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PARODY OF HEMINGWAY IN RAYMOND CHANDLER’S FAREWELL, MY LOVELY

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For Raymond Chandler, Ernest Hemingway was a standard-bearer of modern fiction and a must in any library; he had seen “it all” and could serve as a literary touchstone. The praise prevails, early and late, despite Chandler’s irritation with Hemingway’sDamnable “self-imitation.” This mixture of admiration and irreverence toward “the old war horse” underscores Chandler’s early parody of Hemingway’s repetitive style:

Hank went into the bathroom to brush his teeth.
“The hell with it,” he said. “She shouldn’t have done it.”

It was a good bathroom. It was small and the green enamel was peeling off the walls. But the hell with that, as Napoleon said when they told him Josephine was waiting without. The bathroom had a wide window through which Hank looked at the pines and the larches. They dripped with a faint rain. They looked smooth and comfortable.
“The hell with it,” Hank said. “She shouldn’t have done it.”

Later, Chandler reveals a similar attitude by having Marlowe dub a tough talking cop “Hemingway” in two passages of Farewell, My Lovely. The dubbing signals, I believe, a complex parody involving several of Hemingway’s stories, aspects of character and incident, and a common symbolic device—all held together by a single theme.

In the dubbing incident Marlowe hangs Hemingway’s name on a Bay City cop who employs repetitious banter:

“He wants his gun,” he told him. He looked at me again.
“And what would you want your gun for, pally?”
“I want to shoot an Indian.”
“Oh, you want to shoot an Indian, pally.”
“Yeah—just one Indian, pop.”
He looked at the one with the mustache again. “This guy is very tough,” he told him. “He wants to shoot an Indian.”

(FML, 134)
Indians, of course, abound in Hemingway’s Michigan stories. Moreover, the cop’s bullying and his bullying language suggest several sources in Hemingway’s work, most particularly the hit men of “The Killers.” 4 After the dubbing, “Listen, Hemingway, don’t repeat everything I say,’ I said” (FML, 134), Marlowe repeats the name several times, irritating the cop to ask, “‘Who is this Hemingway person at all?’” (FML, 138). Marlowe’s answer, “‘A guy that keeps saying the same thing over and over until you begin to believe it must be good’” (FML, 138), is an explicit statement of the criticism in Chandler’s earlier parody of Hemingway. As a result of this encounter, Marlowe ends up in a drying-out hospital where, like Nick Adams at Hirsch’s rooming-house, he sees a huge man reclining on a bed and waiting, not for hit men, but for a lead to his Velma, who will prove to be deadly enough.

The scene with the cops suggests even more important connections between Chandler’s novel and a second Hemingway story, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.” 5 Harry, Hemingway’s main character, has succumbed to a woman’s wealth and is dying far from the scenes he had intended to write about. The Bay City cops are similarly out of place—in L. A., outside their jurisdiction. Like Harry, they might at one time have been good at what they did; but now their professional corruption matches his gangrene. When Marlowe returns from a drugged delirium in the drying-out hospital to call upon the Bay City Police Department, he manages to commandeer “Hemingway” by mentioning his client, Mrs. Grayle, a rich, lovely, and corrupting woman. In the subsequent scene, “Hemingway” shows that, like Harry in “Snows,” he has conscience enough to be bothered by what happens to him and other cops, telling Marlowe regretfully, “‘Listen, pally,... You got me on a string, but it could break. Cops don’t go crooked for money. Not always, not even often. They get caught in the system’” (FML, 196). Marlowe ends up almost approving of the cop’s tough candor, just as many readers have ended up feeling better about Harry after his silent soul-searching and his increasing gentleness toward the woman who still supports him.

Then, too, Marlowe himself bears some resemblance to Harry. For the greater part of “Snows” Harry is dying from gangrene (the result of an inadequately treated cut), demanding liquor (which the woman warns him about, encouraging him to eat instead of drinking), and quarreling with her. When Marlowe escapes from the drying-out hospital where he had been nearly killed by a needle, he stumbles to the apartment of Anne Riordan. She feeds him, limits his drinks, encourages him to stay—not minding that it’s a place where he’s not expected to be—and quarrels with him because he won’t.
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Perhaps the most important connection between Chandler’s novel and “Snows” is the use of a common symbolic device to stress the similar and similarly reiterated theme. Hemingway’s treatment of a creature being where it isn’t expected to be has its positive incorporation in the leopard of the epigraph; heroic and mystifying in its drive and ability to ascend close to “19710 feet” (“Snows,” 52), the beast contrasts Harry’s negative condition. Though the ending of “Snows” suggests that Harry is about to join the leopard and, thus, be where he isn’t expected to be, it is the leopard that hovers over the whole story as its most compelling detail.

A feature of the hard-boiled detective novel as developed by Chandler’s mentor, Dashiell Hammett, is the thematically-widening inner parable, exemplified by the Flitcraft episode in The Maltese Falcon and the grisly tale of cannibalism in The Thin Man. Chandler’s own version of the device emphatically develops the theme I have been treating and secures the link between “Snows” and its parody. In the place of the leopard, Chandler employs a comic substitute. A “shiny black bug” has turned up in Detective Randall’s office, and that office is eighteen floors above the ground. Marlowe watches it bumble around, trapping itself in corners; it’s surely out of place. All the while, a theorizing Randall warns Marlowe that his presence in this murder case is an invasion of a territory where a private eye shouldn’t be. Marlowe flabbergasts the cop by seizing the bug and exclaiming, “‘Look...This room is eighteen floors above the ground. And this little bug climbs up here just to make a friend. Me. My lucky piece’” (FML, 184). When Marlowe leaves Randall’s office, he carries the bug with him to the place where it belongs—down and outside, behind a bush in a flower bed—and gets back to work on the case.

This emblematic insect that had gotten where it wasn’t expected to be comically parodies the key symbol of “Snows,” the enigmatic leopard; but Chandler reverses the patterns of “Snows”: bug and man live on, and man works on. The man has touched his lucky piece, and luck will continue to come his way, most helpfully in the form of Red Norgaard, a good ex-cop who gets Marlowe on board a ship where he is definitely not expected to be, but where he starts things rolling toward the climactic conclusion of the book. For Harry, luck had run out—his rich woman thought so, at any rate—and for quite a few other Hemingway heroes, too, which helps to explain why you might feel you’ve heard the “same thing over and over until you begin to believe it must be good”—or decide to laugh at it in the admiring corrective of parody.
NOTES

1 Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler, ed. by Frank MacShane (New York, 1981), pp. 12-13, 23, 293, 72, and 227 respectively.


3 Farewell, My Lovely (New York, 1976), pp. 133-138 and 191-200; hereafter cited in the text as FML.


5 Ibid., pp. 52-77; hereafter cited in the text as "Snows."