cannot hope to surmount and this thesis has negotiated some of those difficulties by limiting the range of extra-textual cues discussed.

Finally, the question regarding both genre and its conceptualization in terms of a reading formation which this thesis has hopefully raised concerns the general status of fictional texts. If we return to Chapter 1, one of the principles of genre that we discussed is the possibility of its activity as a limiting of polysemy; that is to say, the cues which signal a work as a genre text also signal that it is to be read within certain limitations. We might therefore posit that there are cues that work upon non-genre texts which allow their polysemy free rein or even signal that the text is to be read as though it is polysemous. This would seem to have significant consequences: it must be considered that the means by which texts have been constituted into corpuses - as generic texts, as non-generic texts, as part of a canon - has relied not so much on any intrinsic properties which can be objectively shown to exist, but on regimes of reading. This is not to say that these texts will necessarily be read or experienced as undifferentiated from other texts in this respect; rather, that their reading and the experience of them is governed by features 'outside' the text and 'outside' the reader, and which are at play during the text-reader interaction. The processes of reading a non-genre text with its signalled polysemy would not, in this formulation, be much different from those of reading a genre text. Such a notion would, perhaps, enable us to challenge certain conceptions of 'literariness' and what constitutes the literary canon.

The theory of reading formations has told us a great deal about the relation of the generic text to social change. It has also thrown much light on the power of the concept of genre as it is used both in theory and by consumers of popular fiction, in spite of the difficulties entailed in defining it. The concept of genre does not remain static; it requires constant updating in order for it to be effective. Its flexibility when applied to a range of individual texts also suggests that it can never be conceived as a rigid scientific principle. In addition, it must often be sought on the basis of reports from what might be considered interested parties. Genre is therefore a slippery concept which invites constant reformulation.

In fact, we might even say that genre's efficacy lies precisely in the very fact that it does not exist.

Appendix 1

A Guide to the American Thriller in the 1970s

Introduction

In many ways the bibliography that follows represents a futile and fruitless task. Firstly, it will not be complete: the reasons for this are that it is virtually impossible to collect all the thriller material that might have been available in various formats in the 1970s; and it also entails including or excluding narratives which might be thought to be thrillers. We therefore have both an empirical and an analytical problem of compilation from the outset. Related to the latter is the question of compiling with reference to sub-generic categories. The difficulties entailed by this will become manifest immediately, especially to those with knowledge of the thriller in the period. They will immediately raise the question whether or not I have created the 'correct' generic and sub-generic categories and whether the texts that I have placed under them should be there or not. These facts can be turned to our advantage: the bibliography will serve in this way as a demonstration of the difficulty of characterizing generic texts and what is often the superficiality of the grounds for doing so, and it will demonstrate the breadth of the genre.

More specifically we should say something about the categorization. I have tried to make it as broad as possible, and where appropriate, allow it to correspond to extra-textual discourses and designations of the narratives. Nevertheless there are bound to be difficulties. Where, for example, do we place a novel such as *Shaft* (1970)? In the private eye/hard-boiled section or with black thrillers? Where are we to put a text such as Nicholas Meyer's humorous Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Seven Per Cent Solution*()? These are questions which we have asked before and which must necessarily remain unanswered. For the purposes of this guide, certain decisions have been made: *The Seven Per Cent Solution* has been placed in the 'Miscellaneous' section while *Shaft* so evidently belongs to the 'blaxploitation' texts that I have put it into the 'Black Thrillers' category. In general, the placing of texts has been based on an understanding of the way they may have been presented to be read in the period. If such texts are found to be in the 'wrong' section then it is a testimony to the difficulty of making strict taxonomies stick.

Printed texts - usually novels, but sometimes stories - I have listed reasonably conventionally by author surname. As we discussed in Chapter 1, author's names are often a nodal point for the arrangement of reader investments. On this occasion I have not given full bibliographical details because, as is often the case, these thrillers can be found in a number of editions. Films in this guide have been listed chronologically by month and year of their release in the United States. Television thriller series which can be identified by sub-genre will be included in this bibliography. In general, we will limit these to texts which received their first airing on network TV in the seventies rather than long running shows from other decades. I have listed them alphabetically by name rather than by chronological order, followed by year of first broadcast; this enables the reader to find a given series in sections such as 'Police' which are very long. I have assumed that the priority of the reader is to find the TV series and then check when it was first broadcast. For further details in this area the indispensable source is Martindale (1991).

One thing we should make clear at the outset is that the category of blockbusters does not seem to be necessary in this section. The reasons for this are obvious: it would be a relatively small section and the texts in this category have already been discussed within the body of the thesis. I have put the relevant texts into sub-generic categories where applicable e.g. *The Poseidon Adventure* in 'Disaster'. Nevertheless, for the record, we will offer a recap on the blockbuster texts of the decade including non-thrillers.

Print

1. Puzo, Mario. *The Godfather* (1969); 2. Blatty, William Peter. *The Exorcist* (1971); 3. Bach, Richard. *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* (1970); 4. Segal, Erich. *Love Story* (1970); 5. Benchley, Peter. *Jaws* (1974); 6. McCullough, Colleen. *The Thorn Birds* (1977); 7. Shaw, Irwin. *Rich Man, Poor Man* (1970); 8. Sheldon, Sidney. *The Other Side of Midnight* (1973); 9. Michener, James. *Centennial* (1974); 10. Jong, Erica. *Fear of Flying* (1973) (Sutherland 1981 p. 30).

Film

1. *Star Wars* (1977) ; 2. *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980); 3. *Jaws* (1975); 4. *Grease* (1978); 5. *The Exorcist* (1973); 6. *The Godfather* (1972); 7. *Superman - The Movie* (1978); 8. *The Sting* (1973); 9. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977); 10. *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) (Finler 1992 p. 479).

THE NON-FICTION THRILLER

Print

Armes, Jay J. and Nolan, Frederick 1976. *Jay J. Armes Investigator*

Ashman, Charles 1975. *The CIA-Mafia Link*
(*Serpico* style story of police graft)

Becker, Sidney 1975. *Law Enforcement Inc.*

Behn, Noel 1977. *The Big Stick-up at Brink's*

Bugliosi, Vincent with Gentry, Curt 1975. *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders*

Copeland, Miles 1978. *The Real Spy World*

Daley, Robert 1978. *Prince of the City*

David, Heather 1971. *Operation: Rescue*

David, Jay 1980. *The Scarsdale Murder*

Epstein, Edward J. 1978. *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald*

Erdstein, Erich with Bean, Barbara 1977. *Inside the Fourth Reich*

Fawkes, Sandy 1977. *Killing Time: Journey into Nightmare*

Greenberg, Dave 1975. *The Super Cops Play It to a Bust*

Grogan, Emmett 1972. *Ringolevio: A Life Played for Keeps*

Hohimer, Frank 1975. *The Home Invaders* (a.k.a. *Violent Streets*, a.k.a. *Thief*)

Hunt, E. Howard 1974. *Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent*

Hynd, Alan 1970. *The Confidence Game: Kings of the Con*

- Lindsay, Robert 1979. *The Falcon and the Snowman*
- Maas, Peter 1970. *The Valachi Papers*.
- Maas, Peter 1973. *Serpico*
- Maas, Peter 1975. *King of the Gypsies*
- Marchetti, Victor and Marks, John 1974. *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*
- Moore, Robin et al. 1977. *The Wasington Connection*
- Pileggi, Nicholas 1976. *Blye, Private Eye*
- Rather, Dan and Gates, Gary Paul 1975. *The Palace Guard* Rev. edn.
- Roosevelt, Kermit 1979. *Countercoup: The Struggle for Control of Iran*
- Siegel, Micki 1980. *Cops and Women*
- Singer, Kurt 1980. *I Spied and Survived*
- Steven, Stewart 1974. *Operation Splinter Factor*
- Stevenson, William and Dan, Uri 1976. *90 Minutes at Entebbe*
- Talese, Gay 1971. *Honor thy Father*
- Teresa, Vincent with Rennen, Thomas C. 1973. *My Life in the Mafia*
- Whittlemore, L.H. 1973. *The Super Cops: The true story of the cops known as Batman and Robin*
- Woodward, Bob and Bernstein, Carl 1974. *All the President's Men*
- Woodward, Bob and Bernstein, Carl 1976. *The Final Days*

Film

- The Valachi Papers* (October 1972)
(Based on the Peter Maas book, starring Charles Bronson)
- Serpico* (December 1973)
- Attica* (March 1974)
- The Super Cops* (March 1974)
- Breakout* (May 1975)
- Dog Day Afternoon* (August 1975)
- All the President's Men* (March 1976)
- The Brink's Job* (December 1978)

King of the Gypsies (December 1978)
(Based on Peter Maas' book)

The Hunter (July 1980)
(bio-pic about bounty hunter Ralph Thorson)

TV

Toma (1973)
(‘Factual’ stories from the career of a New Jersey undercover cop)

THE HARD-BOILED/ PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORY

Print

Bergman, Andrew 1974. *The Big Kiss-Off of 1944*

Bergman, Andrew 1975. *Hollywood & Levine*

Block, Lawrence 1974. *Five Little Rich Girls*

Block, Lawrence 1975. *The Topless Tulip Caper*

Block, Lawrence 1976. *Time to Murder and Create*

Block, Lawrence 1978. *The Burglar in the Closet*

Constantine, K.C. 1973. *The Man Who Liked to Look at Himself*

Coxe, George Harmon 1971. *Fenner*

Crumley, James 1978. *The Last Good Kiss*

Feiffer, Jules 1977. *Ackroyd*

Franklin, Eugene 1972. *The Money Murders*

Friedman, Bruce Jay 1970. *The Dick*

Gores, Joseph N. 1972. *Dead Skip*

Gores, Joseph N. 1974. *Interface*

Gores, Joseph N. 1975. *Hammett*

Halliday, Brett 1971. *Count Backwards to Zero*

Hansen, Joseph 1970. *Fadeout*

Hansen, Joseph 1973. *Death Claims*

Hansen, Joseph 1975. *Troublemaker*

Hansen, Joseph 1978. *The Man Everybody Was Afraid Of*

Hansen, Joseph 1979. *Skinflick*

Hjortsberg, William 1978. *Falling Angel*

Lewin, Michael Z. 1971. *Ask the Right Question*

Lewin, Michael Z. 1973. *The Way we Die Now*

Lewin, Michael Z. 1974. *The Enemies Within*

Lewin, Michael Z. 1978. *The Silent Salesman*

Lyons, Arthur 1976. *The Killing Floor*

MacDonald, John D. 1970. *The Long Lavender Look*

MacDonald, John D. 1971 *A Tan and Sandy Silence*

MacDonald, John D. 1974. *The Dreadful Lemon Sky*

Macdonald, Ross 1971. *The Underground Man*

Macdonald, Ross 1973. *Sleeping Beauty*

Macdonald, Ross 1976. *The Blue Hammer*

Parker, Robert B. 1973. *The Godwulf Manuscript*

Parker, Robert B. 1974. *God Save the Child*

Parker, Robert B. 1975. *Mortal Stakes*

Parker, Robert B. 1977. *Promised Land*

Parker, Robert B. 1978. *The Judas Goat*

Parker, Robert B. 1980. *Looking for Rachel Wallace*

Rovin, Jeff 1975. *Garrison*

Rovin, Jeff 1975. *The Wolf*

Sharp, Alan 1975. *Night Moves*

Simon, Roger L. 1973. *The Big Fix*

Simon, Roger L. 1974. *Wild Turkey*

Film

Darker than Amber (August 1970)
(Travis McGee movie)

Chandler (December 1971)

Hickey and Boggs (August 1972)
(*I Spy* spin-off)

Shamus (January 1973)

The Long Goodbye (March 1973)
(Chandler remake)

Chinatown (June 1974)

The Manchu Eagle Murder Caper Mystery (March 1975)
(spoof private eye)

The Drowning Pool (June 1975)
(Featuring Lew Archer)

Farewell, My Lovely (August 1975)
(Chandler remake)

Peeper (October 1975)
(private eye spoof)

The Black Bird (December 1975)
(ditto)

Gator (May 1976)
(sequel to *White Lightning* - see 'Revenge')

The Big Fix (October 1978)
(Based on Roger Simon novel)

TV

Archer (1975)

Banacek (1972)

Banyon (1972)

Barnaby Jones (1973)

Big Shamus, Little Shamus (1979)

Bronk (1975)

Cannon (1971)

Charlie's Angels (1976)

City of Angels (1976)

Cool Million (1972)

The Duke (1979)

Faraday and Company (1973)

Griff (1973)

Harry O (1974)

Longstreet (1971)

Richie Brockelman, Private Eye (1978)

The Rockford Files (1974)

Vegas\$ (1978)

THE CRIME STORY

Print

Cain, James M. 1975. *Rainbow's End*

Cain, James M. 1976. *The Institute*

Condon, Richard 1972. *Arigato*

Crawford, William 1973. *The Chinese Connection*

Ferris, Wally 1970. *Across 110th Street*

Higgins, George V. 1971. *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*

Higgins, George V. 1973. *The Digger's Game*

Higgins, George V. 1974. *Cogan's Trade*

Higgins, George V. 1975 *A City on a Hill*

Higgins, George V. 1976. *The Judgment of Deke Hunter*

Hill, Lance 1975. *King of the White Lady*

Leonard, Elmore 1974. *52 Pick-up*

Leonard, Elmore 1974. *Mr. Majestyk*

Leonard, Elmore 1976. *Swag*

Leonard, Elmore 1977. *The Hunted*

Leonard, Elmore 1977. *Unknown Man No. 89*

Leonard, Elmore 1978. *The Switch*

Leonard, Elmore 1980. *City Primeval*

Mann, Patrick 1975. *Dog Day Afternoon*

Murray, William 1977. *Mouth of the Wolf*

Nash, N. Richard 1975. *Cry Macho*

Pronzini, Bill 1974. *Snowbound*

Rostand, Robert 1976. *The D'Artagnan Signature*

Schrader, Leonard 1975. *The Yakuza*

Stark, Richard 1974. *Butcher's Moon*

Trevanian 1976. *The Main*

Wager, Walter 1970. *Sledgehammer*

Westheimer, David 1974. *Over the Edge*

Film

Satan's Sadists (January 1970)

Bloody Mama (March 1970)

The Moonshine War (July 1970)

Angel Unchained (August 1970)

The Grissom Gang (May 1971)
(Based on Faulkner/Hadley chase)

The Last Run (July 1971)

Prime Cut (June 1972)

Across 110th St (December 1972)

Dillinger (June 1973)

The Friends of Eddie Coyle (June 1973)

This Is A Hyjack (June 1973)

Harry In Your Pocket (August 1973)

Mean Streets (October 1973)

Charley Varrick (October 1973)

That Man Bolt (December 1973)

Crazy Joe (February 1974)

Thieves Like Us (February 1974)

Macon County Line (May 1974)

The Nickel Ride (May 1974)

Mr Majestyk (May 1974)

99 And 44/100% Dead (June 1974)

Truck Turner (June 1974)

Big Bad Mama (September 1974)

The Yakuza (March 1975)

Capone (April 1975)

Lepke (May 1975)

Crazy Mama (July 1975)

Angelo (April 1976)

Street People (September 1976)

Death Collector (January 1977)

Feedback (March 1979)

The Lady In Red (August 1979)

THE PARANOID TEXT

Print

Agnew, Spiro T. 1976. *The Canfield Decision*

Anderson, Patrick 1976. *The President's Mistress*

Ardies, Tom 1975. *Russian Roulette*

Barak, Michael 1976. *The Secret List of Heinrich Roehm*

Bova, Ben 1976. *The Multiple Man*

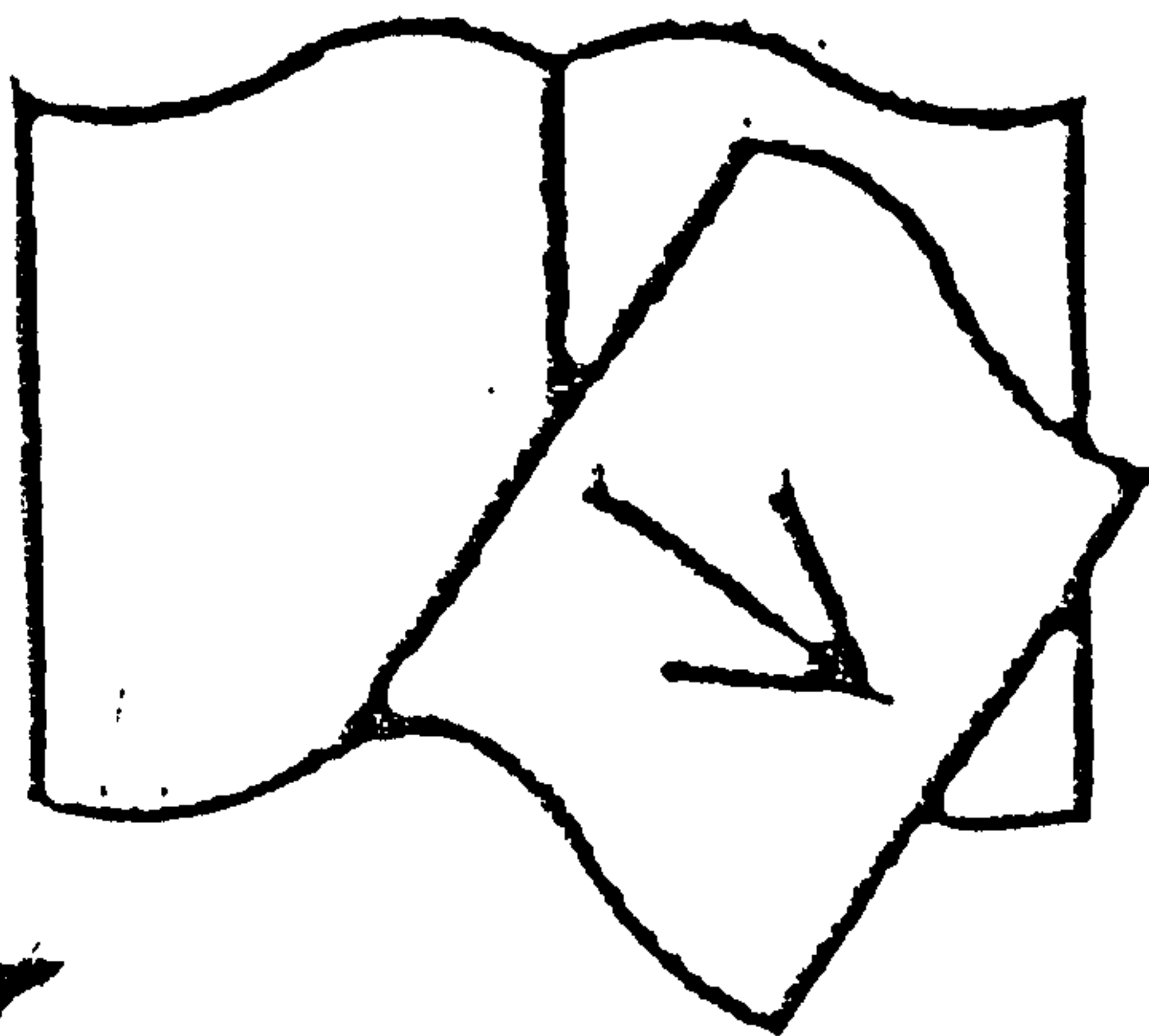
Carroll, James 1976. *Madonna Red*

Condon, Richard 1974. *Winter Kills*

Dan, Uri with Radley, Edward 1977. *The Eichmann Syndrome*

- Duncan, Robert L. 1980. *Brimstone*
- Egerton-Thomas, Christopher 1978. *A Taste of Conspiracy*
- Ehrlichman, John 1976. *Washington Behind Closed Doors* (a.k.a. *The Company*)
- Ehrlichman, John 1979. *The Whole Truth*
- Freed, Donald and Lane, Mark 1973. *Executive Action: Assassination of a Head of State*
- Goldman, William 1974. *Marathon Man*
- Grady, James 1974. *Six Days of the Condor*
- Grady, James 1975. *Shadow of the Condor*
- Hone, Joseph 1971. *The Private Sector*
- Kennedy, Adam 1975. *The Domino Principle*
- Levin, Ira 1976. *The Boys from Brazil*
- Ludlum, Robert 1971. *The Scarlatti Inheritance*
- Ludlum, Robert 1972. *The Osterman Weekend*
- Ludlum, Robert 1973. *The Matlock Paper*
- Ludlum, Robert 1974. *The Rhinemann Exchange*
- Ludlum, Robert 1976. *The Gemini Contenders*
- Ludlum, Robert 1977. *The Chancellor Manuscript*
- Ludlum, Robert 1978. *The Holcroft Covenant*
- Ludlum, Robert 1979. *The Matarese Circle*
- Mann, Patrick 1973. *The Vacancy*
- Marchetti, Victor 1972. *The Rope Dancer*
- McCarry, Charles 1979. *The Better Angels*
- Moore, Robin and Van Doren, Ronald 1976. *The Edge of the Pond*
- Nolan, Frederick 1974. *Brass Target*
- Nolan, Frederick 1974. *The Ritter Double Cross*
- Nolan, Frederick 1976. *The Mittenwald Syndicate*
- Pronzini, Bill and Malzberg, Barry N. 1977. *Acts of Mercy*
- Rostand, Robert 1973. *The Killer Elite*
- Safire, William 1977. *Full Disclosure*

Pages
Missing
not
Available



Pendleton, Don 1971. *The Executioner: Death Squad*

Pendleton, Don 1972. *The Executioner: San Diego Siege*

Pendleton, Don 1972. *The Executioner: Washington I.O.U.*

Pronzini, Bill 1972. *Panic!*

Spillane, Mickey 1973. *The Last Cop Out*

Stone, Robert 1974. *Dog Soldiers*

Thornburg, Newton 1976. *Cutter and Bone*

Film

The Night Visitor (February 1971)

Dirty Harry (December 1971)

Slaughter (August 1972)

(Jim Brown as ex-Green Beret avenges bombing murder of his parents)

Electra Glide in Blue (May 1973)

(Vietnam veteran bike cop)

White Lightning (June 1973)

The Stone Killer (August 1973)

The Outfit (October 1973)

Act of Vengeance (June 1974)

Death Wish (July 1974)

Homebodies (September 1974)

(Geriatric vigilante force)

The Human Factor (November 1975)

(George Kennedy takes revenge against terrorists in this Edward Dmytryk directed movie; not to be confused with Otto Preminger's film of the Graham Greene novel which goes by the same name)

Hustle (December 1975)

Taxi Driver (February 1976)

Lipstick (April 1976)

Vigilante Force (April 1976)

(Kris Kristofferson as a Vietnam veteran)

Fighting Mad (April 1976)

Jackson County Jail (May 1976)

Massacre at Central High (November 1976)

The House by the Lake (a.k.a. *Death Weekend*) (March 1977)

Rolling Thunder (October 1977)

(William Devane as a tortured Vietnam veteran)

Who'll Stop the Rain? (a.k.a. *Dog Soldiers*) (May 1978)

Love and Bullets (March 1979)

Night of the Juggler (May 1980)

The Exterminator (September 1980)

TV

The Manhunter (1974)

(Adventures of an embittered and vengeful bounty hunter in the 1930s)

POLICE GENRES

Print

Ball, John 1976. *The Eyes of Buddha*

Brown, Carter 1972. *The Aseptic Murders*

Brown, Carter 1974. *Night Wheeler*

Constantine, K.C. 1972. *The Blank Page*

Constantine, K.C. 1975. *A Fix Like This*

Coughlin, William J. 1973. *The Grinding Mill*

Droge, Edward F. 1974. *In the Highest Tradition*

McBain, Ed 1972. *Sadie When She Died*

McBain, Ed 1973. *Hail to the Chief*

McBain, Ed 1973. *Let's Hear it for the Deaf Man*

McBain, Ed 1975. *Blood Relatives*

McBain, Ed 1976. *Goldilocks*

McBain, Ed 1979. *Calypso*

McBain, Ed. 1976. *Guns*

McDonald, Gregory 1977. *Flynn*

Mills, James 1972. *Report to the Commissioner*

Moore, Robin and Machlin, Milt 1975. *The French Connection II*

Nolan, Frederick 1974. *No Place to be a Cop*

Stebel, S.L. 1975. *Narc*

Thorp, Roderick 1979. *Die Hard*

Uhnak, Dorothy 1970 *The Ledger*

Uhnak, Dorothy 1973. *Law and Order*

Uhnak, Dorothy 1973. *The Investigation*

Wambaugh, Joseph 1970. *The New Centurions*

Wambaugh, Joseph 1973. *The Blue Knight*

Wambaugh, Joseph 1975. *The Choirboys*

Wambaugh, Joseph 1977. *The Black Marble*

Wamburgh, Joseph 1973. *The Onion Field*

Film

The French Connection (October 1971)

Fuzz (May 1972)

(Based on an Ed McBain novel)

The New Centurions (July 1972)

(Based on Joseph Wambaugh's first novel)

They Only Kill Their Masters (November 1972)

(Reasonably genteel whodunit)

Badge 373 (July 1973)

(Like *The French Connection*, this is based on the exploits of detective Eddie Egan)

Magnum Force (December 1973)

(Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry for the second time)

The Seven Ups (December 1973)

Busting (January 1974)

Man on a Swing (February 1974)

Newman's Law (May 1974)

(Liberal dose of paranoia)

The Take (May 1974)

(Insider account of graft)

Report to the Commissioner (January 1975)

(Based on the James Mills novel)

The French Connection II (August 1975)

Mitchell (September 1975)

The Enforcer (December 1976)

(Third outing for Dirty Harry)

The Choirboys (December 1977)

(Based on the Joseph Wambaugh novel, although he disowns it and tried to sue the makers)

The Black Marble (February 1980)

(Based on a Joseph Wambaugh novel)

TV

Adams of Eagle Lake (1975)

Amy Prentiss (1974)

Baretta (1975)

Bert D'Angelo (1976)

The Blue Knight (1975)

Cade's County (1971)

Caribe (1975)

Chase (1973)

CHiPs (1977)

Chopper One (1974)

Columbo (1971)

Dan August (1970)

David Cassidy - Man Undercover (1978)

Dear Detective (1979)

Delvecchio (1976)

Dog and Cat (1977)

Eischied (1979)

Get Christie Love! (1974)

Jigsaw John (1976)

Joe Forrester (1975)

Kodiak (1974)
(Set in rural Alaska)

Kojak (1973)

Madigan (1972)
(Based on the 1968 Don Siegel film)

McCloud (1970)
(Dennis Weaver as the New Mexico sheriff in New York based on the 1968 Don Siegel film *Coogan's Bluff*, starring Clint Eastwood)

Most Wanted (1976)

Nakia (1974)
(Native American cop in New Mexico)

Nashville 99 (1977)

Paris (1979)

Police Story (1973)
(Series famed for its gritty realism and characterized by the lack of a regular cast; created by Joseph Wambaugh)

Police Woman (1974)
(Most famous of 1970s series featuring a female detective)

The Rookies (1972)

Serpico (1976)
(Based on the 1973 film and book)

Starsky and Hutch (1979)

The Streets of San Francisco (1972)

CAPERS

Print

Judson, William 1973. *Alice and Me*

Ross, Paul 1974. *Freebie and the Bean*

Thornburg, Newton 1971. *Knockover*

Westlake, Donald E. 1970. *The Hot Rock*

Westlake, Donald E. 1971. *I Gave at the Office*

Westlake, Donald E. 1972. *Bank Shot*

Westlake, Donald E. 1972. *Cops and Robbers*

Westlake, Donald E. 1974. *Help: I Am Being Held Prisoner*

Westlake, Donald E. 1980. *Castle in the Air*

Film

The Gang that Couldn't Shoot Straight (December 1971)

The Hot Rock (a.k.a. *How to Steal a Diamond*) (January 1972)
(Based on the Donald Westlake novel)

Every Little Crook and Nanny (June 1972)

Slither (March 1973)

Little Cigars (May 1973)
(Features midget bank-robber gang)

Lady Ice (August 1973)

Cops and Robbers (August 1973)
(Based on Donald Westlake novel)

The Sting (December 1973)

Sugarland Express (March 1974)

Crazy Mary Dirty Larry (May 1974)

The Gravy Train (June 1974)

Bank Shot (July 1974)
(Based on Donald Westlake novel)

Freebie and the Bean (November 1974)

Eat My Dust (April 1976)

Harry and Walter Go to New York (June 1976)
(Period caper)

Special Delivery (July 1976)

TV

The Misadventures of Sheriff Lobo (1979)
(Assorted schemes of a not quite honest Georgia hick sheriff)

Sword of Justice (1978)
(Crime solving by two ex-criminals reminiscent of *The Saint*)

ESPIONAGE

Print

Collingwood, Charles 1970. *The Defector*

Coxe, George Harmon 1975. *The Inside Man*

Duncan, Robert L. 1977. *Temple Dogs*

Farris, John 1976. *The Fury*

Garfield, Brian 1973. *Kolchak's Gold*

Garfield, Brian 1975. *Hopscotch*

Hennisart, Paul 1973. *Narrow Exit*

Hunt, E. Howard 1980. *The Hargrave Deception*

Hynd, Noel 1979. *False Flags*

Hynd, Noel 1979. *The Sandler Inquiry*

Littell, Robert 1973. *The Defection of A.J. Lewinter*

McDonald, Hugh C. 1976. *Five Signs from Ruby*

McGivern, William 1972. *Caprifoil*

Moore, Robin 1976. *The Kaufman Snatch*

Moore, Robin and Dempsey, Al 1974. *Phase of Darkness*

Morre, Robin 1976. *The Terminal Connection*

Mykel, A.W. 1980. *The Windchime Legacy*

Sanders, Lawrence 1978. *The Tangent Factor*

Singer, Loren 1974. *Boca Grande*

Trevanian 1979. *Shibumi*

Wager, Walter 1975. *Telefon*

Film

The Kremlin Letter (January 1970)
(Based on a Noel Behn novel)

Scorpio (April 1973)

Day of the Dolphin (December 1973)

Rosebud (March 1975)

The Next Man (November 1976)

Telefon (December 1977)

The Fury (March 1978)

(Large dose of the supernatural in addition to espionage)

The In-Laws (June 1979)

(Hilarious espionage spoof)

Avalanche Express (July 1979)

Hopscotch (July 1980)

TV

The Silent Force (1970)

(*Mission Impossible* style clandestine crime fighters)

BLACK THRILLERS

Print

Goines, Donald 1974. *Cry Revenge*

Goines, Donald 1974. *Swamp Man*

Goines, Donald 1977. *Black Gangster*

Goines, Donald 1978. *Crime Partners*

Johnson, B.B. 1970. *Black is Beautiful*

Johnson, B.B. 1970. *That's Where the Cat's At, Baby*

Tidyman, Ernest 1970. *Shaft*

Tidyman, Ernest 1971. *Shaft has a Ball*

Tidyman, Ernest 1972. *Shaft Among the Jews*

Tidyman, Ernest 1972. *Shaft's Big Score*

Tidyman, Ernest 1973. *Good-bye, Mr. Shaft*

Film

Cotton Comes to Harlem (June 1970)

They Call Me Mister Tibbs (July 1970)
Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song (April 1971)
Shaft (June 1971)
Cool Breeze (March 1972)
The Final Comedown (May 1972)
The Legend of Nigger Charlie (May 1972)
Shaft's Big Score (June 1972)
Come Back Charleston Blue (July 1972)
Superfly (August 1972)
Melinda (August 1972)
Hammer (September 1972)
Trouble Man (November 1972)
Black Gunn (December 1972)
Hit Man (December 1972)
Trick Baby (January 1973)
Black Caesar (February 1973)
The Mack (March 1973)
Coffy (May 1973)
Sweet Jesus Preacher Man (May 1973)
Shaft in Africa (June 1973)
Super Fly T.N.T (June 1973)
Cleopatra Jones (July 1973)
 (Martial arts)
The Slams (September 1973)
Hit (September 1973)
The Spook Who Sat By The Door (October 1973)
Willy Dynamite (December 1973)
Hell Up In Harlem (January 1974)
 (Sequel to *Black Caesar*, dir. Larry Cohen)
The Black Six (March 1974)
 (Revenge)

Three Tough Guys (March 1974)

Foxy Brown (April 1974)
(Revenge)

Black Eye (April 1974)

Three The Hard Way (June 1974)

Black Samson (August 1974)

Solomon King (October 1974)
(Ex-Green Beret leads commandos against Middle-Eastern revolutionaries)

The Black Godfather (December 1974)

TNT Jackson (February 1975)
(Martial Arts)

Lord Shango (February 1975)

Sheba Baby (April 1975)
(Pam Grier as tough female private eye)

The Black Gestapo (April 1975)

Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold (June 1975)
(Martial Arts sequel)

Bucktown (July 1975)
(Racial revenge)

Gordon's War (August 1973)
(Paul Winfield as Vietnam veteran waging war on drugs gangs)

Friday Foster (December 1975)
(Pam Grier again)

Hit Potato (April 1976)
(Martial Arts)

No Way Back (June 1976)

TV

Shaft (1973)
(Based on the 1970 film and novels by Ernest Tidyman)

Tenaflly (1973)
(Middle-class black private eye)

'ADVENTURE'

Print

Dickey, James 1970. *Deliverance*

Parker, Robert B. 1979. *Wilderness*

Film

Skullduggery (March 1970)

Deliverance (July 1972)

Papillon (December 1973)

The Wind and the Lion (May 1975)

MAFIA TEXTS

Print

Lynn, Jack C. 1971. *The Professor*

McCurtin, Peter 1972. *The Syndicate*

Moore, Robin 1973. *The 5th Estate*

Moore, Robin with Machlin, Milt 1974. *The Family Man*

Puzo, Mario 1970. *The Godfather*

Quarry, Nick 1972. *The Don is Dead*

Thackeray, Alex 1975. *One Way Ticket*

Film

The Godfather (March 1972)

The Don is Dead (November 1973)

The Godfather Part II (December 1974)

ECONOMIC THRILLERS

Print

Erdman, Paul 1974. *The Billion Dollar Killing*

Erdman, Paul 1975. *The Silver Bears*

Erdman, Paul 1977. *The Crash of '79*

Hailey, Arthur 1977. *The Moneychangers*

Tanous, Peter and Rubinstein, Paul 1975. *The Petro-Dollar Takeover*

Film

The Silver Bears (November 1977)

(Based on the Paul Erdman book)

MISCELLANEOUS

Print

Condon, Richard 1975. *Money is Love*

De Mille, Nelson 1978. *By the Rivers of Babylon*

Denker, Henry 1971. *The Director*

Denker, Henry 1976. *The Experiment*

Ellin, Stanley 1972. *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall*

Ellin, Stanley 1974. *Stronghold*

Ellin, Stanley 1976. *Star Light, Star Bright*

Eszterhas, Joe 1978. *F.I.S.T.*

Goldman, William 1976. *Magic*

Hardesty, John 1978. *The Killing Ground*

Kemelman, Harry 1973. *Tuesday the Rabbi Saw Red*

Levin, Ira 1970. *This Perfect Day*

Littell, Robert 1974. *Sweet Reason*

Meyer, Nicholas 1974. *The Seven Per Cent Solution*

Meyer, Nicholas 1976. *The West End Horror*

Millar, Margaret 1976. *Ask for Me Tomorrow*

Mills, James 1974. *One Just Man*

(Revenge, injustice, lawyers, paranoia, police work, prison rebellion all in one novel)

Moore, Robin 1976. *Aloha*

Moore, Robin and Harper, David 1976. *The Last Superbowl*

Moore, Robin and Romain, Neville H. 1977. *Only the Hyenas Laughed*

Murphy, Warren B. 1978. *Leonardo's Law*

Roberts, Willo Davis 1976. *Expendable*

Sanders, Lawrence 1972. *Love Songs*

Schrader, Leonard 1978. *Hardcore*

Stallone, Sylvester 1977. *Paradise Alley*

Film

... *Tick . . . Tick . . . Tick* (January 1970)
(racial tension generates suspense)

The Forbin Project (April 1970)

What's the Matter with Helen? (June 1970)

Fools' Parade (June 1970)

Let's Scare Jessica to Death (August 1970)

The Travelling Executioner (October 1970)

The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes (October 1970)

They Might Be Giants (March 1971)

The Peace Killers (October 1971)

The Jerusalem File (March 1972)

You'll Like My Mother (October 1972)

The Mechanic (November 1972)

Sisters (March 1973)

I Escaped From Devil's Island (August 1973)

Arnold (October 1973)

The Midnight Man (March 1974)
(Psychological whodunnit)

W (June 1974)
(In which Twiggy is persecuted)

Golden Needles (July 1974)

Bring Me The Head of Alfredo Garcia (August 1974)

The Klansman (November 1974)

Shoot It: Black, Shoot It Blue (December 1974)

Race with the Devil (June 1975)
(supernatural chase thriller)

Operation Daybreak (March 1976)
(The assassination of Heydrich)

Family Plot (March 1976)
(Hitchcock's last film)

Murder by Death (June 1976)
(Whodunit spoof)

Obsession (July 1976)

St Ives (July 1976)

The Seven Percent Solution (October 1976)

Assault on Precinct 13 (November 1976)

Twilight's Last Gleaming (January 1977)
(Anti-Vietnam tract)

The Deep (June 1977)

Sorcerer (June 1977)
(Notoriously edited remake of *The Wages of Fear*, disowned by director Friedkin)

The Gauntlet (December 1977)

Doubles (March 1978)

F.I.S.T. (April 1978)

Five Days from Home (April 1978)

Five Days From Home (April 1978)

Convoy (June 1978)

Foul Play (July 1978)

Magic (November 1978)

Brass Target (December 1978)

Hardcore (February 1979)

(Possible companion to *Joe* [1970] and *Taxi Driver*)

The Onion Field (May 1979)

The Outsider (December 1979)

(IRA thriller)

TV

Hec Ramsay (1972)

(The adventures of an outdated Western deputy at the turn of the century)

Lanigan's Rabbi (1977)

(Sleuthing Rabbi based on Harry Kemelman's novels)

McMillan and Wife (1971)

(Light-hearted events in the life of a police commissioner [Rock Hudson]; dominated by an upper class domestic setting)

The Most Deadly Game (1970)

(Homicide as intellectual puzzle)

O'Hara, United States Treasury (1971)

(Adventures of a Treasury agent specializing in tax evasion cases)

Sam (1978)

(The adventures of a police dog)

Sarge (1971)

(Social dramas involving ex-cop turned Catholic priest who cannot escape his instinct for solving crimes)

DISASTER

Print

Ardies, Tom 1973. *Pandemic*

Benchley, Peter 1974. *Jaws*

Chastain, Thomas 1976. *911*

Coppel, Alfred 1974. *Thirty-four East*

DiMona, Joseph 1977. *The Benedict Arnold Connection*

Gallico, Paul 1971. *The Poseidon Adventure*

Godey, John 1973. *The Taking of Pelham 123*

Godey, John 1978. *The Snake*

Harris, Thomas 1975. *Black Sunday*

Moore, Robin 1978. *Search and Destroy*

Sayles, John 1978. *Piranha*

Scortia, Thomas N. and Robinson, Frank M. 1973. *The Glass Inferno*

Scortia, Thomas N. and Robinson, Frank M. 1976. *The Prometheus Crisis*

Stern, Richard Martin 1973. *The Tower*

Film

Airport (February 1970)

The Sky Pirate (February 1970)

Skyjacked (May 1972)

The Poseidon Adventure (December 1972)

The Taking of Pelham 123 (June 1974)

Airport 1975 (October 1974)

Earthquake (November 1974)

The Towering Inferno (December 1974)

Shark's Treasure (May 1975)
(called "toothless *Jaws*" by *Variety*)

Jaws (June 1975)

The Hindenburg (December 1975)

The Big Bus (June 1976)
(epic disaster spoof)

Two Minute Warning (November 1976)

The Cassandra Crossing (January 1977)

Airport '77 (Mar 1977)

Black Sunday (April 1977)

Rollercoaster (April 1977)

Jaws 2 (June 1978)

The Swarm (July 1978)

Piranha (August 1978)

Avalanche (September 1978)

The Bees (November 1978)

The China Syndrome (February 1979)
(A liberal dose of justifiable paranoia in addition to disaster)

Beyond the Poseidon Adventure (May 1979)

Airport '79: The Concorde (August 1979)

WATERGATE MEMOIRS OF THE 1970s

Print

Colson, Charles 1976. *Born Again*

Dean, John 1977. *Blind Ambition: The White House Years*

Jaworski, Leon 1977. *The Right and the Power: The Prosecution of Watergate*

Safire, William 1975. *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House*

Sirica, John J. 1979. *To Set the Record Straight: The Break-in, the Tapes, the Conspirators, the Pardon*

White, Theodore H. 1975. *Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon*

Film

Born Again (September 1978)
(Colson bio-pic)

FICTIONAL INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AS DETECTION

TV

The American Girls (1978)

The Andros Targets (1978)

Kolchak: The Night Stalker (1974)
(often involved investigations of the supernatural)

Mobile One (1975)

Mrs. Columbo (1979)

(Amateur sleuthing by the famous detective's journalist wife)

SERIAL KILLERS

Print

Coe, Tucker 1970. *A Jade in Aries*

Coe, Tucker 1970. *Wax Apple*

Dunne, John Gregory 1977. *True Confessions*

Highsmith, Patricia 1970. *Ripley Underground*

Highsmith, Patricia 1974. *Ripley's Game*

Walker, Gerald 1970. *Cruising*

Film

Klute (June 1971)

The Todd Killings (August 1971)

Sweet Saviour (September 1971)

(Thinly-veiled fictionalization of the Manson killings)

Play Misty for Me (September 1971)

The Mad Bomber (April 1973)

The Killing Kind (June 1973)

The Laughing Policeman (a.k.a *An Investigation of Murder*) (November 1973)

Blade (December 1973)

Have a Nice Weekend (September 1975)

Psychic Killer (November 1975)

Deadly Hero (August 1976)

The Killer Inside Me (October 1976)

The Town that Dreaded Sundown (January 1977)

Bare Knuckles (February 1978)

The Eyes of Laura Mars (August 1978)

The Toolbox Murders (November 1978)

Driller Killer (July 1979)

Windows (January 1980)

American Gigolo (January 1980)

Dressed to Kill (July 1980)

TV

S.W.A.T. (1975)

(Although ostensibly this series was about a Special Weapons and Action Team affiliated to the police, the villains were invariably psychopaths/serial killers of some kind. The SWAT team was interestingly made up of Vietnam veterans)

SOFT-BOILED/PRIVATE DETECTIVE FICTION

Film

Who Killed Mary Whats'ername? (November 1972)

TV

Ellery Queen (1975)

Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew Mysteries (1977)
(adolescent detection)

Hart to Hart (1979)
(updated series version of *The Thin Man*)

Khan! (1975)
(Genteel Chan-like private detective)

The Magician (1973)
(Bill Bixby as amateur magician/sleuth)

The Snoop Sisters (1973)
(Female senior citizen sleuths)

Switch (1975)
(A pair of amateur sleuths who regularly solved cases by means of confidence tricks not unlike those to be found in the 1973 film *The Sting*)

LAWYERS

Print

Hensley, Joe L. 1977. *Rivertown Risk*

Spicer, Bart 1974. *The Adversary*

Film

The Lawyer (1970)

Mr Ricco (January 1975)

TV

The D.A. (1971)

The Eddie Capra Mysteries (1978)

The Feather and Father Gang (1977)

Hawkins (1973)

Kate McShane (1975)

Kaz (1978)

The Law (1975)

(Much praised courtroom-based series concerned often with the difficulties of legal procedure versus justice)

McNaughton's Daughter (1976)

The New Adventures of Perry Mason (1973)

Owen Marshall, Counselor at Law (1971)

Petrocelli (1974)

(Based on the 1970 film *The Lawyer*)

Rosetti and Ryan (1977)

Storefront Lawyers (1970)

The Young Lawyers (1970)

MEDICAL THRILLERS

Print

Cook, Robin 1972. *The Year of the Intern*

Cook, Robin 1976. *Coma*

Goldberg, Marshall 1972. *The Karamanov Equations*

Film

Coma (January 1978)

(Based on the Robin Cook novel with paranoid overtones)

The Carey Treatment (March 1972)

(Remarkable thriller which dramatizes issues directly connected with abortion)

TV

Quincy, M.E. (1976)

SECRET AGENTS/SUPER SPIES

Print

Buckley Jr., William F. 1976. *Saving the Queen*

Buckley Jr., William F. 1978. *Stained Glass*

Carter, Nick 1970. *The Executioners*

Carter, Nick 1973. *Butcher of Belgrade*

Kirk, Philip 1990. *Killer Satellites*

(#6 in the Butler series)

McDonald, Gregory 1974. *Fletch*

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MARTIAL ARTS

Film

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Appendix 2

Interviews

Side A: Maxim Jakubowski

Side B: H.R.F. Keating

Conducted April 1992

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