

## City of Sleuths

William Marling

The prototypical LA detective was invented in San Francisco by Dashiell Hammett. Whether his name was The Continental Op or Sam Spade, he was hard-boiled, with a blue-collar attitude, edgy repartee, and a close connection to his setting. Hammett used him to portray the city, its political corruption, its fog and docks and hills, its cab drivers and efficiency apartments. By 1925 the Op was already a working stiff who suffered for his drinking bouts. With a few changes, he became Sam Spade, the iconic hero of *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). In this novel and *The Glass Key* (1931), Hammett showed that the detective novel could be political allegory, cynical love story, or tale of tragic friendship. “Once a detective story can be as good as this,” wrote Raymond Chandler in “The Simple Art of Murder” (1944), “only the pedants will deny that it *could* be even better.”<sup>1</sup>

Los Angeles crime writers also drew inspiration from Raoul Whitfield, who moved to LA in 1929, drawn by the aviation and film industries. He developed Mel Ourney, an ex-con and sometime detective whose search for stolen emeralds combines geographic sweep and dubious morality in *Green Ice* (1930), and Ben Jardinn, who tracks the killer of a conductor killed while leading a concert in the Hollywood Bowl in *Death in a Bowl* (1932). Using the pen name Ramon Decolta, Whitfield also created Filipino detective Jo Gar, one of the first ethnic detectives. Another important precursor was Paul Cain, whose *Fast One* (1932) featured Gerry Kells, a minimalist version of Sam Spade so terse, so tough that one critic wrote he seemed to have been created with a scalpel.

The Great Depression was key to the creation of Los Angeles as a distinct detective terrain, for it led to reevaluation of American myths about self-creation, honesty, and upward mobility. When outsiders such as James M. Cain moved to LA for work in film, they tried to impose their preconceptions on the city. Meanwhile writers of longer residence, such as Chandler and Horace McCoy, offered local interpretations of the region for the national understanding. The result of this ideological jostling was that the “land of sunshine and oranges” was soon recast as “mean streets.” The outsiders made astronomical salaries: Hollywood paid Hammett \$1,000 a week to live in a penthouse at the Biltmore with a cook and driver. James M. Cain moved from the *New York World* for \$400 a week.<sup>2</sup> Their tone was literary and disillusioned, but the locals struggled in a pulp jungle. Chandler wrote his first stories for a penny a word. Horace McCoy, a bohemian aviator, wrote simultaneously for six pulp magazines to pay his bills. Down on his luck, he hired out as a bouncer at a marathon dance contest, which he later turned into *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935).

During the Depression, Southern California fared better than other regions. Los Angeles was active in the good government and municipal ownership movements; crime in the city was rather minor. As David Fine notes, the “noir” that LA novelists created was “contrapuntal,” a reaction against two fatigued metaphors: the Romantic view rooted in the Spanish past and the “Progressive” view of the city’s boosters. Annoyed by both versions of Los Angeles, the noir writers focused on the finiteness of the “man-made landscape — the roadside motor court, the dance hall at the edge of the ocean, the car on the Coast Highway — as images of deception, metaphors for betrayed hope.”<sup>3</sup>

James M. Cain initially praised California’s roads and schools, its courteous citizens and kind climate. But he was suspicious of the lack of smokestack industries supporting the good

life: he felt local economic life lacked “voltage” and began to look for a narrative that would epitomize his unease. His first success was “The Baby in the Ice Box,” which he sold to the studios. Then, with screenwriter Vincent Lawrence’s aid, he retold New York’s 1927 Gray-Snyder murder in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934).

Not a detective novel per se, *Postman* is the first major work of LA noir. It is a confession, told by the criminal, Frank Chambers, who kills the Greek owner of a roadside restaurant owner for his sensual wife Cora. The force that brings him to justice is the insurance industry; as the judge explains to Frank, “They’ll spend five times as much as Los Angeles County will let me put into a case. They’ve got detectives five times as good as any I’ll be able to hire. They know their stuff from A to izzard, and they’re right on your tail now. It means money to them.”<sup>4</sup> Cain’s style was widely copied: he avoided “he said” and “she said” speech tags, and his characters’ dialogue was brilliantly self-revealing. “They threw me off the hay truck about noon,” is Frank Chambers’ opening line, and he says that Cora’s lips “stuck out in a way that made me want to mash them in for her.”<sup>5</sup>

Cain followed with *Double Indemnity* (1936), which hewed more tightly to the Gray-Snyder case. Insurance salesman Walter Huff and blonde bombshell Phyllis Nirlinger plot to kill her husband, but to make it appear a suicide, collecting the double indemnity due in an accidental death. As quasi-detective, Huff’s boss, claims investigator Barton Keyes, tracks down the murderers. Listening to his intuitions, Keys unravels Huff’s perfect crime. The settings are quintessentially LA — a supermarket, a drugstore on Sunset and Vine, the Hollywood Hills — and driving is at once leisure, rendezvous, and means of crime.

Across town, Chandler and Erle Stanley Gardner were grinding out stories and meeting for dinner with veteran genre writers Dwight Babcock, Cleve Adams, and W. T. Ballard, who

invented the first “studio detective,” an investigator retained by a movie studio. They called themselves The Fictioneers. Gardner had moved to California when young and became a lawyer in Oxnard, then a wide open town of bars, brothels, and immigrants. After trying various protagonists and professions, Gardner hit on defense lawyer Perry Mason in *The Case of the Velvet Claws* (1933). Mason works at a modest LA office with his secretary, Della Street, and investigator Paul Drake. In print Mason is closer to the pulp magazine tradition and blunt about his line of work: “I’m a specialist in getting people out of trouble... If you look me up through some family lawyer or some corporation lawyer, he’ll probably tell you that I’m a shyster. If you look me up through some chap in the District Attorney’s office, he’ll tell you that I’m a dangerous antagonist.”<sup>6</sup> He juggles, conceals, and even creates evidence, misleads the police, breaks into apartments, and tampers with witnesses. He is always justified by the outcome, and excused by judges, for “If facts can be shuffled in such a way that it will confuse a witness who is not absolutely certain of his story ... I claim the attorney is within his rights.”<sup>7</sup>

In most ways, Mason is a generic, methodical version of Spade, one who talks, rather than punches, his way through cases. In other respects he is the foundational character of the LA police procedural, which develops after 1945. Like procedurals, Gardner’s novels are highly structured. The first quarter presents the charges against Mason’s client, while the second shows contrary evidence produced by Drake or contradictions uncovered by Mason. The second half, set in court, reveals the pettiness of human desires and grievances, or the fallibility of perception and everyday logic. The Perry Mason novels are not rich in landscape, however. Except for some Westerns and *The Case of the Drowsy Mosquito* (1943) Gardner’s settings are generically Southern Californian.

The opportunity to make Southern California geography work for detective fiction fell to Raymond Chandler, who brought an outsider's eye (he was raised in England and Ireland) and a classical education. When he fell for a married woman and lost his high-paying job in the oil industry during the Depression, Chandler enrolled in a correspondence course to learn to write fiction. He imitated Gardner's stories, taking five months to write his first story for the hard-boiled magazine *Black Mask*, for which he earned a penny a word.

Chandler arrived before the explosive growth of Los Angeles, and as part of an elite — he socialized with the “Arroyo Culture” — he maintained a foreigner's sense of the exotic. He found the orange groves, oil derricks, film studios, tycoons' mansions, and Chinatowns visually important in a way Gardner had missed. He thought the scandals of Teapot Dome and the Julian Trust, of Mabel Normand and Fatty Arbuckle, not to mention the booze smuggling and gambling boats off the coast, evidence of a general moral slipperiness.

Indicative of his literary background and chivalric attitude, Chandler named his first detective after the author of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Mallory works in a city where “the languid ray of a searchlight prodded about among high faint clouds. ... The car went past the oil well that stands in the middle of La Cienega Boulevard, then turned off onto a quiet street fringed with palm trees.”<sup>8</sup> Blackmail and kidnapping became Chandler's favorite plots, the first threatening reputation and the second the body, both prized commodities in Los Angeles. But he wrote slowly, so Chandler needed a novel to make ends meet. He fused four early stories to make *The Big Sleep* (1939), in which he fleshed out his legendary detective Philip Marlowe, thus: “I'm thirty-three years old, went to college once and can still speak English if there's any demand for it. There isn't much in my trade. I worked for Mr. Wilde, the District Attorney, as an investigator once. ... I'm unmarried because I don't like police-men's wives.” And he adds, “I was fired. For

insubordination. I test very high on insubordination.”<sup>9</sup> This insubordination, crossed with irony, proved attractive for a readership that worked in offices and on assembly lines but rebelled against the faceless nature of life. So did his style: a big man for the time at six feet and 190 pounds, he smokes Camels at work and a pipe at home, drinks American whiskies or bourbon. He drives a convertible with a secret compartment for a gun and sometimes a bottle of rye, even though he lives in an efficiency apartment with little more than a Murphy bed and “a few books, pictures, radio, chessmen, old letters, stuff like that.”<sup>10</sup>

Like Cain, Chandler had an eye for California oddities. In one short story he featured the Santa Ana winds, which fanned fires and supposedly encouraged crime. In several he used rain as an emblem of strangeness. His settings included the La Crescenta flood plain in the San Fernando Valley, Japanese truck gardens in Orange County, Santa Monica, the foothills, and the flophouses of the Central district. Chandler also polished the detective novel’s repartee, incorporating self-deprecation, literary allusions, and a metaphoric exuberance that has seldom been matched.

Chandler pushed the Los Angeles detective novel towards an archetypal crime, the LA Murder. Beginning with “Try the Girl” (1937), his revealed stories — what the denouement reveals actually to have occurred, as distinct from what appears to be the case as the story unfolds — focus on a female murderer who manipulates men for economic gain. In his first novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939), Marlowe works for General Sternwood, an oil pioneer whose daughter Carmen murders her sister’s husband. Marlowe is hired to find out who is blackmailing the Sternwoods, who turn out to be the objects of extortion, pornography, gambling, and kidnapping plots. These threats come from a hierarchy of criminals who are uniformly sleazy, but more talk than action. All their rackets are united, in Marlowe’s opinion, and depend on the

complicity of government and the easy morals of the aristocracy. Chandler made LA geography political on Marlowe's first visit to the Sternwood mansion, where he finds the General rustivating in his greenhouse of orchids and saving his strength "as carefully as an out-of-work showgirl uses her last good pair of stockings." The detective notes that he

could just barely see some of the old wooden derricks of the oil-field where the Sternwoods had made their money. Most of the field was public park now, cleaned up and donated to the city by General Sternwood. ... The Sternwoods, having moved up the hill, could no longer smell the stale sump water or the oil, but they could still look out of their front windows and see what had made them rich. If they wanted to. I didn't suppose they would want to.

The novel ends at the oil-field, where the body of Rusty Regan, dumped into the sump, now is "sleeping the big sleep."<sup>11</sup> The Sternwoods' aristocratic "degeneracy" serves as a cautionary example, distancing Marlowe from the Romantic and Arroyo interpretations of LA history.

A new interpretation of LA crime crystallized in *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940). The perps are no longer the Old Guard, but newcomers like mobster Laird Brunette, grotesque giant Moose Malloy, corrupt police chief Wax, and psychic Jules Amthor. Opposing them are "the Folks," — older, earlier, white migrants like Chandler himself. They include Lieutenant Randall Nulty, Mrs. Florian, Mrs. Morrison, Red Norgaard and Ann Riordan, who is "the kind of girl Marlowe would have married, had he been the marrying kind."<sup>12</sup> In Chandler's view, the Folks were threatened by the avaricious behavior of new arrivals, such as Mrs. Grayle, who use any means to work their ways up the economic ladder.

This novel's settings are among the most original and distinctive of any LA detective novel. Santa Monica, which Chandler had always disliked, becomes "Bay City." Run by corrupt Chief Wax, Bay City is now the focus of fraud. Farther up the coast, in what would be Malibu, are the celebrity psychic, Amthor, his "Hollywood Indian" Second Planting, and fey middle-man Lindsey Marriot. What is clear is that Chandler plotted a political geography of the LA Basin. Marlowe lives and works in Hollywood and downtown, while Santa Monica lies at the end of a vector of development that pushed out Wilshire Boulevard around 1921. The only real crime arises from gangster Tony Cornero's two gambling boats three miles off-shore, in international waters, accessible from Venice Beach, to the south, which Chandler stigmatized with a carnevalesque atmosphere of cheap, and possibly homosexual, sexuality. The real subject of Chandler's ire is development of the sort represented by the Huntington (Pacific) Palisades, at the end of Wilshire Boulevard. Just north of here Marlowe smirks on seeing "a broad avenue lined with unfinished electroliers and weed-grown sidewalks. Some realtor's dream that turned into a hangover there."<sup>13</sup> Marlowe prefers the older, aristocratic community of Hancock Park and Anne Riordan's middle-class LA. Thus did Chandler create the first LA detective novel in which we must read geography as a historical and socio-economic system.

Neither *The High Window* (1943) nor *The Lady in the Lake* (1945) advanced Chandler's art, but they did specify this geographic reading. Set in Pasadena, *The High Window* thematizes the blankness (its most common trope is "nothing") of a young woman from South Dakota who emigrates to LA. Better is *The Lady in the Lake*, split between Bay City and Little Fawn Lake (Big Bear Lake); it features mountain cabins, San Bernardino motels, and long drives to the mountains and high desert, as well as another of Chandler's dope-dealing doctors, Dr. Almore,

and a small town drunk, Bill Chess. The clientele and terrain presage the work of Ross MacDonald, who reworked the plot in *The Zebra Striped Hearse* (1962).

Chandler then roused himself to write a classic American detective novel, *The Long Goodbye* (1953). Preserving the traditional functions of the genre and role of the detective as knight, this work explores the alienation of modern man through three central characters: the rogue Terry Lennox (a version of Chandler in his youth), Philip Marlowe (an idealized Chandler), and hack novelist Roger Wade (Chandler's blackest self-portrait). This path-breaking detective novel also manages to be self-critical autobiography and sociological commentary. While its back story lies in WWII Europe, the novel's present extends to Tijuana, and even Otatoclan, Mexico, where Terry Lennox hides, further expanding the geographic and racial compass of the LA crime novel. As in *The Big Sleep*, the oligarchy are still culprits, but they are placed deeper in the background. The metaphors are toned down, the number of digressions and soliloquies increased — the latter bitter but sharply observed. The bane of this world-weary Marlowe are huge enterprises — press, law, courts, police, and crime — that form a monolith in which good and evil are indistinguishable. Everything in the Southland is now big and interconnected: press baron Harlan Potter summers with Nevada gambling chief Chris Mady. Marlowe still works on the sixth floor of the Cahuenga Building and plays chess, but he lives in a spacious house in Laurel Canyon; a Japanese gardener cuts his oleander bushes. If the novel is weary and cynical, it is nonetheless “the vision of a complete novelist.”<sup>14</sup>

Using the pen name Ross Macdonald, Ken Millar developed the capacity for social analysis and criticism implicit in *The Long Goodbye* in his seventeen Lew Archer novels. Archer still resembles Spade and Marlowe — he's single, a brawler who smokes and drinks and likes women — but the roots of his cases run deep into family dramas and generational conflict.

Millar was born in the U.S but raised in Canada, to which his parents returned when he was four. So he, too, brought an outsider's perspective to LA. Millar led a Dickensian childhood — his impoverished mother took him on the streets to beg and almost put him in an orphanage. Despite academic talents and literary ambition, Millar drank and fought continuously; he stole from school lockers and stores, and had what biographer Tom Nolan calls “homosexual incidents with other boys.” In his early teens he read *The Maltese Falcon* and discovered that “like iron filings magnetized by the book in my hands, the secret meanings of the city began to organize themselves around me.”<sup>15</sup>

Millar named Lew Archer after Sam Spade's partner, Miles Archer, and made him a Gemini (or twin). That his initials formed *L. A.*, where he worked at 8411 ½ Sunset Blvd., was a happy coincidence. For his cases, Archer went often to Santa Teresa (Santa Barbara), where the rich exploited the poor, especially the Mexicans. Knopf didn't think much of Millar's first novel, *The Moving Target*, so Millar used the pseudonym of “John Macdonald.” This was the ignoble birth of what the *New York Times* would later call “the finest series of detective stories ever written by an American.”<sup>16</sup> With his sixth novel, *The Drowning Pool* (1950), John Macdonald was given the middle name Ross, to avoid confusion with John D. MacDonald; “John” was dropped beginning with *The Barbarous Coast* (1955).

Millar began to study the rich of Montecito for *The Drowning Pool* and even joined the Coral Casino Beach Club, eavesdropping its members, teaching himself to platform dive, and swimming a daily half mile in the sea. “Montecito was a hotbed of hard drinking, wife-swapping, and all kinds of scandalous stuff,” said a friend. “This was a dangerous social set,” writes Nolan, “witty and accomplished, but reckless in pursuit of pleasure.”<sup>17</sup> Tragedy among the privileged, the sort that Macdonald wrote about, struck the Millars when their daughter drove a car into

three boys, killing one. They hired counsel and clammed up, an irony not lost on the writer, who had criticized such behavior and used hit-run accidents as a paradigm of local immorality in his novels.

Meanwhile, other Los Angeles writers developed the “police procedural.” Police work had been the subject of dime novels in the 1880s, and after WWII there were millions of ex-soldiers interested in military policing and questions of public order. The LAPD novel owes its existence to Jack (John Randolph) Webb, who grew up in LA’s Bunker Hill neighborhood. After serving in the Pacific, Webb turned to San Francisco radio in 1946. A role as a crime lab technician in *He Walked by Night*, based on the murder of a California Highway Patrolman, gave him the kernel of *Dragnet*, which he developed with the aid of LAPD Sergeant Marty Wynn and Chief William H. Parker, whom Webb made into an icon of fair and efficient Anglo-Saxon policing. *Dragnet* ran on radio from 1949-54 and on television from 1952-9 and 1967-70 starring Webb as Sergeant Joe Friday. Its sign-on — “The story you are about to see is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent.” — became legendary. Webb intended to show the reality of police work and to depict policemen as working-class heroes, but his only literary effort, *The Badge* (1958), was almost adulatory. The LAPD was then lionized in popular narrative for the next four decades in television series and movies like *Adam-12*, *The Terminator*, *Blue Thunder*, *Die Hard*, *The Shield*, *Lethal Weapon* and *Rush Hour*. This era was dominated by three police chiefs — William Parker (1950-66), Edward Davis (1969-78) and Daryl Gates (1978-92) — under whom the force became overwhelmingly white (80%) and suburban (80%).<sup>18</sup> From the 1966 Watts riots onward, it was also identified as racist. During the 1966 Watts riots, Parker called participants “monkeys in the zoo,” and Gates, who created the first SWAT team in

the US was forced to resign in 1992, after disturbances arising from the acquittal of the LAPD officers who beat Rodney King by a mostly white, suburban jury.<sup>19</sup>

During the Davis epoch, however, the LA police procedural was transformed by Joseph Wambaugh, a patrolman and detective from 1960 to 1974. *The New Centurions* (1971) traces young men through the police academy, their first assignments, and into the Watts riots of 1965. From idealists they evolve into corrupt warriors who feel they have been sent futilely into the trenches. The novel strides back into the Central District and ethnic neighborhoods that Chandler visited but that MacDonald ignored. In *The Blue Knight* (1972), Wambaugh depicted the last three days in a twenty-year veteran's police career. Bump Morgan had accepted free meals, roughed up informers, and solicited prostitutes, believing that he was the law. Occasionally he arrested someone, but his informal justice was more feared, until he perjured himself during a trial, which provides the matrix of the novel.

Even darker was *The Choirboys* (1975). Ten cops from the Wilshire Division meet after hours in LA's MacArthur Park to relieve their stress through "choir practice": drinking, storytelling, group sex with barmaids, and violence. They accidentally kill a gay teenager while drinking, and the resulting investigation provides the structure of the novel. The officers range from brutal "Rosco" Rules, who hates LA and lives 60 miles east near Chino, to culturally confused Francis Taniguchi, raised in the *barrio* and trying to prove that he is a Chicano. Not only is *The Choirboys* the most informed and savage depiction of the LAPD ever written, it shows the police and those they "defend" to be only slightly different than those they arrest, with race the most common determining factor.

Wambaugh became so notorious that he had to take a leave of absence, during which he wrote *The Onion Field*. The true story of officers Ian Campbell and Karl Hettinger, this novel is

often compared to Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. In 1963 the officers pulled over a car in Hollywood, only to be taken hostage by a pair of small-time criminals who had just robbed a liquor store. They were driven to an onion field near Bakersfield where Campbell was killed. Though convicted, the criminals were never executed. "I was put on earth to write this story," Wambaugh said. "Nothing could ever stop me ... I felt it was my sole reason for living."<sup>20</sup> Wambaugh also created *Police Story*, a television series that reversed the tone and themes of *Dragnet*.

Overlapping the police procedural is the LA historic crime novel, mastered by James Ellroy, who also subverted the heroic LAPD procedural. At his best, Ellroy evokes the sights, sounds, and feel of Los Angeles in the 1940s. Born in LA, Ellroy lived with his mother, who "drank Early Times bourbon and chased men"<sup>21</sup> before she was strangled after leaving a bar with a man and woman. The next year his father gave Ellroy *The Badge* by Webb, which included a summary of the "Black Dahlia" case: Elizabeth Short, a starlet and sometime prostitute, had been found naked in 1947, her body cut completely in half. Ellroy would link these cases, neither ever solved, in his best work, known as the "LA Quartet." The first novel, *The Black Dahlia* (1987), is the best known. An extraordinary re-creation of LA police politics, racial and sexual attitudes, and slang of the 1940s, Ellroy's novel is true to the facts of the crime, but fictionalizes the solution. Ellroy also perfected an LA crime/scene — the "body dump" — whose liminal location has had a strong pull on the imagination of crime in LA *The Big Nowhere* (1988) is a lesser novel, but *L.A. Confidential* (1990) and *White Jazz* (1992), a stream-of-consciousness tour de force, are significant works. In *L.A. Confidential*, (also a 1997 film) one of the characters moonlights as technical advisor to *Badge of Honor*, an allusion to *Dragnet*.

The world of LA minorities, initially marginalized by the Masons and Marlowes and then repressed by the LAPD procedural, was reclaimed by Ezekial “Easy” Rawlins, the African-American detective of Walter Mosley. The background of *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990), from details of the 1940s to the protagonist’s early job in an aircraft plant, is indebted to Chester Himes’s *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), but from there Mosley recaptures the “Central” district of Chandler and extends the geography of the LA detective to the black communities of Watts and Compton. Worried about paying his mortgage, Easy takes \$100 to find a blonde, Daphne Monet, who favors nightclubs on the black side of town. She has stolen \$30,000 of her white patron’s money which, after an immersion in the world of sexual debauchery and race politics that leads her to kill one man, she splits with Easy and his violent sidekick Mouse. Easy has a distant and antagonistic relation to the LAPD; instead, Mosley thematizes Easy’s pride in home ownership and ends the novel with him watering his yard and pondering the morality of the justice that has transpired. In *A Red Death* (1991), Easy owns apartment buildings he bought with stolen money that he recovered and kept. Pursued by the IRS, he cooperates by spying on a union organizer, and again extortion and murder have underworld roots. The third Easy Rawlins novel, *White Butterfly* (1994), is set in 1956. Easy helps police investigate the murders of four young women, one of whom, a UCLA student and daughter of a city official, led a double life as a stripper. These novels prize the vernacular details of African-American life, but emphasize the constant compromises required to “get along with the Man.” Mosley’s recent work has departed from the genre; his mantle has been taken up by Gar Anthony Haywood, whose detective Aaron Gunner operates from an office behind a Watts barber-shop in *Fear of the Dark* (1989) and *All the Lucky Ones are Dead* (2000). Haywood’s novels are more driven by dialog and less violent than Mosley’s. Most recently Paula Woods has brought the African-American LA sleuth novel

full circle, introducing black LAPD Detective Charlotte Justice (*Inner City Blues* [1999], *Stormy Weather* [2001], *Dirty Laundry* [2005], and *Strange Bedfellows* [2006]).

Lucha Corpi and Michael Nava have created Chicano/a detectives. In Corpi's *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* (1992), Detective Gloria Damasco and her friend find a four-year-old boy dead during a Chicano Civil Rights march in Los Angeles in 1970. She returns to the case eighteen years later, employing a "dark gift" that allows her to dream and to see answers to problems. *Cactus Blood* (1995) is set in Delano during the farmworkers' strike of 1973, and *Black Widow's Wardrobe* (2000) delves into folklore. Nava weaves Chicano history and folklore in his stories of detective Henry Rios, a gay lawyer, who moves from San Francisco to Los Angeles in *How Town* (1990) and investigates the city in *The Hidden Law* (1992), *The Death of Friends* (1996), *The Burning Plain* (1997) and *Rag and Bone* (2001).

Other contemporary LA crime writers include Sue Grafton who, like Ross Macdonald, works in Santa Barbara (Santa Teresa); however, her detective Kinsey Millhone lives in the converted garage of octogenarian Henry Pitts, drives a beat-up Volkswagen, dresses in jeans, eats junk food, and jogs for exercise. Millhone is a loner with a code, who works for just causes. Grafton doesn't stretch the genre and her narratives are notably lacking in violence, but her revealed plots insightfully question gender roles and explore social issues. *T is for Trespass* (2007) alternates points of view between Millhone and the culprit, Solana Rojas, a "chameleon" who assumes the identities of others in order to steal from them.

The contemporary LA detective novel shows breadth and depth. Michael Connelly, who worked as a crime reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, updates the romantic LA detective to include the reality of time cards and weekend rotations in his 12 "Harry Bosch" L.A.P.D. novels published between 1996 and 2008. Another police procedural writer, T. Jefferson Parker, has

written 15 novels set mostly in Orange County or San Diego. Better known is Jonathan Kellerman, whose child psychologist detective Alex Delaware stars in 21 novels. Denise Hamilton, another ex-*Times* reporter, has written five detective novels about reporter Eve Diamond, who investigates crime in the local Latino, Asian, and Russian communities. LA's Orthodox Jewish community provides the settings for Faye Kellerman's 17 novels about police detective Peter Decker and Rina Lazarus, and Rochelle Majer Krich has nine Jewish-themed PI novels. There is a throwback: Stuart Kaminsky's Toby Peters is a private detective who investigates film stars in 1940s Hollywood. Kem Nunn has pioneered a "surfer/noir" variation of the detective in a trilogy (*Tapping the Source*, 1984; *Dogs of Winter*, 1997; and *Tijuana Straits*, 2004) that pursues the environmental themes to which Macdonald, an avid birder, turned in *The Underground Man* (1971), set during the 1964 Coyote Canyon fire, and *Sleeping Beauty* (1973), whose central event is the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill.

Although LA gained a place in detective fiction rather late, it has become an iconic locale. Films such as *Chinatown* have reinforced the mystique. Combining important industries such as oil, aviation, and cinema with terrain stretching from the Pacific over mountains to high desert, Los Angeles has offered writers endless possibilities. Its twentieth-century evolution into a highly multicultural city presages LA's continued importance in the genre.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," *Later Novels and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1995), p. 990.

<sup>2</sup> Diane Johnson, *Dashiell Hammett: A Life* (New York: Random House, 1983), pp. 90-108; Roy Hoopes, *Cain* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), p. 214.

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<sup>3</sup> David M. Fine, Introduction, *Los Angeles In Fiction: A Collection of Original Essays*, ed. Fine (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, in *Crime Novels: American Noir of the 1930s and 40s*, ed. Robert Polito (New York: Library of America, 1997), p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Erle Stanley Gardner, *The Case of the Velvet Claws* (New York: Fawcett, 1985), p. xx.

<sup>7</sup> Gardner, *The Case of the Long-Legged Models* (New York: Fawcett, 1994), p. 98.

<sup>8</sup> Chandler, "Blackmailers Don't Shoot" (1933), *Stories and Early Novels* (New York: Library of America, 1995), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, in *Stories and Early Novels*, p. 594.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 708.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 593, 602-3, 764.

<sup>12</sup> Chandler, quoted in Phillip Durham, *Down These Mean Street a Man Must Go: Raymond Chandler's Knight* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely*, in *Stories and Early Novels*, p. 810.

<sup>14</sup> Frank MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Nolan, *Ross Macdonald: A Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1999), pp. 27, 31.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> Jim Newton, "ACLU Says 83% of Police Live Outside L.A." *Los Angeles Times* 29 March 1994, B1.

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<sup>19</sup> See Anthony Oberschall, "The Los Angeles Riot of August 1965," *Social Problems* 15.3 (1968), 322-41.

<sup>20</sup> Wambaugh, quoted in Evan Hunter, "Author Interview," *Playboy*, July, 1979, 69.

<sup>21</sup> James Ellroy, "The Sub-Definitive Ellroy on Ellroy," *Richmond Review* 2003  
[www.richmondreview.co.uk/features/ellsound.html](http://www.richmondreview.co.uk/features/ellsound.html).