Bogey, Bobby, and Woody: Diminutiveness and the Antihero

Greg Weiss,
University of Southern Mississippi

Greg's poetry and criticism has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *Now Culture, The Columbia Review, The South Carolina Review, The Oklahoma Review, The Margie Review, The Southern Poetry Anthology: Mississippi*. He is presenting a paper on William Wycherley's *The Country-Wife* (1675) at PAMLA in November 2009.

Within five minutes of *The Big Sleep*'s opening credits, Raymond Chandler's iconic PI Philip Marlowe has gone from being the kind of tall that strangers remark upon to being the kind of short that strangers remark upon. The first explanation that leaps to mind in regards to Marlowe's on-screen transformation is the actor who portrays him, Humphrey Bogart - and the one thing Bogey "ain't" is tall. (Various sources list him as being between 5'8 1/2" and 5/10 1/2," although I think the fact that his height is being recorded in half-inches is more revealing than the preceding numbers. In any event, he certainly looks to be shorter than 5'81/2" in *The Big Sleep*). While that explanation may be true, it is also worth noting that Bogart did not produce the movie, and did not cast himself. Additionally, he is hardly alone in being an artist who portrays an antihero not in spite of his diminutive size, but at least, in some way, because of it. Other examples are James Cagney, Marlon Brando, James Dean, Jeremy Piven as Ari Gold on *Entourage*, Prince, and, of course, two of the most famous people and antihero-artists of the twentieth century, Bob Dylan and Woody Allen.

My purpose is not to figure out if there really is a Napoleon complex, or if tall people really do fare better in the business world. There have already been plenty of articles addressing both topics. I would offer that there have been two technological developments which have been essential to the over-representation of the diminutive amongst male modern antiheroes. The first is the handgun, which divorced the scope of a person's possible heroism from their size, and the second is film. Bogart, as Marlowe, hits precisely on the shift that the popularization of the handgun engendered, from the necessity of the antihero's possessing physical size and strength to the necessity of his possessing the mental strength to know why, how, and, most importantly, when to shoot, when he says to burly petty-thief Joe Brody, after Brody pulls a gun on him, "My, my – such a lot of guns around town, and so few brains." Physical strength does not even enter the picture. And in relation to film, some things work better on paper, and some better on screen. For instance, I'm not a big fan of horror-movies, but the film version of *Cujo* is definitely better than the print version because the image of a rabid dog is much more viscerally affecting than "his jaw hung and his mouth frothed beneath his sick, red eyes." In the same way, it reads better, or sounds better on the radio, for the hero to be ruggedly, or dapperly handsome, than for him to be, like Bogart, physically ugly but an attractive person. But the screen gives a man, or character, like Humphrey Bogart the opportunity to demonstrate that his presence and performance can permanently alter, or transcend, a character's written narrative.

But, as mentioned previously, Bogart is not alone - smaller people are not just represented amongst twentieth-century antihero-types, but overly represented. And, as evidence by opposition, I put to you that you would be hard-pressed to name a single antihero-type who is as tall, stocky, and famous as all of the aforementioned examples are short, slight, and famous. As I see it, there are three at least somewhat likely explanations as to the over-representation of small artists in the enactment and depiction of modern antihero-types:

1. Short people are an archetypal antihero, and archetypes are timeless.
2. The popular imagination associates diminutiveness with belonging to a social class of lower-middle or below, which, by some sociological opinions, results in the approval of the greatest number of people from the greatest range of classes.
3. The liminal/marginal nature, in many ways, of a small, slight man, but most importantly in regards to the contact-zones between boy and man and man and woman.

In the following case-studies that attempt to address these options, I primarily focus on (2) and (3), because I find them the most appealing, so let me discuss (1) now. There is no doubt that there is an archetype of short people as a species of antihero. First, there is a long tradition in American filmmaking, and in many types of narrative for long before that, of indicating a character's moral worth through physical attributes. The most obvious is the handsome, broad-shouldered hero and the disfigured villain. So, given that tradition, there is reason to presume that it is possible that diminutive artists might be, purely on the basis of an aspect of their physical appearances, associated with the enactment/depiction of anti-heroism. We also know of specific examples - the West African trickster-god Esu Elegbara, the trolls under the bridge of Old World fairy/folktales. There are elements of both of these examples, and many others, that are important in regards to Bogart, Dylan, and Allen's antihero-status. But the problem, as I see it, with archetypal criticism, is not that it's incorrect, but that it's an observation masquerading as theory. It's interesting that the same concepts and images reappear over time and space, but how and why that happens is more interesting. And archetypal criticism answers that with a tautology: It happens because it happens. And, like all tautologies, that of course is true, but it certainly doesn't get us any closer to locating the meeting-point of Bogart, Dylan, and Allen's roles/images and statures.

I. Humphrey Bogart Is Just Like You and Me

Humphrey Bogart's diminutiveness is most important in its association with the popular imagination of Bogart with the "common man." I'll return to that, as well as what the "common man" is, in a moment. But first, in regards to option (3): diminutiveness as liminality is present in Bogart, although not to the extent that it is in Allen or, especially, Dylan, whose diminutiveness is the occasion for any number of binary contact-zones, and in particular boy-man and man-woman. Bogart, in contrast, looked to be approximately fifty from his mid-twenties until his death, and appears less physically feminine than Dylan and Allen, which I speculate is because they're skinnier and Bogart has a heavier beard. It is impossible to understand Bogart, even critically, as anything other than a grown man. The only hint of man-woman ambiguity that I can even motion at in *The Big Sleep*, which, interestingly, is unique to the film, is the emphasis on Marlowe/Bogart's attractiveness/virility in relation to women - he does not significantly interact with a single woman who doesn't come onto him. Of these interactions - many of which do not advance the plot at all - the most memorable and extended is between Marlowe and a bookstore-clerk, and, in relation to any sort of gender-blurring, is significant because it takes place immediately after Bogart has assumed a fey identity in the pornographic bookstore across the street. But while it's possible that the film feels a need to "rescue" Marlowe's masculinity in a way that the book doesn't because Humphrey Bogart is short and Chandler's Marlowe is tall, I tend to see these interactions, including with the bookstore-clerk, as not part of the movie's thesis, but as amusing throwaways for the audience; that's certainly how they function for me. In fact, the most intriguing contact-zone that Bogart's height occasions isn't boy-man or man-woman, but man-old man.

In "Being Boss: Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*," which is primarily concerned with the importance of the personal financial independence of Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade, also portrayed by Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*, John T. Irwin notes the many similarities between Marlowe and the decrepit General Sternwood, whose relationship is "the single most important relationship in *The Big Sleep*, energizing the entire novel as it drives Marlowe to discover the fate of the general's friend Rusty Regan despite the other characters wanting him to drop the investigation" (221). And while the relationship between Marlowe and General Sternwood is less central to the film than the novel, having been supplanted by the Bogart-Bacall romantic storyline, it is still, in the manner that Irwin describes, the impetus for the entire movie. Man-old

man concerns are also winkingly introduced into the movie in service of that romantic storyline in the scene in which Bogart and Bacall's characters extemporize a who's-on-first routine for the policeman on the other end of the phone-line in which they explicitly assume a father-daughter relationship (Also interestingly, this dialogue is not part of the script, which leads you to believe that Howard Hawks, Bogart, or Bacall introduced it). But diminutiveness as liminality, while present in Bogart, does not account for the importance of diminutiveness to his status as an antihero. Of the liminality that is present, the man-old man border is much more important than the man-woman border.

In response to heavy questioning in regards to Humphrey Bogart's appearance, my wife Nicole said that he was an attractive person but physically ugly, or "sexy-ugly," but, perhaps more importantly, that he looked pretty good in a suit through a cigarette-haze in movies like *Casablanca* and *The Big Sleep*. But he is much less attractive in a "wifebeater" undershirt (the term based on the wardrobe of the diminutive Marlon Brando's character in *A Streetcar Named Desire*) in *To Have and Have Not* and *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*. If Humphrey Bogart's size functions liminally, it is in regards not to age or gender but class, in that his size logically associates him with people from classes in which food, which promotes growth, is scarcer. In his 1955 article "Popular Hero Symbols and Audience Gratifications," which is focused on the reactions of the "common man" to different movie-stars and definitely reveals many of the prejudices of its time, sociologist Frederick Elkin notes that "the 'common man' subjects, we observed, felt reassured by those symbols which reinforced the values of their class position" (105). This I take to indicate that the "common man" subjects felt reassured by actors who appeared to also be "common men," due to the high correlation between perceptions of values and class. Elkin defines the "common man" as people:

> ... who tended to be married housewives, of American parentage,
> born and raised in Chicago or other urban areas, with a high school
> education, living in modest apartments in a partially run-down sec-
> tion of Chicago. Most had young or adolescent children. The hus-
> bands of approximately the same educational level as their wives,
> were employed primarily as skilled and semi-skilled laborers. (99)

Considering the fact that Elkin conducted his survey in the 1950s, I would describe his subjects as lower-middle and middle-class. However you describe their social station, they find the popular association, largely based on his physical size, of Bogart with the "common man," reassuring. Writing 41 years after Elkin, Tim

Fulford noted in *Landscape, Liberty and Authority* that the upper classes also feel reassured by those symbols which reinforce the values of their class position (18). Nothing reinforces the values of being upper-class more than perceiving, at leisure, representations of the lower classes which are often pathetic and/or threatening. The practical result of the tendency of people of all classes to feel reassured by symbols which reinforce the value of their class-position is a preponderance of antiheroes that invoke aspects of lower-middle class life - members of the lower-middle and middle classes can identify with Bogart, while members of the middle and upper classes can consciously not identify with Bogart (The middle class is split, although perhaps not evenly, between those who identify with representations of the lower-middle class, and those who consciously don't). The result is a protagonist that members of the lower-middle through upper classes find reassuring, but that members of the middle and upper classes also consciously view as essentially different from themselves. People living at a level below lower-middle class were fairly insignificant to the relationship between Bogart's height, perceived class-status, and fame as an antihero because they often could not afford to go to the movies. Because they were not generally considered part of the movie-viewing public, members of the lower class were disregarded and as a result shut out, whether consciously or not, from the movie-making equation. As is often the case in inter-class interaction, the result was that members of the lower class had to take what they were given: whether their natural inclination was to identify with a lower-middle class antihero or to consciously *not* identify with a lower-middle class antihero (which in this class relationship might also take the form of aspiration). Bogart, who is the most relatable but also of a distinctly higher social station, is the only option. The result is that members of the lower-middle through upper classes find Bogart reassuring, while they also simultaneously find him to be essentially alien - the conflict that accounts for his antihero status - and that members of the lower classes are considered to be lucky if they get to go to the movies at all.

II. Bob Dylan Is Everything Besides A Physically Larger Man or Woman

Of Bogart, Dylan, and Allen, Bob Dylan (between 5'6" and 5'71/2") most lends himself to archetypal criticism, as he himself is explicitly fond of archetypes in regards to his image - "troubadour," "song-and-dance man," etc. Joan Baez has also noted the relationship between Dylan's public image and fairy-tale archetypes

in her famous recollection of an eighteen year-old Dylan's transformation from toad to prince when he performed. But, while noteworthy, the presence of archetypes in Dylan's image, even if intentional, doesn't account for his primacy as a modern antihero.

From his earliest performances and recordings upon arriving in New York in 1961, Bob Dylan was concerned with social class. In concert and photo-sessions, he often wore clothes that archetypally associated him with a class below his own middle-class upbringing - brakeman hat and jacket, farmhand denim, etc. (As a Jew, I should also note that I think, for no reason at all, that Bob Dylan's Jewishness is in some way related to whatever conception he has of "social class"). In addition to his wardrobe, Dylan also associated himself in the popular imagination with African-Americans, archetypally the lowest of class in American history, through his role in the Civil Rights Movement. However, the fact that Dylan's antihero-image is based not on archetypal or class-based qualities, but on liminality, is most fully demonstrated by the fact that his most famous antihero moment, "going electric," is significant not for its assertion of a conservative position - elemental tradition or class-structure - but for its enactment of a transition.

But while archetypes and class considerations are present in the importance of Dylan's size, Dylan is defined as an antihero by his liminality, which in turn is very dependent on his diminutiveness. Countless people have noted that, because of his "chameleon like nature" and penchant for "reinventing himself," Dylan is a "shape-shifter" (Porton 20-23). That element of Dylan's persona was most famously captured in D.A. Pennebaker 1967 documentary *Don't Look Back*, in which "many sequences unfold in which he [Dylan] is confronted with obscurities and contradictions of his public image" (Bouquerel 152), and most recently enacted in Todd Haynes's 2007 biopic *I'm Not There*. Dylan is portrayed by six different actors, including a woman, Cate Blanchett, and a thirteen year-old black kid, Marcus Carl Franklin. Haynes is literally representing the boy-man and man-woman contact-zones that Dylan's image challenges. Those representations are only coherent because of Dylan's diminutiveness. And although Dylan's blurrings of man-boy and man-woman differences are the most central to his image, Dylan's diminutiveness of course also occasions many other blurrings. For instance, in a 2007 interview, Todd Haynes specifically notes his attempt to include Dylan's blurring of the straight-gay contact-zone (Porton 21). I could go on, but I think that the fact that a wide-release movie, *I'm Not There* - which I thought was flawed but also interesting and worthwhile in its varied portraits - is almost entirely based on the notion of Dylan's liminality demonstrates that it is a quality that

I am hardly unique in having observed. Dylan's antihero-status is hugely dependent on his liminality, which is in turn hugely dependent on his diminutiveness.

III. In Addition To Being Incompetent, Woody Allen Can't Make Up His Mind

In the films that primarily define his public image - *Annie Hall, Manhattan,* and his early slapstick - Woody Allen (5'5") very much keeps to the stereotype of the diminutive court-jester. Allen's characters are capricious and indecisive - bringing the trickster-archetype to mind - and engage in much clumsiness, "overacted" fright, and mock-balletic leaping. From Puck to George Carlin, the archetype of the diminutive jester has saturated comedy; I can't guess at the relationship between size-perceptions and cultural expectations that has produced so many excellent short comedians, but Allen implicitly acknowledged his awareness of and participation in such comedic tradition in 1982's *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*, in which he plays a "wacky inventor" (imdb.com).

Portraying or invoking lower-middle class life is not a significant part of Allen's antihero image. This is not because he never plays characters of below-middle class, but because Allen's Jewishness is so important to his persona that it overrides class as a consideration. Even though Allen depicts and portrays below-middle class characters, and even though there are many Jews in the below-middle classes, the association in the popular imagination of Jews with material success is so close that a person as notably Jewish as Woody Allen cannot also be associated with the "common man."

Allen's antihero status is based on blurring the same boy-man and man-woman boundaries that Dylan does, but Allen's ambiguity is based on very different premises. Whereas Dylan's diminutiveness invoked confusion quite directly - he was a man who looked a lot like both an adolescent boy and a woman - Allen's operated culturally. His size is linked to his incompetence and indecisiveness, which are in turn associated with women and children in the popular imagination. As an example of circular logic, I earlier noted that, even critically, it is impossible to think of Humphrey Bogart as anything other than a grown man. This is not true of Woody Allen - much of his comedy, in fact, is based on exactly how far from being a grown man he is.

Allen's incompetence most often manifests itself in physical comedy arising from the fact that, although he may be "book-smart," Allen can't perform basic tasks like walking, holding a package of frozen spinach, or killing a fly. *Annie Hall*

contains one of the most famous examples of incompetence/fecklessness in film history, where Allen sneezes hundreds of dollars of an acquaintance's cocaine into the thick, 1970s carpet. But while incompetence is important to Allen's antihero status, it is his indecisiveness that is essential. In *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*, the two films that most successfully combine Allen's talents for comedy and drama, Allen is defined by his indecisiveness, and specifically in his relationships with women. The notion of "settling-down" is central to American conceptions of male maturity, and the ubiquity of phrases like "he just wasn't ready" and "he needs to grow up" are proof of that centrality. In the movies and in the popular imagination, romantic steadfastness is associated with male maturity. To put it differently, romantic fickleness, or indecisiveness, is associated with male immaturity - a promiscuous young man is a "young buck" who needs to "sow his wild oats" before, presumably, maturing and coming home to sow the oats on his farm. Allen's inability, or unwillingness, or both, to commit to Diane Keaton in *Annie Hall*, or either Keaton or Mariel Hemingway in *Manhattan* - Hemingway portrays a senior in high school who is meant to be viewed as more "mature" than Allen, who looks to be about forty - is a rebuke to contemporary notions of male maturity.

Allen's image is based on being a grown man who, because of his incompetence and indecisiveness, popularly associated with women and children, is not a grown man. Humphrey Bogart, in contrast, is a grown man, and as a result is competent and decisive. As one of the subjects in Elkin's survey wrote, "I have a picture of him [Bogart] pulling out his gat, shooting someone, and running away with someone else's woman. He's rough through and through" (105). Many of the other subjects noted Bogart's "aggressiveness" (102). But while Bogart plays his "masculinity" for drama, Allen plays his for laughs. There are many examples of "ultra-masculinity" in Allen's films, but perhaps the most prevalent is Allen's attractiveness to women far younger and, popularly, better-looking than he, and the complete lack of explanation for this attractiveness, as if it hardly merited explanation. As a diminutive comedic antihero, Allen subverts the very qualities that Bogart, as a diminutive dramatic antihero, embodies. It is not a coincidence that when Allen decides in 1972's *Play It Again, Sam* to get serious in regards to life and women that he seeks the counsel of Humphrey Bogart's ghost, who in Allen's movie is a caricature of competent decisiveness. Allen dramatizes the passage from boyhood into manhood as a transition from being Woody Allen to Humphrey Bogart. As a diminutive comedian and dramatic actor, respectively, Allen and Bogart's antihero statuses arise from the same cultural wellspring but necessarily manifest themselves oppositely.

Diminutiveness is central to Humphrey Bogart, Bob Dylan, and Woody Allen's

antihero-images. I don't claim that there is only one connection between each person's size and antihero-status, because there are obviously many for each. I do think that, loosely speaking, ideas of archetypes, class, and liminality are the three most important factors in the over-representation of the diminutive amongst modern male-antiheroes. Of the three discussed here, Bogart is most connected with social class - while there are elements of archetypes and liminality in his image, he is an antihero because he appeals to the lower-middle through upper classes, but he also offends members of the middle and upper classes. Dylan and Allen's statures are most noteworthy because they allow Dylan and Allen to straddle the archetypal categories of boy, man, and woman. Dylan's image directly confronts distinctions like boy-man and man-woman, where Allen's confronts them via cultural associations with women and children in regards to incompetence and indecisiveness. All three are antiheroes because they are protagonists whose appeal is specifically based on not being "the best of men." Humphrey Bogart is both man and old man, and, as a result of his intrinsic association with the lower classes, is not the "best" as the word is generally used in the United States. Bob Dylan and Woody Allen are not "manly-grown." Diminutiveness and antiheroism are connected in that diminutiveness evokes identities other than strong, well-fed male, the most common modern "heroic" image. If these identities are then not only concomitant with, but essential to, a person/character's antihero status, qualities other than "strong," "well-fed," and "male" are demonstrated to be necessary for heroism. Because people like Bogart, Dylan, and Allen, as a result of their size and its attendant popular associations, are uniquely suited to depict and portray heroes that aren't heroic, diminutive men are overly represented amongst modern antiheroes.

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Endnotes

Mapping Hyphenation in Cuban-American Literature
Maria Louisa Ochoa Fernandez

[1] Together with Vasconcelos there have been some other important Latin American and Caribbean theorists and writers commenting on the meeting of different cultures, for example Arguedas on the Spanish Peruvian culture and the indigenous cultures, Fernando Ortiz and his term transculturation, aimed at explaining the formation of Cuban culture from different ones, Benítez Rojo and his work The Repeating Island also trying to enlighten Cuba´s cultural genesis, etc.

[2] "Soul between two worlds [...] / my head buzzes with contradictions / [...] because of all the voices that are simultaneously talking to me."

[3] According to Pérez Firmat "the game ends at some point (the one-and-a-half generation passeth away), and the board then comes to rest on one side. But in the meantime it stays in the air […] balancing one weight against the other" (6).

[4] "[. . .] cuerpos flotantes en las fronteras líquidas de la masa continenal, empujados por el reflujo de las olas de las políticas nacionales y migratorias, y por nuestras propias conflictivas construcciones identitariasz…]"

[5] I am a stew of contradictions.

[6] A purée of impurities.

[7] Jet

[8] Pothole

[9] Because of the shape of its topography, Cuba has often been identified with a crocodile; hence an image used by many authors to refer to the island

[10] "[. . .] nos devora en la distancia."

[11] "yo también llevo el cocodrilo a cuestas"