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**ELEMENTS OF *ROMAN NOIR* AND HARD-BOILED FICTION
IN DENNIS LEHANE'S *SHUTTER ISLAND* (2003)**

BA thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to analyze the elements of hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir* in Dennis Lehane's novel *Shutter Island* (2003). This study will highlight the differences and similarities between the two subgenres and analyze the elements of both in the book.

The thesis consists of an introduction, literature review, an empirical study of the novel and a conclusion.

The introduction provides the context for the novel, its author and defines the terms used for analysis (hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir*). The literature review defines the key elements of hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir*, highlights the differences and similarities of the two subgenres and provides an overview of how the author's work has been characterized by scholars, in reviews of his writings as well as by Lehane himself.

The empirical study identifies and analyzes elements of hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir* in Lehane *Shutter Island* by analyzing the narrative, the role of the unreliable narrator, atmospheric elements and the characteristics of the main character, Teddy Daniels. The analysis explores how Lehane combines elements of hard-boiled and *noir* fiction to create a complex and compelling story that challenges the conventions of traditional detective stories.

The conclusion summarizes the main findings of the thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

Dennis Lehane is an American author known for his works in the crime fiction genre. Some of his most popular works include *Mystic River* (2001), *Gone, Baby, Gone* (1998), *Shutter Island* (2003), and *The Given Day* (2008). This thesis will examine his psychological thriller novel *Shutter Island* (2003). The novel has received generally positive reviews from critics and readers. Many book reviews from readers available on Goodreads praise Lehane's novel for its suspenseful storytelling, psychological twists, and ability to keep readers guessing until the end (Goodreads n.d.). Patrick Anderson (2003), who regularly reviews crime fiction for *The Washington Post*, states that Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island* is a thrilling exploration of madness, violence, and deceit. He compares the storytelling to that of Edgar Allan Poe but also mentions the novel's postmodern storytelling techniques. The novel gained additional recognition in 2010 when it was adapted into a successful film directed by Martin Scorsese, with Leonardo DiCaprio in the lead role.

This thesis aims to identify and analyze the elements of two subgenres of crime fiction – hard-boiled detective fiction and *roman noir* – in Dennis Lehane's novel *Shutter Island*. This thesis will determine the similarities and differences of the two subgenres and identify the elements which prevail in the novel.

Hard-boiled fiction emerged in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. It features tough, unsentimental protagonists who are often private detectives or police officers and who operate in a violent and corrupt world (McCann 2010: 42-43). *Roman noir* first emerged in France during the 1940s and 1950s. While hard-boiled fiction is mainly action-oriented, *roman noir* explores darker and more complex themes such as human nature and social issues (Glover 2003: 145-46). In addition, hard-boiled fiction usually separates the good guys from the bad, but in *noir*, the right and wrong are not always defined (Horsley 2009: 139). Although the two subgenres have distinct differences, there are also many overlaps,

which is why many of the same authors are associated with both hard-boiled fiction and the *noir* genre: James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Jim Thompson, Cornell Woolrich, Patricia Highsmith, David Goodis, and Mickey Spillane (Pepper 2010: 58).

This thesis consists of two parts. The first part defines the elements and themes in hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir*, with attention to their differences and similarities. The second part analyzes how Lehane incorporates these elements into *Shutter Island*. The elements of hard-boiled fiction I will look at include the descriptions of the island's atmosphere and surroundings, the structure of the narrative, and the main characteristics of the character Teddy Daniels. The features of the *roman noir* genre I will be examining include the psychological state of the main character, Teddy Daniels, by focusing on his thoughts, feelings, and instances where Teddy is forced to make tough decisions and confront difficult truths about himself or the world around him. I will also examine the novel's narrative, the unreliable narrator, and any changes in the atmosphere of the novel.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW: HARDBOILED FICTION AND *ROMAN NOIR*

1.1 Hard-boiled fiction

During the 1920s, there was a surge in crime rates in the U.S. following World War I. People became interested in reading stories that portrayed the realities of the industrial metropolis and solving of the crimes. The hard-boiled crime story first emerged during this time as a distinct style of adventure narrative. The main difference from the typical adventure story, which usually involves exploring an imaginary world, was that hard-boiled stories were portraying a more complex and recognizable world with tough protagonists, violent crime, and realistic depictions of urban life (McCann 2010: 42). John Scaggs (2005: 145) offers the following definition of hard-boiled fiction:

A type of fiction whose style is derived from the tough-guy prose associated with Ernest Hemingway, and which was developed in the pulp fiction of the 1920s and 1930s in America. The hard-boiled style is terse, tough, and cynical, like the hard-boiled detectives it features, and the typical hard-boiled story is one of violence, sex, and betrayal.

The first hard-boiled stories were published in pulp magazines and gained widespread popularity among ordinary people as they provided cheap entertainment and a form of escape from everyday life. The characters in these stories were described as real people who experienced pain and emotions like everyone else (McCann 2010: 42-43). The classic British detective characters, such as Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot, have often been depicted as detached and immune to danger, but the hard-boiled detective is portrayed as someone who is directly involved in the violent, dishonest, and corrupt world of crime (Horsley 2009: 137). An influential pulp editor, Joseph Shaw, wrote that these new characters were a shift from some of the previous “dummies stuffed into the clothes of the parts they are supposed to act” (McCann 2010: 43).

Some of the most influential writers in the hard-boiled genre include Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, Cornell Woolrich and Mickey Spillane.

Hammett's and Chandler's writings included many of the key characteristics that would later become defining elements of the hard-boiled subgenre, such as a fast-paced and action-packed plot, tough streetwise characters, an isolated and bleak setting, a dark cynical tone, as well as a focus on crime and violence (Scaggs 2005: 55-56). The dark and cynical tone is usually conveyed through vivid descriptions of violent acts, corruption and the language used by the characters as well as in the depressing and realistic descriptions of the surroundings and the atmosphere (McCann 2010: 42).

One of the most important elements of a hard-boiled story is the hard-boiled detective. Ranta Raina (2008: 17-18) claims that hard-boiled detectives are depicted as "tough loners" who do not need others in their lives. These detectives usually either work alone or trust a very small circle of people. They are commonly characterized by a troubled past and pessimistic outlook on life. Carroll John Daly's detective character, Race Williams, was an early example of the hard-boiled detective in fiction, published in the *Black Mask* magazine during the 1920s. Williams is a large, tough, and cynical man. The detective's toughness and no-nonsense attitude are revealed in his desire to solve crimes without being afraid to use confrontation or violence to do so. The cynical side of the hard-boiled detective can be seen in his distrust of other people (Scaggs 2005: 55-57).

Scaggs (2005: 55) writes that while Daly was originally an important contributor to the development of hard-boiled fiction, his detective Race Williams was quickly replaced by more popular fictional detectives, such as Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, who had an even greater impact on the genre. Scaggs also claims that Hammett's *Red Harvest* is considered a classic example of a hard-boiled fiction story, and his male detective Continental Op is the one who really gave this genre its name, when Hammett described Continental Op as a "hard-boiled, pig-headed guy"

(Hammett 1992: 85). All these authors have contributed to setting the prototype for the traditional hard-boiled detective.

The authors who have written on this topic have varied opinions on whether the hard-boiled detective genre has distinct characteristics and rules that should be followed or whether there is room for change. John Scaggs (2005: 57) argues that the genre is classified as predominantly American. He goes on to say that early hard-boiled fiction includes three classic characteristics of the American style: a threatening and isolated Californian setting, an urban cowboy detective, fast-paced and slangy language, and storylines that follow early hard-boiled fiction reflecting the social, economic, and political conditions in the USA during the 1920s.

In contrast, Andrew Pepper (2010: 142-143) argues that although the hard-boiled genre is often associated with the 1920s *Black Mask* magazine pulp and thus seen as American, it has since been reconceived in various ways and by a variety of writers from different countries, such as Spain, Mexico, Australia, etc., and that it should not be considered as being purely American or period-based anymore. He also claims that the characteristics of hard-boiled fiction are not rock-solid and unchangeable and that authors do not need to follow certain characteristics. John Frow (2006: 67) seconds that opinion by claiming that texts may exhibit certain genre conventions or characteristics, but that does not mean that they must belong exclusively to one genre or another. This means that different writings always alter a genre to some extent by using its rules and characteristics and that the hard-boiled detective genre should not be limited to classic rules.

1.2 Roman noir

Philip Simpson (2010: 189) describes *roman noir* in the following way: “Noir’s universe is bleak, divested of meaning. Flawed human beings in these stories must somehow make moral decisions with no transcendent foundation of morality on which to base them. The consequences of those decisions are frequently fatal and always tragic to someone.” The term *roman noir* (“black novel” in English) specifically refers to a genre that emerged in France in the 1940s and 1950s. It was first used in the French book series, *Série noire*, in 1945 by Gallimard. The series was founded, edited, and translated by Marcel Duhamel. *Série noire* included books from authors such as James Hadley Chase, Peter Cheyney, Cornell Woolrich, David Goodis, and Jim Thompson (Glover 2003: 145). *Noir* is darker and more cynical than hard-boiled fiction: while hard-boiled fiction focuses more on the action and crime itself, *noir* puts emphasis on how the main characters go through feelings of guilt and deal with failure (Horsley 2009: 139). The *noir* genre explores the darker aspects of human nature and the setting or mood of the novel is usually also more grim and hopeless.

Even though Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett’s works were not published in Gallimard’s collection, some of their novels are known to contain many of the classic elements of *roman noir*. Several of the authors who are associated with the hard-boiled genre are also known for writing *noir* fiction, since their work often incorporates elements of both. As mentioned before, Hammett’s *Red Harvest* is often cited as the first hard-boiled American crime novel, but according to Pepper (2010: 58) some people believe it is also the first American *roman noir*. Philip Simpson (2010: 190) claims that “Hammett’s work is prototypically *noir* in the way it establishes the thematic landscape of corruption, violence, pathological sexuality, and psychological character study”. Similarly to hard-boiled, fiction can be characterized by a bleak, cynical tone and a focus on crime.

Noir narratives are typically told through the perspective of an unreliable narrator, who can be confused and fraudulent themselves (Horsley 2009: 139). This narrative technique offers an insight into the protagonist's experiences, thoughts, and feelings, which often misleads the reader into trusting them. It is a clever way to turn a traditional detective novel upside down and include a major twist, for example, revealing that the detective is a madman himself (Kressa 2013: 28). Horsley (2009: 139-140) states that "The roles occupied by this character are not fixed: victim can turn aggressor or perpetrator, the hunted man can become the hunter." Unlike hard-boiled stories, where the story ends with a clear and satisfying conclusion of the crime being solved and justice being restored, *noir* narratives intentionally avoid this satisfactory ending of the story's conflict or mystery. This is done to challenge the idea that there can always be an easy solution or a clear-cut villain to blame. Instead, the story demonstrates the complexity and ambiguity of real-life situations where guilt and responsibility cannot be easily assigned or resolved.

Lee Horsley (2009: 140) claims that the *noir* genre's bitter and cynical tone is achieved through its portrayal of characters who are alone, disconnected, and powerless. Horsley (2001: 16) adds that it is common for *noir* narratives to have their characters go through a traumatic event that completely changes their view of life. They are trapped in a corrupt and unchanging society where they feel that no one is giving them hope for redemption or a better life. This bleak representation of the world and the characters' situations adds to *roman noir's* overall feeling of pessimism and existential despair. Horsley (2009: 141) also claims that since the *noir* genre largely emerged as a response to growing dissatisfaction and skepticism in American society, the protagonist's struggles often seem to be caused by the unpredictability and senselessness of life as well as the injustices of their own society. Similarly to Horsley, Andrew Pepper (2010: 65) writes that, in comparison to film *noir*, American authors who write *noir* novels usually do not use psychology to explain

why their characters act in strange or unusual ways and instead tend to focus more on how the characters' actions are influenced by their social and political situations.

1.3 Differences and similarities between the two subgenres

Hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir* are two subgenres with notable differences and similarities. While both subgenres involve crime and morally complex characters, they have some differences in their narrative styles. Hard-boiled fiction is characterized by tough characters and a fast-paced, action-oriented plot. It focuses on crime, violence, and betrayal (Scaggs 2005: 145). In contrast, *roman noir* delves into themes of guilt, failure, and the bleak aspects of human nature (Horsley 2009: 139). One similarity that both hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir* have in common is a bleak and cynical tone. However, a distinction lies in the fact that *roman noir* has a darker and more existential tone than hard-boiled fiction, primarily due to its exploration of darker themes.

In hard-boiled fiction, detectives consistently serve as the main characters, driving the narrative through their investigations and interactions. They are tough and independent individuals who actively engage with the criminal world, relying on their practicality and willingness to use violence. These detectives usually work alone or trust a very small circle of people (Scaggs 2005: 55-57). On the other hand, while detective characters may be present in *roman noir*, they are not always central to the genre. Instead, the focus shifts towards flawed human characters grappling with internal struggles and moral dilemmas. *Noir* characters are usually portrayed as isolated, disconnected, and powerless, trapped in a corrupt society that offers little hope for redemption (Horsley 2009: 139-140). In *roman noir*, the emphasis lies on the complexities of these characters' lives, rather than the detectives' actions. The narrative often employs an unreliable narrator's perspective, blurring the line between victim and aggressor (Horsley 2009: 140).

Another difference between the two subgenres is that hard-boiled stories and *noir* narratives have different ways of solving conflicts. Hard-boiled stories usually follow a pattern where the detective solves the crime, catches the bad guys, and restores order. This gives readers a sense of closure and reinforces a clear sense of right and wrong. In contrast, *noir* narratives intentionally break this pattern. In *roman noir*, solving the crime or the protagonist's personal struggle doesn't always bring justice or a definite answer, reflecting the moral ambiguity of the real world (Horsley 2009: 140).

Despite some of their differences, there are notable similarities between hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir*. Some authors, such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, have made significant contributions to both subgenres. Their works incorporate elements from both hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir*, blurring the boundaries between the two (Pepper 2010: 28). As mentioned before, the two subgenres share similarities in tone as well as in their focus on crime. Additionally, both subgenres gained popularity as forms of affordable entertainment for ordinary readers (McCann 2010: 42). Both *roman noir* and hard-boiled fiction can also be flexible. While they have their own unique elements, they are not strictly defined. Authors diverge from or blend elements of these subgenres, creating stories that go beyond traditional limits.

In conclusion, while hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir* are distinct subgenres with differences in narrative styles and approaches to resolving conflicts, they also share similarities such as a focus on crime, morally complex characters, and a bleak and cynical tone.

1.4 Dennis Lehane

This part of the thesis will focus on how Dennis Lehane's writing has been classified in reviews of his novels and how the author classifies his own works. In an interview with Dennis Lehane, he was asked about what essentially drew him to write crime fiction. Lehane places himself among "the new renaissance writers of noir" and adds that the initial desire to compose in this style came from wanting to write about the social issues in the 1990s USA. His first novel, *A Drink Before War* (1994), was about racism and domestic violence. The author quickly made a name for himself with this award-winning first book and has since been called a major figure in the *noir* genre, with fellow crime fiction author Michael Connelly even calling him the "heir apparent" (Guttridge 2001).

Lehane adds that violence has always been a theme in his books and that he is fascinated by the reasons behind violent acts and what exactly drives people to commit them. This interest also led him to the *noir* genre (Murphy 2004). These themes are also apparent in his novel *Shutter Island*, where the protagonist is haunted by his violent past and attempts to overcome his inner demons (Lehane 2003). Lehane has also mentioned that *Shutter Island* draws inspiration from the Gothic genre, B-movies, and pulp fiction in its writing style (Coutts 2010).

In his book, Steven Powell (2012: 194-196) calls Lehane "one of the finest of contemporary American crime writers". He goes on to say that Lehane's writing is notable due to his use of a Boston setting and the dark themes that he explores. *Shutter Island* is the first of his novels to not take place in the present day, but during the 1950s, and he explores war trauma and the complexities of psychiatric medicine.

Reviews of Dennis Lehane's novels often highlight his skillful use of hardboiled techniques. In a review of Lehane's works, Peter Guttridge refers to Lehane as "one of the

wonder-boys of hard-boiled US crime fiction”. That is, in reviews he is directly associated with the genre that is being studied in this thesis.

In *Since We Fell* (2017), Lehane incorporates the elements of yet another subgenre of crime fiction - domestic *noir*. Domestic *noir* is intriguing because it delves into the scary idea of someone who is meant to be close to you turning out to be your enemy, and possibly wanting to kill you (Burke 2017). Myles McWeeney (2017) writes in a review of *Since We Fell* that although the novel takes place in today’s Boston, the beginning of the book could easily be mistaken for classic American *noir* writing from the 1930s and 1940s by authors such as Raymond Chandler or Mickey Spillane. The opening lines depict a scene where the protagonist, Rachel, shoots her husband on a Tuesday in May, causing him to stumble backwards with an eerie sense of acceptance, as though he always knew it would happen.

These extracts from reviews show that Dennis Lehane is a highly acclaimed writer in the crime fiction genre, who has been celebrated for his skillful use of both hard-boiled and *noir* techniques. Most reviews do not distinguish between the two and seem to use the two terms quite interchangeably. However, because they have somewhat different main emphases, this thesis will look at their elements more closely and specifically in the next section.

2. EMPIRICAL STUDY: ELEMENTS OF HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE FICTION AND *ROMAN NOIR* IN SHUTTER ISLAND

This part of the thesis will analyze the elements of hardboiled fiction and *roman noir* in Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island*. Among the elements of hard-boiled fiction, I will be looking at the descriptions of the island's atmosphere and surroundings as well as the main characteristics of the character U.S. Marshal Teddy Daniels. I will specifically be looking for traits of the hard-boiled detective by analyzing his appearance, character, dialogue, and actions. To analyze the atmosphere of the book, I will be looking at passages that describe the surroundings and the emotions of the main characters. To identify how Lehane's *Shutter Island* fits within the *roman noir* genre, I will be examining the psychological state of the main character, Teddy Daniels, by focusing on his thoughts and feelings and looking for instances where Teddy is forced to make tough decisions or confront difficult truths about himself or the world around him. I will also examine the novel's narrative, the unreliable narrator, and any changes in the atmosphere on the island.

The story of the novel is set in 1954 and it follows two U.S. Marshals, Teddy Daniels and Chuck Aule, as they investigate the disappearance of a patient from a hospital for the criminally insane on Shutter Island, off the coast of Massachusetts. Teddy Daniels is haunted by his experiences in World War II and the death of his wife. As the story goes on, Teddy begins to believe that the hospital staff are hiding secrets and that there is a bigger conspiracy happening on the island.

2.1 The narrative of *Shutter Island*

The first part of *Shutter Island* follows the conventions of a hard-boiled fiction narrative featuring Teddy Daniels and his partner investigating a crime in a dangerous and remote setting. The focus is largely on the action itself and the storyline is often fast-paced and action packed:

Teddy saw the arcing lights again, and this time he was pretty sure he could hear the whine of an engine behind all that squealing. “Marshals!” The voice was weak on the wind, but they both heard it. Chuck swung his legs over the end of the slab and jumped off and joined Teddy at the doorway and they could see headlights at the far end of the cemetery and they heard the squawk of a megaphone and a screech of feedback and then: “Marshals! If you are out here, please signal us. This is Deputy Warden McPherson. Marshals!” Teddy said, “How about that? They found us.” (Lehane 2003: 154).

Throughout the novel, there are also moments of physical confrontations, adding tension to the story:

The guard was suddenly standing there, as surprised by Teddy’s appearance as Teddy was by his, the guard’s fly still open, the rifle slung behind his back. He started to reach for his fly first, then changed his mind, but by then Teddy had driven the heel of his hand into his Adam’s apple. He grabbed his throat, and Teddy dropped to a crouch and swung his leg into the back of the guard’s and the guard flipped over on his back and Teddy straightened up and kicked him hard in the right ear and the guard’s eyes rolled back in his head and his mouth flopped open (Lehane 2003: 314).

These physical confrontations not only add tension but also highlight Teddy's toughness and willingness to resort to violence when necessary, which is a common trope in hard-boiled fiction.

Although the narrative features elements of hard-boiled detective fiction, the novel gradually shifts towards the conventions of *noir* as it progresses. The transition becomes particularly noticeable as the story moves away from its action-driven plot and increasingly delves into Teddy's psychological state, ultimately revealing the true nature of his investigation. The narrative's shift from a typical detective story to an exploration of the protagonist's hidden past changes the whole course of the novel.

Kressa (2013: 28) states that a clever way to shake up a conventional detective story is to incorporate a significant plot twist. The reader is initially following the detective’s investigation and expecting the ending to reveal the big question: “Who did it?”. Instead,

Lehane turns the entire novel upside down by revealing the truth about the protagonist: “Your name is Andrew Laeddis,” Cawley said. “The sixty-seventh patient at Ashecliffe Hospital? He’s you, Andrew.” (Lehane 2003: 329). This major twist forces the reader to question every event and character that they have just read about, to determine whether it was real or just the protagonist’s delusion.

As previously mentioned, Horsley (2009: 139-140) claims that in *noir* narratives, the roles employed by characters are not always fixed, so that the victim can turn into the attacker, or “the hunted man can become the hunter“. This is reflected in the character of Teddy Daniels, who initially appears to be a righteous detective attempting to find a missing patient but is later revealed to be a violent criminal responsible for the murder of his wife (Lehane 2003: 331). He has developed this schizophrenic act as a self-defense mechanism to avoid reality: “Because I can’t take knowing that I let my wife kill my babies. I ignored all the signs. I tried to wish it away. I killed them because I didn’t get her some help. /.../ And knowing that is too much. I can’t live with it.“ (Lehane 2003: 385). In his mind, seeking help would have meant acknowledging the severity of the situation and facing the possibility that he could not fix it, which was too much for him to bear.

He also exhibits traits of toxic masculinity in instances where he feels as though talking about one’s mental problems is embarrassing and a sign of weakness (Lehane 2003: 335). All these factors deepen his reluctance to admit that his wife was mentally ill and needed help. Instead of a typical hard-boiled fiction ending where justice is restored and a clear-cut villain to is blame, Lehane presents Teddy as a complex and troubled character whose motivations and actions are shaped by his past traumas and struggles with mental illness. Throughout the novel, his trauma and psychological state are explored in depth, and the reader is encouraged to empathize with him. In this way, the ending follows the conventions of *roman noir*, where blame and responsibility are not easily assigned, leaving

the reader with more questions than answers (Horsley 2009: 139). Lehane offers a modern take on the genre by turning a detective tale into something much more complicated, getting the reader to engage more deeply with the story, and leaving them with a sense of uncertainty.

2.2 The unreliable narrator

In this section, I will analyze the unreliable narrator in Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island* and its impact on the narrative. Through the perspective of Teddy Daniels, Lehane creates a sense of uncertainty and tension by blurring the line between reality and hallucinations, which leads the reader to question what is even real.

As mentioned in the literature review, Horsley (2009: 139) states that the narratives of *noir* stories often employ unreliable narrators, who may be confused and deceitful themselves. This technique allows for a glimpse into the protagonist's inner world, including their experiences, thoughts, and emotions, but also tends to deceive the reader into trusting them. Lehane's book is told from a close third-person perspective of Teddy Daniels, which lets the reader into Teddy's troubled past, dreams, and thoughts. Through the unreliable narration, Lehane creates a sense of uncertainty and tension, which keeps the reader on edge until the very end. All the events and accompanying characters are described from his point of view, resulting in the reader only seeing and therefore trusting his side of the story. There is an instance where Teddy begins to get frustrated and suspicious about the hospital staff's efforts to find the dangerous missing patient: "The search struck Teddy as desultory, as if no one but he and Chuck truly had their heart in it" (Lehane 2003: 55-56). Another similar instance – "Teddy glanced at Chuck and Chuck gave him a small tilt of the eyes back. A missing woman with a history of violence at large on a small island and everyone seemed to just want to get to bed." (Lehane 2003: 60) – shows Teddy's distrust of the hospital staff, which prompts the reader to also become suspicious of the staff's intentions and actions.

In the novel, the line between reality and Teddy's hallucinations/psychosis is very thin. As the story progresses, the reader is forced to confront the possibility that Teddy's perceptions and memories may not be entirely accurate, and that the truth of what is happening on the island may be more complicated than it initially seems. In *Shutter Island*, the presence of an unreliable narrator aligns closely with the conventions of *roman noir* as the reader is led down a path of deception and begins to question what is real and what is imagined.

2.3 Atmosphere of *Shutter Island*

In this section of the thesis, I will analyze the novel's atmosphere by looking at Lehane's descriptions of the surroundings, themes, and emotions of the main characters.

The novel opens with U.S. Marshal Teddy Daniels and detective Chuck Aule approaching Shutter Island, on their way to investigate a missing person's case. Lehane uses elements of *noir* and hard-boiled fiction in the first chapter to describe the island's atmosphere, setting an ominous and tense tone for the whole novel: "It was warm and clear out here, but the water was threaded with dark glints of rust and an overall pallor of gray, a suggestion of something growing dark in the depths, massing" (Lehane 2003: 13). The description of "something growing dark in the depths, massing" creates a sense of unease and danger for the reader. Lehane intensifies the ominous atmosphere by introducing an impending storm into the narrative. The island they arrive on is described as dark and sinister, with cliffs looming overhead and the wind howling through the trees: "Chuck and Teddy walked the dark grounds, feeling the storm in the air swelling hot around them, as if the world were pregnant, distended" (Lehane 2003: 68). The ominous and unsettling tone is heightened by the description of the Ashecliffe Hospital, which is a large place with many buildings surrounded by tall walls and barbed wire to keep people in or out. The buildings

are old, and there is a sense of decay and abandonment. There is also an old graveyard and mausoleum on the island, which adds eeriness to the novel (Lehane 2003: 31; 140-141).

As Teddy and Chuck begin their investigations, the storm also grows, turning into a hurricane: “They stood in the doorway and watched the island whirl itself into a rage. The wind was thick with dirt and leaves, tree branches and rocks and always the rain, and it squealed like a pack of boar and shredded the earth.” (Lehane 2003: 141). The storm is introduced at the very beginning of the novel as a tool to create an uneasy and tense mood. It can also be seen as a foreshadowing of the dark events that are yet to come. As the novel grows more suspenseful, the storm also gradually grows into a hurricane. The tone of the novel is characteristic of both hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir*.

As the story progresses, a sense of unease and danger pervades the atmosphere. Teddy and Chuck become increasingly suspicious of a sinister conspiracy unfolding within the asylum, with the staff engaging in unethical experiments on the patients. The novel's tone begins to align more closely with *roman noir* as it delves into these disturbing and ominous themes. The mood grows increasingly anxious as the seemingly tough detectives begin to feel unsafe: “Teddy met Chuck’s eyes and nodded. For the first time since they’d met, he could see fear in Chuck’s eyes, his jaw trying to tighten against it.” (Lehane 2003: 154). As the detectives are discovering secrets about Ashecliffe Asylum and its staff, the storm has turned into a hurricane, which is gradually getting worse. The sense of danger and isolation increases, creating a claustrophobic atmosphere as the two detectives are seemingly cut off from the outside world and stranded on the island where they suspect something horrible is taking place (Lehane 2003: 151-154).

Through descriptions and themes, Lehane establishes an ominous and tense atmosphere on Shutter Island, blending *noir* and hard-boiled fiction. As the story unfolds, the sense of danger and isolation grows, aligning more with *roman noir*.

It should also be noted that many of these atmospheric elements found in *Shutter Island* can also be described as Gothic. As previously mentioned, Lehane drew inspiration from the Gothic genre when writing *Shutter Island*, which is apparent in his descriptions of the dark and ominous atmosphere, decaying buildings, and a remote, claustrophobic setting. Although Gothic and *noir* fiction are distinct genres, it is interesting to note that the term "roman noir" was originally used to describe the gothic novel, revealing a historical connection between the two genres (Platten, 2005: 116). Additionally, Crow (2009: 160) suggests that Gothic literature often incorporates *noir* influences. This implies that both genres share similar elements and themes, influencing each other's development, and that some of the atmospheric elements described above can be seen as characteristic of both Gothic and *noir* fiction.

2.4 Teddy Daniels' evolution throughout the novel

The following section will explore how the character of Teddy Daniels in *Shutter Island* undergoes a transformation from a tough and determined hard-boiled detective to a complex character, revealing a range of conflicting emotions, motivations and the factors that contribute to this change.

At the beginning of the novel, U.S. Marshal Teddy Daniels exhibits several traits of the traditional hard-boiled detective. Lehane describes him as a large and tough looking man who carries a gun on his hip (Lehane 2003: 12-13). His dialogue is often abrupt, direct, and filled with dry humor. In a dialogue between the two partners, Teddy's dry humor is apparent in his reply to Chuck: "He said to Chuck, "Heard much about this place?" "A mental hospital, that's about all I know." "For the criminally insane," Teddy said." "Well, we wouldn't be here if it weren't," Chuck said. Teddy caught him smiling that dry grin again.

“You never know, Chuck. You don’t look a hundred percent stable to me.” (Lehane 2003: 22).

In an instance where Chuck asks Teddy whether he is married, he receives a short answer of “Was”, reminding him how Teddy’s wife died a few years ago and indicating that Teddy does not want to talk about his personal life (Lehane 2003: 19). He is clearly uncomfortable with questions that would give insight into his personal struggles. For example, a doctor named Naehring from the Ashecliffe Asylum begins to analyze Teddy and Chuck by labeling them as “men of violence” (Lehane 2003: 75). He suggests that the two have always resorted to violence without seeing any other options. The dialogue continues with the doctor asking Teddy who raised him, to which Teddy sarcastically answers: “Bears” (Lehane 2003: 76-77). Naehring's observation that Teddy and Chuck are "men of violence" touches a sensitive nerve with Teddy, who has a troubled past as a war veteran and as a law enforcement officer. This implies that Teddy's experiences have contributed to his violent tendencies and his reluctance to talk about them. He uses humor as a defense mechanism to cope with personal problems.

Teddy also seems to believe that people who talk about their problems are not strong enough to handle them. In the book, there is a dialogue between him and a doctor named Crawley who asks Teddy about his deceased wife and receives the reply: “I’m not really in the mood to be psychoanalyzed, Doc” (Lehane 2003: 189). The doctor then suggests that Teddy might be suicidal and tells him to see a psychiatrist, to which Teddy replies: “U.S. marshals don’t go to head doctors. Sorry. But if it ever leaked, I’d be pensioned out.” (Lehane 2003: 192). This quote proves that he views talking about emotional problems as a sign of weakness, and as something that could damage his reputation and career as a U.S. Marshal. It is also apparent that this opinion is derived from societal expectations.

Another trait that is common in hard-boiled detectives is Teddy's no-nonsense professional attitude and how he takes his job very seriously. He has a strong sense of justice and is not afraid to confront anyone who gets in his way, regardless of whether it is hospital staff, patients, or other law enforcement officials. As previously mentioned, hard-boiled detectives are determined to solve cases and are not afraid to use confrontation and violence to do so. In an instance where Teddy is interviewing a patient at the asylum, who is hospitalized because he assaulted a nurse with broken glass, critically injuring and permanently scarring the victim, the reader gets an insight into Teddy's thoughts:

.../, but mostly he just wanted to pick the little shit up by his throat, slam him against one of the ovens in the back of the cafeteria, and ask him about that poor nurse he'd carved up. *.../* Teddy looked across the table at Peter Breene, and he wanted to punch him in the face so hard that doctors would never find all the bones in his nose. Hit him so hard the sound would never leave his head. Instead, he closed the file and said, "You were in group therapy the night before last with Rachel Solando. Correct?" (Lehane 2003: 109-110).

Although there is a violent side to Teddy, as a detective he does not rely on violence as his first or preferred method of investigation. While he is capable of violent thoughts, he restrains himself and instead remains professional as he asks the patient about his whereabouts to solve the case of the missing woman. This suggests that Teddy is not motivated by a desire to inflict harm or violence, but rather by a desire to uncover the truth and bring those responsible to justice. Unlike the traditional hard-boiled detective, Teddy relies on his intellect, intuition, and investigative skills to solve the case.

One characteristic that Teddy Daniels does have in common with the traditional hard-boiled detectives is his cynical nature and reluctance to trust others. As a U.S. Marshal who has seen the darker side of life, Teddy is skeptical of people's motives and often assumes the worst in others. In an instance where Chuck and Teddy are discussing the case of the missing patient with the doctor, he asks to see the personnel files of all the medical staff, orderlies, and guards. He questions the personnel by stating: "A woman disappears from a locked room, Doctor? She escapes onto a tiny island and no one can find her? I have to at least

consider if she had help.” (Lehane 2003: 48). Later on, he tells his partner Chuck that they have not heard the truth once (Lehane 2003: 85). He has a deep-seated mistrust of authority figures, which makes him especially suspicious of the doctors and staff of the asylum. This kind of skepticism is a hallmark of hard-boiled fiction, where detectives often have to navigate a corrupt and deceitful world (McCann 2010: 42).

As previously noted, hard-boiled detectives are typically portrayed as solitary figures who place little trust in others and are often depicted as emotionally distant from those around them. This thesis previously analyzed the cynical side of Teddy, but the one person whom Teddy does trust to some extent is his partner Chuck Aule. Although they form a bond from the beginning of the novel based on their shared experiences as U.S. Marshals, there is still a sense that Teddy is keeping Chuck at arm’s length (Lehane 2003: 14). In a dialogue between Chuck and Teddy, where Chuck finds out Teddy has been keeping things from him, Chuck says: “I’m your partner, boss.” to which Teddy replies: “We just met.” (Lehane 2003: 12). It is apparent that while Teddy respects Chuck and appreciates his help, he still keeps a certain distance from him emotionally, perhaps as a self-defense mechanism. By the end of the book, there is a moment where he thinks: “Would Teddy ever know if he should’ve given him that last benefit of the doubt? Chuck, who’d made him laugh and made the whole cranial assault of the last three days so much easier to bear.” (Lehane 2003: 262). This quote follows right after Teddy thinks about all the people he has ever cared about. There is a sense of guilt and despair in his thoughts as he struggles with being able to trust someone fully and form emotional connections with others around him.

Although Teddy can be described as hard-boiled based on some of the previously mentioned characteristics, he also exhibits qualities that do not conform with the role of the traditional hard-boiled detective. The following paragraph offers insight into Teddy’s softer and emotional side: “/.../, and he thought of all the others he’d cared for who had died while

he was asked to soldier on. Dolores, of course. And his father, somewhere on the floor of this same sea. His mother, when he was sixteen.” (Lehane 2003: 262). This passage gives the reader insight into the significant losses that Teddy has suffered throughout his life, which helps to understand his character better. As previously mentioned, hard-boiled detectives are usually lonesome men, who do not need others in their lives (Ranta 2008: 18). This trait is clearly not apparent in Teddy’s character as he shows a deep emotional connection to his loved ones and a sense of loss and grief at their passing, which suggests that Teddy is not completely detached from the world around him and does not fit the traditional mold of a hard-boiled detective.

Teddy’s character evolves throughout the novel from a seemingly tough detective to a man struggling with his own inner demons and being haunted by a tragic past (Lehane 2003: 12). In an instance where Teddy catches a glimpse of his own reflection, the book describes him in the following way: “/.../still a relatively young man with a government issue crew cut. But his face was lined with evidence of the war and the years since, his penchant for the dual fascinations of pursuit and violence living in eyes Dolores had once called “dog-sad” (Lehane 2003: 12). He then thinks to himself that he is much too young to look so rough. The part of the quote which reveals that Teddy's face is "lined with evidence of the war and the years since," indicates that although the war has ended, the effects of it remain with Teddy. The phrase "dual fascinations of pursuit and violence" suggests that Teddy is a man who is driven by a need to seek out and confront danger, and that this need has manifested in violent behavior at times. The fact that these fascinations are described as "living in his eyes" suggests that they are a central part of his personality and could be visible to others. The expression “dog-sad” suggests that while Teddy may be driven by violence, he is also capable of experiencing sadness and vulnerability.

Noir puts a strong emphasis on the main characters grappling with feelings of guilt and confronting failure. The genre often has its characters go through a traumatic event that changes their perspective on life (Horsley 2001: 16). For Teddy's character, those events include the sudden death of his wife and his experiences in World War II. Throughout the novel, the element of guilt is exemplified through Teddy's memories and dreams of his deceased wife, which are all a reminder of how he could not save her:

Teddy wondered, and not for the first time, not by a long shot, if this was the day that missing her would finally be too much for him. If he could turn back the years to that morning of the fire and replace her body with his own, he would. That was a given. That had always been a given. But as the years passed, he missed her more, not less, and his need for her became a cut that would not scar over, would not stop leaking (Lehane 2003: 90).

This passage provides insight into Teddy's emotional state and highlights the theme of grief that runs throughout the novel. The use of repetition in the phrase "not for the first time, not by a long shot" emphasizes that this is a recurring thought for Teddy, and the imagery of a cut that will not scar over or stop leaking emphasizes the intensity and persistence of Teddy's grief. The loss of Dolores has had a profound impact on Teddy's character, which is apparent in most of his actions and thoughts. The way he deals with his grief and guilt is a significant aspect of his character development throughout the novel. Furthermore, his thoughts reveal his depressing and hopeless view on life, how he feels lonely and at the same time suggesting that he is suicidal: "He couldn't remember a day since Dolores's death when he hadn't thought of joining her, and it sometimes went further than that. Sometimes he felt as if continuing to live was an act of cowardice." (Lehane 2003: 200). The last sentence where Teddy describes him still being alive as "an act of cowardice", he refers to Dolores dying unjustly and alone, and feeling how unfair it is that he gets to live when he should be with her. The paragraph that follows reflects on how he sees no purpose in living and carrying out everyday activities such as grocery shopping or brushing his teeth if he does not have Dolores by his side (Lehane 2003: 200).

Later on in the novel, Teddy is forced to face the harsh reality of his past and becomes overwhelmed with guilt and failure once he finally learns the truth about how his wife and children really died: “But he’d failed her. Failed his children. Failed the lives they’d all built together because he’d refused to see Dolores, really *see* her, see that her insanity was not her fault, not something she could control, not some proof of moral weakness or lack of fortitude.” (Lehane 2003: 360). The paragraph then follows with: “He’d refused to see it, because if she actually were his true love, his immortal other self, then what did that say about his brain, his sanity, his moral weakness?” (Lehane 2003: 360). Teddy's realization of his own failure to see Dolores as she truly was represents a common *noir* theme of characters being blinded by their own desires and delusions, ultimately leading to their downfall.

Noir narratives often place their characters in an unforgiving environment without hope for redemption or a better life (Horsley 2009: 5). The Ashecliffe Asylum is depicted as a place where patients are mistreated and subjected to harsh and inhumane treatments. A doctor at the asylum confirms that it is an experimental hospital with a radical approach that experiments only on the most violent patients. Although according to him experimental surgeries are a last resort, the hospital still performs shock therapy and partial lobotomies in an attempt to cure violent patients and have some kind of control over them. Teddy is revealed to be a patient of the asylum named Andrew, on whom they are also experimenting, involving a role-playing experiment that is designed to treat Teddy's delusions and help him overcome his traumatic experiences. A doctor of the asylum reveals the truth about his real identity and violent past: “Your name is Andrew Laeddis,” Cawley repeated. “You were committed here by court order twenty-two months ago, /.../, You came here two years ago because you committed a terrible crime. One that society can't forgive, but I can. Andrew, look at me.” (Lehane 2003: 331).

The previous statement on how the environments in *noir* stories often do not offer a chance of redemption is not entirely true in this case. Through this experiment, Teddy has been given a chance to try and come back to sanity, which gives a glimmer of hope and a possibility for redemption. Although the doctor states that the crime he committed is too awful to be forgiven by society, he is clearly desperate to offer him some kind of redemption. He wants to change the hospital's old-fashioned treatment methods by trying to restore Teddy's memories by giving him clues about his past. He explains to Teddy the importance of his experiment:

If we fail here, we've lost. Not just with you. Right now, the balance of power is in the hands of the surgeons, but that's going to change fast. The pharmacists will take over, and it won't be any less barbaric. It'll just seem so. The same zombification and warehousing that are going on now will continue under a more publicly palatable veneer. Here, in this place, it comes down to you, Andrew (Lehane 2003: 346).

Teddy then learns that if he were to fail to come back to reality, he is too dangerous of a patient and would be forced to undergo a "transorbital lobotomy" (Lehane 2003: 346). Even though the experiment offers him some hope for a better life, the threat of the lobotomy reflects the harsh and unforgiving nature of his environment. The hospital's willingness to resort to such extreme measures suggests their disregard for human life just to pursue a supposed greater good. This aligns with the bleak and cynical worldview that is characteristic of *noir*.

2.5 Discussion

Shutter Island combines elements from both hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir*, but as the story unfolds, it gradually transitions towards *noir*. Initially, the novel follows the conventions of hard-boiled fiction with its action-packed storyline and fast-paced narrative. The focus is on Teddy Daniels and his partner investigating a crime in a dangerous and remote setting. From the beginning, Lehane sets a dark and ominous tone through his description of the island and its surroundings. In line with the characteristics of hard-boiled

fiction, the investigation in the story features instances of physical confrontations and vivid depictions of violence. These elements combine to set a tough and cynical tone.

At the beginning of the novel, Teddy embodies some of the traits of a hard-boiled detective - tough, determined, and carrying a gun. His dialogue is often abrupt and filled with dry humor, which serves as a defense mechanism to cope with his personal problems. Teddy is reluctant to talk about his personal struggles and views discussing emotional problems as a sign of weakness. He is cynical by nature and reluctant to trust people. However, as the story unfolds, the plot moves away from its action-driven nature and begins to delve into Teddy's psychological state. The reader gets to see a different side to Teddy as his character evolves from a tough detective to a man haunted by inner demons and grief.

Roman noir often delves into darker aspects of human nature (Horsley 2009: 4). In *Shutter Island*, the narrative shifts from hard-boiled fiction more towards *noir* fiction as the plot begins to explore darker themes such as the effects of the war on one's mental state, grief, and Teddy's contemplation of suicide. This shift is significant since it changes the trajectory of the novel and challenges the reader's expectations.

Lehane employs a close third-person perspective throughout the novel, offering a glimpse into Teddy's troubled past, dreams, and thoughts. This narrative technique aligns with the conventions of *noir*, where unreliable narrators are often used. As Lehane reveals the true nature of Teddy's investigation, it becomes evident that Teddy himself is an unreliable narrator. This twist forces the reader to question the reality of events and characters, blurring the line between truth and delusion.

The ending of the novel also reflects the characteristics of *roman noir*, where right and wrong are not easily defined and the characters' roles are not fixed (Horsley 2009: 4). Teddy Daniels, initially seen as a righteous detective, is later revealed to be a violent criminal with deep psychological struggles. Rather than a conventional hard-boiled ending, Lehane

presents a complex character shaped by trauma and mental illness, challenging easy blame or resolution.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to identify elements of two crime fiction subgenres - *roman noir* and hard-boiled fiction - in Dennis Lehane's novel *Shutter Island*. The aim was to highlight the similarities and differences between the two subgenres and determine which subgenre dominates in the novel.

The literature review chapter found that hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir* have distinct differences as well as notable similarities. Hard-boiled fiction emerged in the 1920s as a response to the societal changes and increasing crime rates in the US and is characterized by tough characters, fast-paced plots, and a focus on crime, violence, and betrayal. In contrast, *roman noir*, which originated in France in the 1940s and 1950s, delves into themes of guilt, failure, and the bleak aspects of human nature. Both subgenres share a bleak and cynical tone, although *roman noir* exhibits a darker and more existential atmosphere due to its exploration of darker themes. In terms of narrative focus, hard-boiled fiction revolves mainly around detectives solving crimes, while *roman noir* shifts its emphasis towards flawed characters grappling with internal struggles and moral dilemmas. The resolution of conflicts also differs, with hard-boiled stories offering closure and reinforcing a clear idea of right and wrong, while *noir* narratives intentionally break this pattern to reflect the moral ambiguity of the real world. Despite these differences, notable similarities exist between the two subgenres, such as a focus on crime, morally complex characters, and a bleak and cynical tone. Additionally, both subgenres give authors the freedom to diverge from traditional limits and blend elements to create unique stories.

The empirical section observed that *Shutter Island* by Dennis Lehane combines elements of both hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir*. Initially, the narrative follows the conventions of hard-boiled fiction with its action-packed storyline and tough tone, but as the story progresses, the novel gradually transitions towards *noir* as it delves into the

protagonist's psychological state and explores darker themes such as war trauma, grief, and suicidal thoughts. The analysis revealed that the novel contains a greater number of elements associated with *roman noir*. Another element analyzed was the portrayal of Teddy Daniels. Initially depicted as a typical hard-boiled detective, his character undergoes a transformative journey, gradually revealing layers of complexity and inner demons. The narrative shift from hard-boiled fiction to *noir* challenges the reader's expectations and blurs the line between truth and delusion. The close third-person perspective and unreliable narrator technique further align with the conventions of *noir*. The ending of the novel reflects the nature of *roman noir* and challenges simplistic resolution by presenting Teddy as a complex character shaped by trauma and mental illness.

In conclusion, while *Shutter Island* incorporates elements from both subgenres, the analysis shows a greater emphasis on *roman noir* elements. Lehane's *Shutter Island* skillfully blends these two subgenres to challenge a conventional detective story and create a compelling and thought-provoking story. Further research could involve examining how readers and critics have responded to the blending of hard-boiled fiction and *roman noir* in *Shutter Island*. Studying the impact of this genre blending on reader engagement could provide valuable information about how readers perceive and interpret hybrid genres in contemporary literature.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Elizabeth Nadjuk

Elements of Hard-Boiled Fiction and *Roman Noir* in Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island*

Karmi stiili detektiivkirjanduse ja musta romaani elemendid Dennis Lehane'i *Shutter Island*'is

Bakalaureusetöö

2023

Lehekülgede arv: 34

Annotatsioon:

Antud lõputöö eesmärgiks on analüüsida kahe krimikirjanduse alamžanri – karmi stiili detektiivkirjanduse ja musta romaani - elemente Dennis Lehane'i romaanis *Shutter Island*. Uurimuses tutvustatakse kahe alamžanri erinevusi ja sarnasusi ning samuti uuritakse, kumb antud romaanis domineerib.

Bakalaureusetöö jaguneb neljaks osaks: sissejuhatus, kirjanduse ülevaade, romaani analüüs, ja kokkuvõte.

Sissejuhatus annab taustainfot uuritava romaani ja autori kohta ning defineerib teemakohased mõisted “karmi stiili detektiivkirjandus” ning “must romaan”. Kirjanduse ülevaade määratleb alamžanrite põhielemendid, tutvustab nende sarnasusi ja erinevusi ning annab ülevaate Dennis Lehane'i loomingut iseloomustavatest käsitlustest. Empiiriline osa analüüsib karmi stiili detektiivkirjanduse ja musta romaani elemente Dennis Lehane'i teoses *Shutter Island*'is, keskendudes narratiivile, jutustaja rollile, atmosfääri elementidele ja peategelase Teddy Danielsi omadustele. Analüüs keskendub sellele, kuidas Lehane ühendab kahe alamžanri elemendid, et luua keerukas ja haarav lugu, mis erineb traditsiooniliste detektiivlugude loodud eeldustest.

Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et alamžanridel on nii erinevusi kui ka märkimisväärseid sarnasusi. Dennis Lehane'i romaan järgib algselt karmi stiili detektiivkirjanduse tavasid oma tegevusterohke süžee ja karmi tooniga, kuid loo edenedes liigub romaan järk-järgult mustale romaanile omaste elementide suunas, käsitledes süngemaid teemasid ja sukeldudes peategelase psühholoogilisse seisundisse. Kuigi mõlemad žanrid on esindatud, siis viitab analüüs sellele, et suurem rõhk on musta romaani elementidel.

Märksõnad: Dennis Lehane, *Shutter Island*, ameerika kirjandus, krimikirjandus, karmi stiili detektiivkirjandus (hard-boiled fiction), must romaan (*roman noir*)

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