

# HARD BOILED FICTION: A NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

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**Abstract:** *Had boiled fiction is an American literary style, commonly associated with detective fiction. It follows a tough unsentimental style of writing that brought a new tone of earthy realism or naturalism to the field of detective fiction. Hard boiled fiction used graphic sex and violence, vivid but often sordid urban background, and first paced, slangy dialogues. Hardboiled science fiction is a genre that blends noir with an American style detective fiction, within a much defined boundary. Born in America during the 1920s, hard-boiled fiction owes its enduring literary style to three writers:*

*Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain. The main hero of this genre is a detective and we can encounter both rural and urban settings. This crime fiction deals with a tough cynical attitude towards emotions in a background of violence.*

**Key Words:** *Hardboiled fiction, Unsentimental, Detective fiction, Noir fiction.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Hard boiled crime fiction, distinguished by the unsentimental portrayal of violence and sex, is a literary style, most commonly associated with detective stories. It has been derived from the romantic tradition which emphasized the emotions of apprehension, awe, horror and terror, hardboiled fiction deviates from that tradition in the detective's cynical attitude towards those emotions. The attitude of hard boiled fiction conveyed through the detective's inner monologue describing to the audience what he is doing and feeling. The genre's typical protagonist is a detective, who witnesses daily the violence of organized crime that flourished during Prohibition, while dealing with a legal system that had become as corrupt as the organized crime itself. Rendered cynicism with this cycle of violence, detectives of hardboiled fiction are classic antiheroes.

The phrase 'hard boiled school' was coined in the early 1930s to describe a group of writers of whom Dashiell Hammett was regarded as luminary. This 'hard-boiled school' depicted characters; they are emotionally hardened in an uncaring world driven by money, power and sexual desire. This literary genre shares some resemblance in its characters and settings with crime fiction especially detective stories as both of them talks about the unsentimental part of life.

When we research more, this hardboiled fiction blends with noir fiction, as in the case of crime fiction, in an American style detective fiction, within a much defined boundary. Here the protagonist is usually a male investigator or a detective who works alone, wears a gun and hangs out in seedy bars and clubs. The story will usually involve a murder mystery that the investigator will use any means required to solve and thus moves to a thrilling level of narration.

Even though there are a lot of similarities with hard boiled and noir fiction, there is much debate to the difference between Noir and Hard boiled fiction. But the general consensus is to how each portrays its heroes and villains within a social hierarchy, specifically through dialogue. Whereas Noir has a tendency to amalgamate the two into a complete and very ordered civilization, the hard boiled hero oscillates between two worlds; he can communicate with his bourgeois client but liaisons too with his bulldog-faced lead. This new genre became a talk later in the magazines. A 1937 issue of Harper's magazine denounced hard boiled fiction as the stuff of immature minds. But with that immaturity or even with the arguably detrimental blank canvas like nature of the characterization, success of hard boiled fiction was on the rise. The popularization of the hard boiled hero was because of the consumer's desire for it and of course that is the reason behind the success, as the readers were craving for change. To identify, as we all know, is a key element to a book's success in the marketplace, so readers really saw themselves in these stiff stark misogynist men. The way these novels dealt with postwar anxiety certainly played a big part in this. For Frank Krutnik, noir males were internally divided and alienated from the culturally permissible or ideal parameters of masculine identity, desire and achievement. Thus, readers could see, identify and project themselves both in and apart from their rapidly shifting even frightening modern society.

## 2. MAJOR THEMES:

The narrative style of hard boiled fiction is also surprising. Hard boiled fiction is often defined by what it is not. It is not British; but is American. It is not set in the little village; but in a large city or urban area. It is not filled with civilized and polite people; but with crooks, criminals and mafia types who are very familiar with physical violence, psychological intimidation and

can say some rough languages. The solution is not reached by a brilliant detective who analyzes clues and is an expert as psychological deduction. Corruption and disorder are common themes of this genre.

### 3. THE BEGINNING AND THE GROWTH:

After pioneered by Carroll John Daly in the mid 1920s, it was popularized by Dashiell Hammett over the course of the decade, and refined by James M. Cain.

By Raymond Chandler, beginning in the late 1930s; its heyday was in 1930s–50s America. From its earliest days, hardboiled fiction was published in and closely associated with so called pulp magazines, most famously *Black Mask* under the editorship of Joseph T. Shaw. In its earliest uses in the late 1920s, hardboiled didn't refer to a type of crime fiction; it meant the tough cynical attitude towards emotions triggered by violence thus it shares the qualities of a crime fiction.

According to the pulp historian Robert Sampson, Gordon Young's "*Don Ever hard*" stories which appeared in *Adventure* magazine from 1917 onwards, about an "extremely tough, unsentimental, and lethal" gun-toting urban gambler, anticipated the hardboiled detective stories. *Black Mask* moved exclusively to publishing detective stories in 1933, and pulp's exclusive reference to crime fiction probably became fixed around that time, although it's impossible to pin down with precision. The hardboiled crime story became a staple of several pulp magazines in the 1930s; in addition to *Black Mask*, hardboiled crime fiction appeared in *Dime Detective* and *Detective Fiction Weekly*. Later, many hardboiled novels were published by houses specializing in paperback originals, also colloquially known as "pulp" in there theme and mode of narration.

Later, "pulp fiction" is often used as a synonym for hardboiled crime fiction or gangster fiction; some would distinguish within it the private eye story from the crime novel itself. In the United States, the original hardboiled style has been emulated by innumerable writers, including Sue Grafton, Chester Himes, Paul Levine, John D. MacDonald, Ross Macdonald, Jim Butcher, Walter Mosley, Sara Paretsky, Robert B. Parker, and Mickey Spillane. They all followed the path of this new narrative technique and the readers became easily addicted to these thrillers.

As we already discussed, hard boiled fiction, a tough, unsentimental style of American crime writing that brought a new tone of earthy realism or naturalism to the field of detective fiction. It took graphic sex and violence as there centre of attraction through vivid but often sordid urban backgrounds, and fast-paced, slangy dialogue. Obviously the credit for the invention of the genre belongs to Dashiell Hammett, a former Pinkerton detective and contributor to the pulp magazines, whose first truly hard boiled story, "Fly Paper," appeared in *Black Mask* magazine in 1929. Combining his own experiences with the realistic influence of writers such as Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, Hammett created a definitely American type of detective fiction that was separate and distinct from the English mystery story usually set in a country house populated by cooks, butlers, and relatives, a pattern that had been slavishly followed by American writers for generations. It is important to know about his contribution in this genre. The first of Hammett's detective novels was *Red Harvest* (1929). His masterpiece is generally believed to be *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), which introduced Sam Spade, his most famous sleuth. His most successful story, *The Thin Man* (1934), was the last of an extraordinary quintet of novels. All of these were successful in the theme and narration.

### 4. MAJOR WORKS:

The following list is a great start for those who want to read the classic hard-boiled stories that have defined what is meant by a hard boiled fiction. The *Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett. The *Postman Always Rings Twice* by James M Cain. It caused a scandal with its explosive mix of violence and sex. The torrid story of Frank Chambers, the amoral drifter, Cora, the sullen and brooding wife, and Nick Papadakis, the amiable but inconvenient husband, has become a classic of its kind, and established Cain as a major novelist with a spare and vital prose style and a bleak vision of America. Cain's another work *Double Identity*. Here, Walter Huff is an insurance investigator like any other until the day he meets the beautiful and dangerous Phyllis Nirdlinger and falls under her spell. Together they plot to kill her husband and split the insurance.

Another writer Raymond Chandler's work *The Long Goodbye* deals about a down-and-out drunk Terry Lennox dying millionaire, Philip Marlowe to handle the blackmailer of one of his two troublesome daughters, Marlowe finds himself involved with more than extortion. Kidnapping, pornography, seduction, and murder are just a few of the complications he gets caught up in.

It is important to discuss that Hammett's innovations were incorporated in the hard-boiled melodramas of James M. Cain (1892–1977), particularly in such early works as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) and *Double Indemnity* (1936). Another successor was Raymond Chandler (1888–1959), whose novels, such as *The Big Sleep* (1939), *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), and *The Little Sister* (1949), deal with corruption and racketeering in Southern California. Other important writers of the hard-boiled school are George Harmon Coxe (1901–84), author of such thrillers as *Murder with Pictures* (1935) and *Eye Witness* (1950), and W.R. Burnett (1899–1982), who wrote *Little Caesar* (1929) and *The Asphalt Jungle* (1949). Hard-boiled fiction ultimately degenerated into the extreme sensationalism and undisguised sadism of what *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* called the "guts-gore-and-gals-

school,” also many works of the hard-boiled school have been extensively translated into films, often through successive versions tailored to different generations of moviegoers. Thus became very human need of entertainment.

Most of the hard boiled crime fiction stories involve private investigators as the hero, though Sherlock Holmes was a private eye and the stories aren't hard-boiled, and Cain never wrote a detective novel. They are realistic, in the sense that people who go out and get a private investigator license are hired to solve crimes, which is more than the village vicar or the head of the gardening club can say. These situations will definitely make a curiosity in eyes of the reader than the normal occasions.

## 5. THE SETTING:

As we discussed earlier the setting for hardboiled detective fiction is usually a large city, an urban area, or an industrial area. The cities tend to be dark, dangerous places run by corrupt politicians, gangster syndicates, and an occasional corrupt police officer. Often the stories themselves have more night scenes than daylight scenes, which contribute to the overall dark atmosphere of the stories thus, can create more mind blowing occasions.

Hard boiled fiction covers a broad range of writing about crime and the people involved in criminal activity or violence, the police, private detectives, criminals, lawyers, and so on. The plots range from the solving of the mystery of who committed the crime to following the police in their activities to the semi-humorous antics of ordinary citizens and amateur detectives. The hard-boiled genre are gritty stories of the criminal underworld, usually containing sex, violence, and corruption both public and private. The famous authors of the genre -- Hammett and Chandler -- wrote from the point of view of a protagonist who was a lone private detective, tough but honest and determined to unravel the mystery of a murder in the face of deceitful women and uncooperative clients and these are essential ingredients in it.

Even though in the subject and the mode of presentation, these hard boiled, noir and crime fiction carry a number of similarities, when differentiate, hard-boiled from *noir* by noting that the former describes style and the latter, content. *Noir* is dark and grim, no matter its style. Hard-boiled is gritty and unsentimental, no matter its outlook. There are numerous works where the two overlap, and it's certainly possible to have a story that's hardboiled or grim or both but that doesn't involve crime, but the terms are usually associated with crime fiction.

The question is still open as 'hard-boiled characters' and crime-ridden urban landscapes prefigure 'the hard-boiled school' by some 30 or 40 years. The phrase 'hard-boiled' itself in respect to human character originates somewhere in the last quarter of the 19th century. The hardboiled egg as a measure of human character is prefigured by the 'bad egg' which is often said to have its origin in the Samuel Hammett novel *Captain Priest*. People can take it as a comparison for the study.

## 6. CONCLUSION:

This 1920s American born, hard-boiled fiction, the different style of storytelling, owes its enduring literary style to three writers: Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain. Through their timeless stories, a tough-talking hero strives to root out corruption and bring a small measure of justice to a dark, urban landscape. The lead character in most hard-boiled stories is a streetwise detective; where others like noir fiction usually focuses on a victim, suspect, or the actual criminal. The central themes in hard boiled fiction emphasize the self-destructive qualities of the characters and a sense of fatalism, where the world is indifferent to injustice and suffering and finally the solution. After all it gives a new mode of writing in the field of detective fiction.

## 7. JOURNAL PUBLISHING AGREEMENT:

I hereby declare that i have read the submission guidelines and i agree to the policy of the journal. The submission is original without any plagiarized material. The article entitled “Hard Boiled Fiction: A Narrative Technique” is a genuine work carried out by me.

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