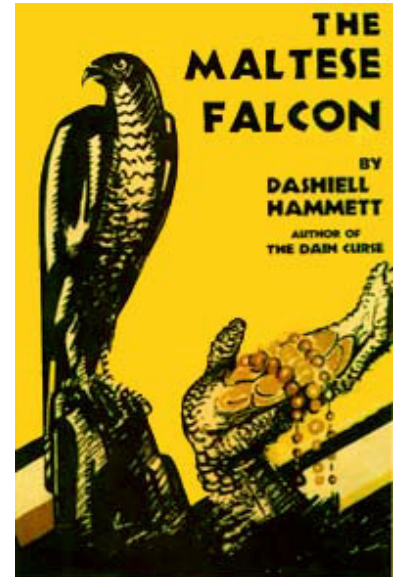


The Maltese Falcon **by Dashiell Hammett**

Publisher: Knopf Vintage
4th edition (July 17, 1989)
© 1930
Paperback: 224 pages
ISBN-13: 978-0679722649



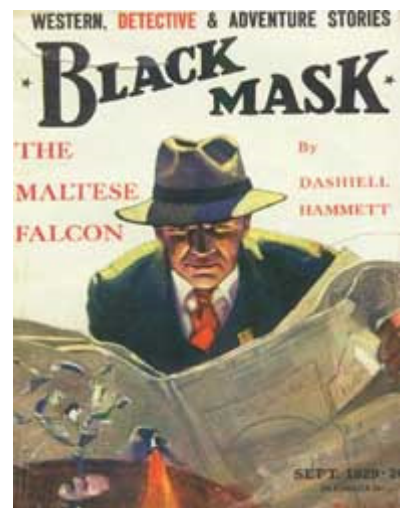
Summary (*From the Publisher*)

A treasure worth killing for. Sam Spade, a slightly shopworn private eye with his own solitary code of ethics. A perfumed grafter named Joel Cairo, a fat man named Gutman, and Brigid O'Shaughnessy, a beautiful and treacherous woman whose loyalties shift at the drop of a dime. These are the ingredients of Dashiell Hammett's coolly glittering gem of detective fiction.

Synopsis

The Maltese Falcon is a 1930 detective novel originally serialized in the magazine "Black Mask". The story has been adapted several times for the cinema. The main character, Sam Spade, appears only in this novel and in three lesser known short stories, yet is widely cited as the crystallizing figure in the development of the hard-boiled private detective genre – Raymond Chandler's character Philip Marlowe, for instance, was strongly influenced by Hammett's Spade.

Spade was a departure from Hammett's nameless and less than glamorous detective, *The Continental Op*. Sam Spade combined several features of previous detectives, most notably his cold detachment, keen eye for detail, and unflinching determination to achieve his own justice. He is the man who has seen the wretched, the corrupt, the tawdry side of life but still retains his "tarnished idealism".



Cover of the magazine "Black Mask", September 1929, featuring part 1 of its serialization of The Maltese Falcon. The illustration is of detective Sam Spade by Henry C. Murphy, Jr.

Reviews

New York Times Book Review (1930)

If the locution 'hard-boiled' had not already been coined it would be necessary to coin it now to describe the characters of Dashiell Hammett's latest detective story. There is plenty of excitement . Hammett's prose [is] clean and entirely unique. His characters [are] as sharply and economically defined as any in American fiction

The Boston Globe

"Dashiell Hammett. . . is a master of the detective novel, yes, but also one hell of a writer."

The Times Literary Supplement (London)

"The Maltese Falcon is not only probably the best detective story we have ever read, it is an exceedingly well written novel."

Biography



Samuel Dashiell (*pronounced Da SHYEEL*) **Hammett** (May 27, 1894 - January 10, 1961) is recognized as the first master of hard-boiled detective fiction. His lean writing style, cynical characters and complex plots brought a new energy to pulp magazines then went on to define the genre in movies, radio and television where private eyes became an entertainment staple.

Hammett wrote more than 80 short stories and five novels. He created tough guys Sam Spade and the Continental Op as well as debonaire sleuths Nick and Nora Charles. He wrote a comic strip ("Secret Agent X-9"), an original radio series ("The Fat Man") and worked on numerous scripts, often simply to polish dialogue.

Hammett's crisp, colorful language brought

gangster slang into everyday speech.

Born in St. Mary's County, Maryland, Hammett grew up in Philadelphia and Baltimore. He left school at the age of fourteen and held several kinds of jobs thereafter -- messenger boy, newsboy, clerk, operator, and stevedore, finally becoming an operative for Pinkerton's Detective Agency from 1915-1921 with time off to serve stateside in the Motor Ambulance Corps. In World War I. A bout with tuberculosis in the service kept him in fragile health for the rest of his life

Hammett married a nurse he met during his TB treatment. They settled in San Francisco and had two daughters. In 1922 he began writing for Black Mask Magazine first using the pen name "Peter Collinson" then taking Dashiell Hammett as his byline. In the late 1920s Hammett became the unquestioned master of detective-story fiction in America.

Appearing primarily in the pulp magazine *Black Mask*, Hammett's work soon became a favorite with readers. Bringing his real-life detective experience to his writing, he is today regarded as a founding father of the "hard-boiled" genre, as well as elevating detective fiction to the level of literature.

Many of his stories featured a pudgy, middle-aged operative of the Continental Detective Agency, known only as The Continental Op. His best-known creation was Sam Spade, the tough, shifty detective of *The Maltese Falcon*. Like the Op, Spade was based in San Francisco, a city Hammett knew well.

Hammett's writing career was short. He produced four novels and almost all of his short stories between 1922 and 1931, a span of barely nine years. A fifth novel (*The Thin Man*) followed in 1934. Then... nothing. Why the long silence? Ironically, Hammett had come to loathe the hard-boiled genre that he had pioneered. He aspired to write mainstream novels that would rival those of Hemingway and Fitzgerald. It wasn't to be: Hammett barely published another word during the last 27 years of his life.

In 1930 he met Lillian Hellman, then a 24-year-old aspiring playwright married to a screenwriter. A short while later she moved in with him. Though both eventually divorced their spouses, Hammett and Hellman never married. Their relationship lasted until his death

During World War II, Hammett again served as sergeant in the Army at age 48. This time was for more than two years, most of which he spent in the Aleutians.

In the late '40s, Dashiell Hammett became an active supporter of the Civil Rights Congress of New York. In 1951 he refused to give information about four members of the group who were Communists and was sentenced to jail for six months..It also caused him to be blacklisted; his books were removed from libraries, and his radio shows cancelled. Further troubles were to follow. The IRS garnisheed all income from new publications or productions of his work for back taxes. In 1953 he again faced media scrutiny testifying as an unfriendly witness in the McCarthy hearings.

Hammett's later life was also marked in part by ill health, alcoholism and by his long-time companion, the author Lillian Hellman, with whom he had a very volatile relationship. He was unable to finish "Tulip," the most autobiographical of all his books. [Hellman published it as a novella in "The Big Knockover," a collection of tales she edited in 1966.]

A man of many contradictions, Hammett was a celebrity and a recluse, a writer so successful that he no longer needed to write, a Marxist who served America proudly in two World Wars, a wealthy man who was always broke, and a man who chose prison over revealing information that was nobody else's business. Hounded by the IRS, he died near-penniless in 1961.

Biographical info from Random House, Mystery Net and Mike Humbert
http://www.mikehumbert.com/Dashiell_Hammett_01_Short_Bio.html

Bibliography

http://www.mikehumbert.com/Dashiell_Hammett_13_Chronology.html

Novels and Short Story Collections

Red Harvest, 1929 (novel)
The Dain Curse, 1929 (novel)
The Maltese Falcon, 1930 (novel)
The Glass Key, 1931 (novel)
The Thin Man, 1934 (novel)
Blood Money, 1943 (novel written in 1927)
The Adventures of Sam Spade, edited by Ellery Queen, 1944 (stories)
The Continental Op, edited by Ellery Queen, 1945 (stories)
The Return of the Continental Op, edited by Ellery Queen, 1945 (stories)
Hammett Homicides, edited by Ellery Queen, 1946 (stories)
Dead Yellow Women, edited by Ellery Queen, 1947 (stories)
Nightmare Town, edited by Ellery Queen, 1948 (stories)
The Creeping Siamese, edited by Ellery Queen, 1950 (stories)
Woman in the Dark, edited by Ellery Queen, 1951, (novella and stories)
A Man Named Thin, edited by Ellery Queen, 1962 (stories)
The Big Knockover, edited by Lillian Hellman, 1966 (stories)
The Continental Op, edited by Steven Marcus, 1974 (stories)
Woman in the Dark, introduced by Robert B. Parker, 1988 (novella)
Nightmare Town, edited by McCauley, Greenberg & Gorman, 1999 (stories)
Crime Stories and Other Writings, selected by Steven Marcus, 2001 (stories)
Lost Stories, edited by Vince Emery (stories)

Hammett never allowed any hardback reprints of his short stories during his lifetime. He wished to be judged on his novels only, and tried to leave no permanent record of his earlier works. Apparently he was unconcerned about the Ellery Queen-edited paperbacks, which he considered "disposable."

From the RARA-Avis website

<http://www.miskatonic.org/rara-avis/biblio/hammett.html>

Hammett Screenplays

City Streets (1931) (original story)
Mister Dynamite (1935) (original story)
After the Thin Man (1936) (original story)
Another Thin Man (1939) (original story)
Watch on the Rhine (1943)

Adaptations

Roadhouse Nights (1930, from *Red Harvest*)
The Maltese Falcon (1931)
The Thin Man (1934) *Woman in the Dark* (1934)
The Glass Key (1935)

Satan Met a Lady (1936) (from The Maltese Falcon)
The Maltese Falcon (1941)
The Glass Key (1942)
Yojimbo (1961) (from Red Harvest)
A Fistful of Dollars (1964) (from Red Harvest)
The Dain Curse (1978) (TV)
Miller's Crossing (1990) (from The Glass Key, but not acknowledged)
Last Man Standing (1996) (from Red Harvest)

For more info about Hammett and his works

<http://www.booksfactory.com/writers/hammett.htm>

<http://www.thrillingdetective.com/trivia/hammett.html>

<http://mikegrost.com/hammett.htm>

The Maltese Falcon film (1941)

From <http://www.filmsite.org/malt.html>



The Maltese Falcon (1941) is one of the most popular and best classic detective mysteries ever made, and many film historians consider it the first in the dark film noir genre in Hollywood. It leaves the audience with a distinctly down-beat conclusion and bitter taste. The low-budget film reflects the remarkable directorial debut of John Huston who filmed this for Warner Bros. studios, with great dialogue, deceitful characters, and menacing scenes.

Huston was very faithful to Dashiell Hammett's 1929 novel *The Maltese Falcon*, that had originally appeared as a five-part serialized story in a pulp fiction, detective story magazine publication named *Black Mask*. However, for an early preview audience, the film took a different, short-lived title, *The Gent From Frisco*.

There were two major differences between the book and film: (1) Gutman was killed by Wilmer, and (2) the last quotable line of dialogue, with a Shakespearean reference, was thought up by Bogart on the set.

Hammett's murder mystery novel had previously been filmed twice:

1) low-budget, pre-Code film (directed by Roy Del Ruth) as *The Maltese Falcon* (1931) - renamed for TV as *Dangerous Female* - with Ricardo Cortez as the gumshoe opposite femme fatale Bebe Daniels; it was faithful to Hammett's novel, although its pre-censorship status allowed for steamier scenes (a nude bathtub shot, a portrayal of Spade as a womanizing Latin lover, and a clearly homosexual relationship between Casper "Fat Man" Gutman (Dudley Digges) and 'fall guy' Wilmer (Dwight Frye))

2) remade as *Satan Met a Lady* (1936) (directed by William Dieterle) with Warren William and rising star Bette Davis as the femme fatale, but without the 'black bird' (a ram's horn was substituted)

Huston was convinced that he could remake the film with a more precise screenplay and better acting than the other two adaptations. The idea of a sequel following the film's success, to be titled *The Further Adventures of the Maltese Falcon*, was scrapped when Huston became unavailable and when Hammett demanded an exorbitant financial guarantee.

As a footnote, it was refilmed 34 years later (a record for an interval of time between a sequel and its original) in the mid-70s as the satirical *Black Bird* (1975) with George Segal as son Sam Spade, Jr., and two appearances by original cast members (Elisha Cook, Jr., and Lee Patrick). The classic mystery film has also been spoofed in *The Maltese Bippy* (1969) with TV-show stars Dan Rowan and Dick Martin, *Murder By Death* (1976), and *The Cheap Detective* (1978).

The stylistic film is a mixture of mystery, romance, and thriller. It is mostly known for a number of memorable portrayals of corrupt, deceitful, hard-nosed villains ("The Fat Man" or Gutman by Sydney Greenstreet), low-life quirky crooks (Peter Lorre and 'gunsel' Elisha Cook, Jr.) and tough heroes, interwoven complex interactions between vividly-played characters, double-crossing intrigues and deceptions (e.g., the treacherous, lying Mary Astor character identifies herself with three aliases - as Miss Ruth Wonderly, Miss Leblanc, and Brigid O'Shaughnessy), posturings, betrayals and materialistic greed.

[Mystery writer Dashiell Hammett was reportedly the first to use the word 'gunsel' - meaning a gun-toting felon - and to transform the old meaning (a young, passive, and inexperienced male homosexual) into a new one. In the film's conclusion, Gutman is willing to sacrifice his own gun-wielding lover Wilmer to the police -- and that parallels Sam Spade's response to Brigid! Lorre and Greenstreet would go on to star in many films together, most notably *Casablanca* (1942) - also with Bogart.]

B-movie lead character Humphrey Bogart, now introduced as a 'good guy', presented the definitive anti-hero Sam Spade in the mystery thriller classic - as a cynical, cool San Francisco sleuthing private-eye who lives by his own code of ethics. Bogart had just finished another Warner Bros. film *High Sierra* (1941), in a role that was also turned down by WB's contract player George Raft. Geraldine Fitzgerald was originally chosen to play the role that Mary Astor eventually portrayed.

The film received three nominations, but no Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor (. Sydney Greenstreet in his talkie film debut), and Best Adapted Screenplay (by the director - John Huston). Neither Astor nor Bogart were nominated for their immortalized roles.

The Falcon statue



The "Maltese Falcon" itself is reportedly based on the "Knipphausen Hawk," a ceremonial pouring vessel made in 1697 for George William von Knipphausen, Count of the Holy Roman Empire. It is modeled after a hawk perched on a rock and is encrusted with red garnets, amethysts, emeralds and blue sapphires. The vessel is currently owned by the Duke of Devonshire and is an integral piece of the Chatsworth House collection.

There were several 11-1/2 inch tall falcon props made for use in the film due to the fact that Humphrey Bogart dropped the original during shooting. The original is on display to this day in Warner Brothers' movie museum, its tail feathers visibly dented from Bogart's accident. Some of the copies of the falcon were cast of plastic resin, and some of lead. Only two 45 lb. lead falcons and two 5 lb., 5.4 oz resin falcons are verified to exist today. One lead falcon has been displayed for years at various venues. The second, which was marred at the end of the movie by Sydney Greenstreet, was given to William Conrad by studio chief Jack L. Warner. It was auctioned off in December 1994, nine months after Conrad's death, for \$398,500 to Ronald Winston of Harry Winston, Inc. At that time, it was the highest price paid for a movie prop. It was used to model a 10 lb. gold replica displayed at the 69th Academy Awards. The replica has Burmese ruby eyes, interchangeable claws (one set of gold, one set of coral) and has a platinum chain in its beak with a 42.98 flawless diamond at the end. Its value is estimated at well over \$8 million.

What is Noir Fiction?

http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Noir_fiction

For More Information see "What is Noir" by George Tuttle
<http://noirfiction.info/what.html>

Noir fiction is the name sometimes given to a mode of crime fiction regarded as a subset of the hardboiled style. According to noir aficionado George Tuttle, "In this sub-genre, the protagonist is usually not a detective, but instead either a victim, a suspect, or a perpetrator. He is someone tied directly to the crime, not an outsider called to solve or fix the situation. Other common characteristics are the emphasis on sexual relationships and the use of sex to advance the plot and the self-destructive qualities of the lead characters. This type of fiction also has the lean, direct writing style and gritty realism commonly associated with hardboiled fiction."

The seminal American writer in the noir fiction mode was James M. Cain—regarded as the third major figure of the early hardboiled scene, he debuted as a crime novelist in 1934, right between Hammett and Chandler. Other important U.S. writers in the noir tradition are Cornell Woolrich, Dorothy B. Hughes, Jim Thompson, David Goodis, Charles Williams, and Elmore Leonard. The term "noir fiction" may evoke unrelenting gloom; in fact, while the work of all the major authors in the field might be

characterized by a fatalistic attitude, it has been expressed in a variety of tones. Woolrich and Goodis indeed often portray what seems to be a sunless world, but Leonard is frequently bright, even when the color's blood red. Hughes and Williams are somewhere in the middle—her work is serious, yet with a lot of hardboiled "attitude," while his forte is the philosophical smile and shrug. As for Cain and Thompson, wrote some of the blackest and funniest of American genre fiction.

The popular use of "noir" in the term "noir fiction" derives immediately from "film noir" as it has been used to characterize certain putatively "dark" Hollywood crime dramas and melodramas, many early examples of which were based on works by the original hardboiled writers. In turn, "noir" (French for "black"), first applied to American films in the mid-1940s by observers in France, was used there in similar senses. Most relevantly, the term roman noir ("black novel") was employed to describe a range of books, some that an English speaker might think of as mysteries, others as gothic melodramas. Note that while the meanings of "noir fiction" and roman noir are closely related, the derivation is not direct. Making the connection even tighter, in 1945 the French publisher Gallimard brought out a new series of paperback thrillers, many of them translations of hardboiled American fiction. The line was called Série noire.

Analysis of *The Maltese Falcon*

In this novel, Hammett redefines many of the conventions of the "hard-boiled" detective genre. Spade is a bitter, sardonic character who lets the police and the criminals think he is in with the criminals while he works singlemindedly to catch the crooks. Brigid O'Shaughnessy is the classic femme fatale. The other crooks are manipulative and self-centered (or merely self-centered) with no concern for anyone's well-being except their own.

However, unlike some other hard-boiled detectives who have a strong sense of idealism underneath the cynical shell, Hammett never provides a clear statement of Spade's notion of morality. Spade attempts to explain himself to Brigid O'Shaughnessy with the Flitcraft parable in which Hammett makes an oblique reference to the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, but O'Shaughnessy has no idea what he is getting at.

At the time of Miles Archer's death, Spade is having an affair with Archer's wife, and while he does the "right thing" in the end, catching and turning in Archer's murderer, his reasons for doing so are somewhat ambiguous. Although he expresses a strong professional ethic ("When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it") it also has an element of self-interest about it ("[W]hen one of your organization gets killed it's bad business to let the killer get away with it. It's bad all around - bad for that one organization, bad for every detective everywhere"). It is left unclear whether Spade might have chosen not to turn Brigid in if there was a bigger monetary gain for him ("...a lot more money would have been one more item on your side"), but certain that his emotional attachment to her (however strong that is) is not sufficient to overcome the risks

involved with letting her go. Spade's blatant calculus of risk, reward and duty with which Hammett ends the novel contains remarkably little trace of morality.

The Maltese Falcon itself is a good example of a MacGuffin, in that it serves as motivation for several of the character's actions but has little other significance.

The writing style is unusual in that the reader is told what each character does and says, but no-one's inner thoughts are ever revealed.

What is Hard boiled American crime fiction writing?

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_crime_fiction

A U.S. reaction to the cozy conventionality of British murder mysteries was the American hard-boiled school of crime writing (certain works in the field are also referred to as noir fiction). Writers like Dashiell Hammett (1894 - 1961), Raymond Chandler (1888 - 1959), Jonathan Latimer (1906 - 1983), Mickey Spillane (1918 - 2006), and many others decided on an altogether different, innovative approach to crime fiction.

This created whole new stereotypes of crime fiction writing. The typical American investigator in these novels, was modelled thus:

- He is a private investigator working alone. He is between 35 and 45 years or so, and both a loner and a tough guy.
- Displaying numerous macho attributes, he is certainly no family man and he does not associate with lots of friends either. Alone at home, his usual diet consists of fried eggs, black coffee and cigarettes.
- He meets his casual acquaintances at his favourite haunts, which are shady all-night bars where he turns out to be a heavy drinker without ever getting too drunk to be unaware of his surroundings or unable to defend himself when attacked.
- He always "wears" a gun and does not mind shooting criminals if the necessity arises, or being beaten up if it helps him solve a case. He certainly has a penchant for attractive "dames", especially the gorgeous blonde clients, many a femme fatale among them, who come to his shabby little office on an upper floor of a downtown highrise to have their unfaithful husbands shadowed by a private eye.
- He is always short of cash and invariably asks for a down payment. Cases that at first seem easy and straightforward, often turn out to be quite complicated, forcing him to embark on an odyssey through the urban landscape which often involves having to deal with organized crime ("rackets") and low life of all sorts crowding the "mean streets" of urban America, preferably Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago. This is how he acquires his reputation as a troublemaker.
- A hard-boiled private eye has an ambivalent attitude towards the police. On the one hand, he realizes that both the "cops" and he himself are fighting on the

same side. On the other hand, especially where police corruption and foul play are involved, it's his ambition to save America and rid it of mean elements all by himself.

- Also, as Raymond Chandler's protagonist Philip Marlowe -- immortalized by actor Humphrey Bogart in the movie adaptation (1946) of the novel *The Big Sleep* (1939) -- admits to his client, General Sternwood, he finds it rather tiresome, as an individualist, to fit into the extensive set of rules and regulations for police detectives:

Discussion Questions (from *Barnes and Noble.com*)

1. Sam Spade's attitude toward authority is patently clear in remarks like "It's a long while since I burst out crying because policemen didn't like me" [p. 19] or "At one time or another I've had to tell everyone from the Supreme Court down to go to hell, and I've got away with it" [p. 170]. How is Spade's distrust of power manifested in his actions? How important is distrust as an aspect of his character?
2. Of the three women in the book--Brigid O'Shaughnessy, Effie Perine, and Iva Archer--are any fully realized, or are perhaps all three, as stereotypes, three sides of one woman? As a stereotype, what does each woman represent? What does Spade mean, and what does it say about Spade, when he tells Effie, "You're a damned good man, sister" [p. 160]?
3. A blatant stereotype is Joel Cairo: "This guy is queer" [p. 42], Effie informs Spade when the perfumed Cairo comes to the office. Is a homosexual character effective or necessary in the plot? Would he be as effective without stereotyping? Why do you think Hammett created him?
4. Near the end of the story, Spade says to Brigid, "Don't be too sure I'm as crooked as I'm supposed to be" [p. 215]. What evidence is there that he's not crooked? Does honor temper greed in his negotiations with the others in the hunt for the black bird? How are greed and ruthlessness packaged here so that ultimately we might not care whether the characters are crooked or not? Does style compensate for all in the hard-boiled genre?
5. "By Gad, sir, you're a character" [p. 178], says Gutman, laughing, when Spade suggests making Wilmer the fall-guy. Is the Spade-Gutman relationship one of justice versus corrupt wealth or one of equals competing for the same prize? How does Gutman's sophistication and erudition reveal another side of Spade?
6. When Spade returns to the office in the last scene, Effie does not greet him with her usual verve. What has happened to the breezily affectionate bond between them? What is Effie's relationship to Brigid? Will Effie forgive Spade, or do we not know enough about her to make predictions?

Comparing Hammett, Chandler, and Thompson:

1. How does the way Chandler uses Los Angeles in *The Long Goodbye* resemble or differ from the way Hammett uses San Francisco in *The Maltese Falcon*? To what extent is this the result of their individual writing styles? Does Thompson resemble

either writer with his descriptions of the West Texas oil country in *The Killer Inside Me*? How important is setting in each of these novels?

2. Although they were brilliant innovators and stylists, Hammett and Chandler were writing for a genre that dictated resolution of the plot. Thompson, on the other hand, in *The Killer Inside Me* creates a plot rife with ambiguity. What element or elements of his predecessors' style does Thompson retain? Could Thompson have written *The Killer Inside Me* without the models of Hammett and Chandler?

3. Thompson inverts traditional crime fiction by writing from the viewpoint of the criminal instead of the detective. In the novels of Hammett and Chandler, how different is the criminal from the detective? Where do Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe fall in their respective, or mutual, attitudes toward authority and law?

4. How does the characterization of women in *The Maltese Falcon* compare with those in *The Long Goodbye*? Is Brigid O'Shaughnessy the equivalent of Eileen Wade? Is Effie Perine the equivalent of Linda Loring? What do the differences in these characters tell you about the hard-boiled style? About the authors?

5. Chandler and Thompson write in the first person, and Hammett uses the third person in *The Maltese Falcon*. How would each of these novels have been affected--for better or worse--if the voice had been reversed? What are the inherent advantages and/or limitations of writing in the first or third person?

From RT Library Research Database Novelist Plus

Access via link at www.rtlibrary.org

How does Hammett use character to keep the reader interested in the novel?

The Maltese Falcon centers around a relatively unremarkable mystery. Compared to many mysteries of today, the crime is not particularly horrifying. Hammett is a character writer and his characters are more worthy of attention than the mystery. His writing includes physical descriptions of the characters, but very few personality descriptions, and he does not reveal the thoughts of any of the characters. This forces the reader to make judgments on the characters as he would on people he has met in person — based entirely on dialogue and mannerisms.

The spare writing makes the story even more mysterious and gives the novel its lasting impact. The reader wonders about the importance of what Hammett leaves out of the story and whether he will eventually reveal the answers to all the mysteries. For example, the story doesn't explain the real relationships between Gutman and Wilmer or Wilmer and Cairo...

What does the falling beam (Flitcraft) story represent?

To Spade, Flitcraft represents inevitability. As Spade contemplates his attraction to the woman he thinks killed his partner, he has his own brush with death. Despite the danger, Spade wants a taste of the new life that Brigid represents. She is the danger of the falling beam, excitement, and the sign that his life could end at any moment.

However, just as Spade has to adjust himself to Brigid, he will have to adjust himself to life without Brigid.

Spade faces the inevitability of his own woman on the last page of *The Maltese Falcon*: Iva Archer. Just as it was his destiny to fall in love with Brigid, Spade cannot escape the inevitability of Iva in his life.

How does Sam Spade evolve as a character through the novel?

At the beginning of the novel, Sam Spade is a puzzle. Despite his dead partner and the beautiful woman in his head, he seems detached and unemotional. He is always thinking, always ready for the unexpected, and never seems to be surprised by anything. As the novel progresses, Spade slowly reveals his fears, and eventually we get a glimpse of the honorable Spade who sacrifices love for moral beliefs.

In the end, Spade proves he is a man of honor. When he is faced with Brigid's doe eyes begging him to save her, Spade tells her, "I'm going to send you over. The chances are you'll get off with life. That means you'll be out again in twenty years. You're an angel. I'll wait for you. . . . If they hang you I'll always remember you" (

Is Sam Spade (Dashiell Hammett) sexist?

The *Maltese Falcon* does not portray women positively. Of the three main female characters, Spade likes one (his secretary Effie Perine), loves another (Brigid O'Shaughnessy), and avoids the other (Iva Archer, his partner's widow). The reader could perceive this portrayal of women as a sexist commentary on the dangers and frailties of the female sex. The book could also convey the ultimate feminist comment that the women are no better (or worse) than the men in the novel.

Brigid, Iva, and Effie could be representations of the three types of women an honorable, lone detective like Spade interacted with. Spade's habit of referring to women by impersonal diminutives such as "darling" and "angel" implies that these characters are stand-ins for all other women.

The novel can also be understood another way. Brigid, Effie, and Iva could be the very pinnacle of modern feminism. They do not fit the idea of a woman as genteel, calm, and maternal. Instead, like the men, they are selfish, conniving, greedy, and dangerous. By not making the women more moral or honest than the men, Hammett could be making the ultimate statement of equality. Ambiguity is one of the great strengths of *The Maltese Falcon*.

How do the stories Gutman and Brigid tell affect the reader's perception of their character?

Brigid has many stories designed to get men to do what she wants. Gutman tells the story of the *Maltese Falcon*. Brigid's stories mark her as a liar. Gutman's stories also show him as untrustworthy, but not because he is a liar. He is untrustworthy because he is honest about his willingness to do anything to get his treasure.

Brigid is not to be trusted. For the rest of the novel she essentially tells the truth when really pressed, but the reader has already learned that Brigid is not to be trusted and wonders what information she skips over when she answers Spade's questions. Gutman's big story is different; this story is the truth, as he knows it. Gutman appears more honest because he is willing to share this story and because Effie's cousin confirms it could be true.

Both Brigid and Gutman are thieves who are willing to sacrifice others for their own advancement. The ultimate difference is that Gutman is transparent about his criminality while Brigid tries to hide behind her femininity to make men help her. The first stories they tell to Spade define their characters for the reader.

How has time changed the reader's reaction to the dialogue in the novel?

When it was published, dialogue was not meant to evoke a bygone era, but instead to suggest a criminal underworld. Hammett is careful to use the appropriate slang, words he learned while working as a Pinkerton detective. He also carefully constructs a cadence to the dialogue. The rhythm of Spade's words suggests a deep voice, made gruff with tobacco smoke, and a man who has seen it all.

The slang feels old-fashioned to a modern reader. It demonstrates a connection to the underworld, but it also evokes a lost time.

What role does trust play in the novel?

Trust is a major theme in the novel and defines Spade's relationships with the other characters. Trust is also elusive for Spade. It is something he is always reaching for and can never catch. Spade can only trust himself and his sense of honor.

Brigid regularly begs for Spade's trust; she dangles the carrot of her trust in him as a ploy to get him to help her. Gutman, strangely, seems to trust Spade. Despite Spade's role as his opponent, Gutman likes Spade's honesty.

Spade's relationship with Effie is harder to define. He repeatedly asks her what she thinks of Brigid and she repeatedly tells him that Brigid is an okay person. Until the end, Spade seems to trust her answer. He doesn't challenge her. Spade's mistrust is part of his character. He is a lone wolf.

How does the novel's point of view add to the mystery?

Hammett writes his novel in the third person. Usually, novelists use the third person point of view (POV) when they want readers to feel everything the characters feel, but Hammett uses the third person POV to keep the reader at arm's length from Spade. This has the interesting effect that the reader is almost another character in the novel, rather than a spy in Spade's head.

The first mystery is who killed Miles Archer. Its accompanying mystery is at what point Spade knew Brigid was the killer. The reader cannot predict Spade's reaction because we do not know where his ultimate loyalty lies, beyond himself. This ambiguity creates a lasting effect on the reader. While Spade solves the

Spade's character. Hammett leaves the depths of Spade's character for the reader to piece together from the little information gleaned from descriptions of his dialogue and reactions.

Discussion Questions (from *The Big Read* guide)

http://www.neabigread.org/books/maltesefalcon/maltese06_discuss.php

1. *The Maltese Falcon* centers on detective Sam Spade, a character almost as elusive as the falcon itself. What aspects of his personality remain mysterious? Which of his choices retain their ambiguity?
2. Why does Sam Spade take the case, even though he suspects that "Miss Wonderly" is lying?
3. What kind of vision does *The Maltese Falcon* present of urban America? How important is San Francisco as the novel's setting?
4. The reader discovers some parts of the mystery at the same time as the detective, other parts much later. At what point did you solve the crime?
5. Is Sam Spade a hero? How would you describe his personal moral code in a violent world?
6. Why might Hammett avoid describing any of the novel's murders in detail?
7. What do the novel's three women-Brigid O'Shaughnessy, Effie Perine, and Iva Archer-have in common? How different are their personalities and motivations?
8. In the 1930s and '40s mostly male writers adapted the femme fatale-a foxy, dangerous woman-to crime stories. How might a woman have written Brigid differently?
9. What motivates Sam Spade to find the falcon? Is he tempted by money or Brigid, or does he merely love the chase?
10. Does any character change or grow in *The Maltese Falcon*?
11. Are Sam Spade's actions in the novel's final scene consistent with his character? What would you have done in his place?
12. Although the reader is never privy to the thoughts of Hammett's characters, what might the falcon symbolize to each of them based on their actions?

For Further Reading

Classic Noir Fiction (*all Dashiell Hammett titles plus*)

James M. Cain, *Double Indemnity* (1935)

The Postman Always Rings Twice . (1934)

Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939)

The Long Goodbye .(1954)

Patricia Highsmith *Strangers on a Train* (1950)

Dorothy Hughes *In a Lonely Place* (1947)

PD James *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972)

Ross MacDonald *The Chill* (1964)

The Drowning Pool (1950)

William F Nolan *Sharks never sleep : a novel featuring the Black Mask boys:
Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Erle Stanley Gardner* (1998)

Jim Thompson *The Grifters* (1963)

Some Contemporary Noir authors

Lawrence Block

James Lee Burke

Michael Connelly

Robert Crais

James Ellroy

Joe Gores

Denis Johnson (*Nobody Move*)

Philip Kerr

Dennis Lehane

Elmore Leonard

John MacDonald

Haruki Murakami

Walter Mosley

Marcia Muller

Robert B. Parker

George Pelecanos

William Pronzini

Thomas Pynchon (*Inherent Vice*)

Lawrence Sanders

Mickey Spillane

Nonfiction

Dashiell Hammett, *Selected letters of Dashiell Hammett, 1921-1960* (2001)

Jo Hammett, *Dashiell Hammett: A Daughter Remembers* (2001)

Diane Johnson *Dashiell Hammett, a life* (1983)

Richard Layman's *Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett* (1981)

James Mackay, *Allan Pinkerton: The First Private Eye* (1997)

Joan Mellen *Hellman and Hammett : the legendary passion of Lillian Hellman and Dashiell Hammett* (1990)

Frank Morn "*The eye that never sleeps*": *a history of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency* (1982)