

University of Nevada, Reno

**In Search of the Dingus:**  
**A Geographic Approach to *The Maltese Falcon***

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in  
Land Use Planning and Policy

by

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We recommend that the thesis  
prepared under our supervision by

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**In Search of the Dingus:**

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**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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## ABSTRACT

*The Maltese Falcon* was serialized in *Black Mask* magazine in 1929 before Dashiell Hammett's story was published in book form on Valentine's Day of 1930. It ascended from hard-boiled yard to timeless classic in 1941, when director John Huston adapted the book to film. Later would come radio, comic strip, foreign translation, parody, and other versions of the story, and ultimately in 2005, recognition by the Library of Congress, in a ceremony celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the book's publication. Simply put, *The Maltese Falcon* is a part of the American cultural landscape, a story that won't go away. I ask and answer two questions: 1) Why does *The Maltese Falcon* have cultural significance to the present day, and 2) How does geography help in gaining a better understanding of the story? This thesis views the content of *The Maltese Falcon* through three means: searching out primary source information by Hammett (of which there is little); scouring secondary source information about Hammett, including biographical information and interpretations of his work (of which there is much); and examining the broader history of the detective genre to place Hammett's work amid a break from tradition that helped gel the hard-boiled street-wise detective into world literature. The content of *The Maltese Falcon* will be examined through a geographic lens to explore this work that takes place as American cities were transformed through a period of economic, social, and urban turmoil. *The Maltese Falcon* is a geographic tale of place and culture, delivered as a unique yarn with an unforgettable style that forever links San Francisco to an historical artifact that Hammett's detective Sam Spade refers to, not altogether unlovingly, as the "dingus."

## DEDICATION

*To JMC ...*

*... and to a friend and advisor, now gone, whose door was  
always open, and who opened many doors for me and for  
other students.*

*Christopher H. Exline, PhD (1949–2007)*

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## PREFACE

In *The Frontier in American History* (1962 [1893]), a work that set the agenda for studies of the American past for ensuing decades, Wisconsin historian Frederick Jackson Turner portrayed the American frontier dweller as a rugged individual with restless nervous energy. New social trends were emerging, Turner explained, as the American Frontier closed. The restlessness that had inspired many to seek fortunes or a new way of life in geographically remote areas helped to transform American society.

In the early nineteenth hundreds, an outgoing flow from the cities slowed and reversed to become an incoming tide. People left the rural environment and sought employment in urban settings where leisure activities consisted of lunch breaks and commuter rides on the streetcar. Pulp magazines competed with slicks and with newspapers for the attention of the American public. Consumerism and speculation replaced the restless frontier spirit as high rises and tall buildings sprang up during an industrializing modern era.

The written word, as always, remained a powerful tool throughout the tumult. Writers with a great reach and striking style stimulated the imagination of a readership that absorbed their stories as American society became more complex under the pressures of an urban environment. The stories were written by native sons who connected to their readers because the message delivered was embedded in everyday life.

A distinct form of writing emerged in the early days of the twentieth century that fit the edgy mood of the nation. The anxious style of the detective genre kept pace with an American economy that was on a collision course with destiny. The tidy dénouements



put forth by British writers who packaged logical solutions — known as locked-room mysteries — from their comfortable chairs in mahogany-paneled studies needed a revision. Urban malaise was a more suitable frame than the English countryside; trees and cobbled paths gave way to neon and shadows, and hurried footsteps in turn created echoes in dark alleys.

American crime fiction was different; it needed, and it took, a more poignant approach. The urban landscape was crowded and the hard-boiled detective arrived on the scene as the ideal protagonist. Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler would quip, gave crime back to the people who committed it (Polito 2000, xiii). Hammett, among others, had honed his early craft in pulp magazines, described as “a class-based literature” that offered a social perspective (Haut 1995, 4). Hammett helped to fuse the geography of the nation, and reaffirmed the closing of the frontier by offering a more urban story. At times he even “invented” geography by giving a country a social and political history along with a network of streets (Wolfe 1980, 61). Hammett’s plots stretched to the Mountain and the Pacific West, even to provenance. But when he hit upon *The Maltese Falcon*, the eponymous title of his timeless geographic tale, it belonged to no one. The quest for the Falcon is an urban tale with a Western if not an ancient theme of quest for treasure.

Hammett fit the profile of Turner’s frontier dweller. His style of writing was full of frontier energy, an energy dissipated in the modern American city (Wolfe 1980, 21). Hammett carried the scars of his Pinkerton days like a gunfighter who bore witness to the real life toughness of his prose. He wrote from first-hand experience, yet remained detached, befitting the actions and aura of a stoic. Hammett was as much a critic of his own work as that of others. Even those closest to Hammett knew him little; just ask his

long-time companion Lillian Hellman (Wolfe 1980, 2). Hammett parceled out details of self like the endings he scripted: A bit unresolved, like a ray of light coming through the largely opaque window. His existence was T.S. Eliot's "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons," from an author hardly likely to admit to reading "Prufrock." Hammett was nothing if not parsimonious with personal revelations.

A geographic evaluation of Hammett's classic work, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), is possible because of the element of time. Geographic time is real time. There is a lapse in time before the story met its ultimate destiny, reflected in John Huston's classic 1941 screenplay and film version that all but gave birth to film noir.

In an ironic twist, befitting the style of its creator, the ultimate recognition of Hammett's work came about through replication of the story in movie form. The story of the Black Bird could be in a large part mostly read from the book to the movie screen, much like Joyce Carol Oates offers essays that read the fights (Oates 1988). There would be fewer edits in the movie — though still some 2000 in all from the serialized version to book form (Layman 2005) — that plagued Hammett's original story that got a few things by the censors.

John Huston re-crafted Hammett's novel to have an effective version of *The Maltese Falcon* that he might put on the big screen. For many the book has morphed into the movie in what has been described as "total submission by the cinema to literature" (Marling 1995, 239). The result is that some evaluations of *The Maltese Falcon* ignore duality and treat the subject as one that is uniform through all the versions: pulps, novel, two initial films, and the "final" Huston version in 1941. But not so fast — Huston did, for example, leave out the much-debated parable of "Flitcraft," which was in Hammett's

novel, but also something personal, “a thing he had savored and relished that he wanted me to share” (HLR 2001, 100). Because of the censorship code of the time, Huston had to mute what were quite overt sexual overtones in the novel, and ease off some of the notably complex human relationships that Hammett wove into the plot (Luhr 1995, 175; Layman (ed.) 2005, 281). The movie was, after all, to be filmed in a Hollywood studio, but Hammett wrote from the streets of San Francisco as he collected ideas in making his daily rounds. The alley where Miles Archer bought it was real urban space, and not a Hollywood creation. There were limits to what Hollywood could accept and pass on from Hammett’s shadowed vision of the City by the Bay.

The beauty of Hammett’s work lies in its simplicity, which leads to endless discussion and analysis about the cultural meaning of the *Black Bird*. This thesis is a critical attempt to inquire about the true meaning of *The Maltese Falcon*. My thesis will examine the larger context in geographic representation of a story that was published in 1930 by Alfred A. Knopf. This was a story for the Jazz Age when the nation was striving to shed its Puritan values — but was already facing the crunching uncertainty of a Great Depression that was already imminent, late in 1929.

*The Maltese Falcon* conjures up the image of tough-guy Sam Spade, a fictional character who has remained constant in popular culture in his manner of speech and dress. Spade is the arch type private detective and has become one of the most enduring characters in detective fiction, if not all of American literature.

Even the movie prop of the Falcon that Spade called “the dingus” (a not altogether polite term) has endured. At an estate sale in 1994, it fetched \$398,500, “a then-record price for movie memorabilia” (Sobchack 2007, 227). Two years later the

owner sold the prop to a “secret buyer” for an amount considerably in excess of the purchase price in 1994. The purchaser turned out to be a Manhattan jeweler who adorned the dingus with ten pounds of gold, ruby eyes, and a forty-two carat diamond that hung from the falcon’s beak in a restoration that took over two years and eight million dollars to create (Sobchack 2007, 227).

Spade would probably find humor in these “acts of appropriation” and in the real life caper when the Falcon went missing from its perch at John’s Grill in San Francisco around Valentine’s Day 2007. Spade ate his hurried dinner of “chops baked potato and sliced tomatoes” at John’s while he waited for his cab en route to Burlingame to find Brigid, who had sent him on a wild goose chase in chapter 17 (Hammett 1930).

The theft of a treasured movie prop has rekindled interest in a timeless story that will simply not go away. The heist was nationally reported nationally (in the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times), and of course caused quite a stir in San Francisco, where Hammett acolytes regularly visit the shrine at John’s Grill (San Francisco Chronicle) (Glionna 2007; Koopman 2007; McKinley 2007). The Falcon statuette is much more than a movie prop or a cultural icon. It has become the centerpiece for Hammett’s world view of the corrupt human and social landscape that emerged from 1920s and ’30s American society. People have bought into it, “foolproof baby,” in the words of poet and crime writer Kenneth Fearing (Polito 1935, 44-45).

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Samuel Spade's Jaw was long and bony, his chin a jutting v under the more flexible v of his mouth.

—Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*

Some academic disciplines deal all the time with the downside of the human soul and personality: biographers, psychologists, sociologists. But geographers and planners are not necessarily thought of as being members of that somewhat disconsolate cast — if planners tend to be by nature utopians, wearing round rose-colored spectacles in the style of architects and social engineers, then geographers are perhaps more interested in mapping patterns and movement than in jousting with society's dark side. But there are exceptions, and this thesis is one. For years, I have been interested in noir, in fiction and film, and in this study I examine the role of geography in *The Maltese Falcon*, which is widely regarded as one of the signature works in American life and letters. If some works mete out their existence largely in the internal monologues and perceptions of their protagonists, *The Maltese Falcon* lives its life openly and geographically: In film and in the original Dashiell Hammett work, the intersections of geography with everyday life in San Francisco are fanned out for inspection like a deck of slightly racy playing cards. Even in urban planning in downtown San Francisco Dashiell Hammett's legacy is alive in landmarks and in public and private space.

The opening line of *The Maltese Falcon* introduces the reader to detective Sam Spade and embeds him forever in American culture. Spade, the eponymous Falcon, a

clumsy and peculiar bunch of rogue characters with international connections (spiced with a world-class *femme fatale*); all are connected in the pursuit of an illusory cultural artifact. In the end, the falcon turns out to be a fake, but its pursuit is nevertheless fatal to many of its pursuers. The Library of Congress celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the publication of *The Maltese Falcon* in 2005, a testament to the enduring significance of the story to American literature.

*The Maltese Falcon* is uniquely American, but with a global appeal. The story was written by the American author Dashiell Hammett, whose terse prose captured a unique period between two world wars. It was a time when Americans shed blood in a foreign war they did not fully understand, and shed more in episodes of labor strife at home, hoping to assert their rights against unfair and oppressive practices. It was a period of cynicism and distrust of government, and of anything foreign. Also present was a period of rapid urbanization and modernization when the formerly agrarian economy was transformed. America became an industrialized nation. Social mores and barriers were broken as the Victorian Age gave way to the Jazz Age. Consumerism stimulated by mass advertising ran high, as did women's skirts as if to mimic a runaway stock market that would come to a roaring crash in 1929. Against this backdrop, on Valentines Day 1930, *The Maltese Falcon* was published in book form.

The story had been serialized in *Black Mask* magazine. *Black Mask* was one of an estimated 200 pulp magazines that emerged from a cottage industry of less than two dozen after World War I (Goulart 1965, xi). Pulp supplanted dime novels and fiction weeklies that were popular during the nineteenth century (Goulart 1965, xi). The magazines gained the nickname of "pulp" because of the low cost and the acidic wood-pulp

paper used to produce the magazine. The cover of a pulp magazine “served as both package and advertisement, so it had to be bright provocative” (Goulart 1988, 4). The appeal of *Black Mask*, like other pulps, played to a niche audience some considered lowbrow (Goulart 1988, 9). Pulp writers’ pay was meager, as low as a single penny per word. The “slicks” were produced on a better quality of paper and were considered more upscale. Slick magazines attracted a more sophisticated readership that paid a higher cover price to read the likes of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, and others.

In addition to being serialized in *Black Mask* and produced as a novel in book form, *The Maltese Falcon* was syndicated for foreign newspapers, reprised for radio, plagiarized by an amateur novelist “just for fun” (*The New York Times*, 26 September 1933), and satirized in parodies. Sam Spade is the protagonist in the story: Spade who has become one of the most enduring characters in literature, and is often imitated in manner of speech, dress, and mannerism. Although he is a fictional character, described by his creator as a “dream man,” Sam Spade today conjures up an image of the archetype detective. At the end of the 1941 movie classic, Spade tosses off a quotation from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* to the effect that the statuette of the Maltese Falcon is “the stuff that dreams are made of” (Dooley 1984, 108). This line does not appear in Hammett’s story, which had been portrayed in film twice (1931, 1936) before director John Huston’s successful adaptation in 1941. The line constitutes one of the few liberties Huston took with Hammett’s novel; indeed, most of the film can be “read” from the book. This film achieved a status of its own and became known as one of the earliest examples of *film noir* by French critics (Luhr 1995, 5). The book, film, icon, and its characters have morphed into one.

*The Maltese Falcon* has also achieved recognition internationally. The story has been translated into numerous foreign languages including Italian, Spanish, German, and Japanese, and there have been foreign film adaptations (Layman (ed.) 2005, 316-320, 339-343).

Hammett's style of writing has been described as hard-boiled, where "character was placed before situation" (Nolan 1969, 112). Phillip Shaw was the primary patron of Hammett's early work; he was responsible for enticing Hammett back to the *Black Mask* after Hammett had a falling out with Shaw's predecessor Phillip Cody. Despite the fact that the two did not always see eye-to-eye, Cody was the first one to recognize Hammett's talent (Layman 1981, 79). Cody was at *Black Mask* in 1923, "with the birth of the world's first tough private eye, Terry Mack, in [Carroll John] Daly's story, 'Three Gun Terry' in the May 15 issue" (Nolan 1985, 22). Hammett's first Op story was printed in *Black Mask* later that year, in October (Nolan 1985, 22). Cody became editor of *Black Mask* in 1924, and recognized "that the Hammett-Daly brand of tough, hard-edged storytelling represented a bold new step beyond the traditional deductive school of crime fiction" (Nolan 1985, 23).

Shaw, the new editor, expressed his goal for *Black Mask* when he invited Hammett back to the magazine, and he set the boundaries for a type of magazine mystery story that "was both constrained and restrained," seeking "simplicity for the sake of clarity, plausibility and belief" and "action, but we held that action is meaningless unless it involves recognizable human character in three dimensional form" (Shaw 1946, vi). Shaw's goal was simple: "in this new pattern character conflict is the main theme; the ensuing crime, or its threat, is incidental" (Shaw 1946, vii). Hammett adheres to these



principles in *The Falcon*. Tension builds between Spade and Brigid until the denouement is reached.

Shaw recalls that Hammett's response was "immediate and most enthusiastic" (Shaw 1946, vi). Hammett was passionate about his craft, and took the detective story seriously, and was critical of others whose work he reviewed. A letter Hammett wrote to Blanche Knopf on March 28, 1928 expressed this fact: "I'm one of the few — if there are any more — people moderately literate who take the detective story seriously" (Layman (ed.) 2005, 45-47). Hammett's approach to the detective genre was in contrast to the deductive type of mystery story that was made popular by writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and his English counterpart, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Hammett and his fellow writers at *Black Mask* ushered in a new form of writing that "emphasizes character and the problems inherent in human behavior over crime solution" (Shaw 1946, vii). This form of mystery is often referred as the hard-boiled school of writing. In a comparison of the two styles, if the element of crime is stripped away from a Hammett story, there is still a thrilling story, "a test which the deductive type of mystery could barely meet" (Shaw 1946, vii).

The hard-boiled detective was born in pulp magazines and *Black Mask* contributed the most to its creation (Goulart 1965, xi). Shaw had a winner and Hammett had his meal ticket that he could bring out "whenever the landlord, or the butcher, or the grocer shows signs of nervousness" (Layman 1981, 59). The pulps became the vehicle for writers to tell stories that reflected the currents in American society in the 1920s. "Disillusionment, cynicism and detachment mixed with romanticism and compulsion toward action took over" (Goulart 1965, xi). The Roaring Twenties gave way to pessimism in the

Thirties and the pulps provided many a disaffected reader with an escape through tales of “adventure on land and sea, western thrills, science fiction, detection and love” (Goulart 1965, xi).

In American society, the period between the two world wars was one of shifting values. *Values in Mass Periodical Fiction, 1921-1940*, demonstrates this shift (Johns-Heine and Gerth 1949). The study found a movement in emphasis in the themes that were present in a sampling of magazines it surveyed (Johns-Heine and Gerth 1949, 110). The 1920s emphasized the theme of the successful businessman who was exalted for his genius over all other group values, while the 1930s underscored a different kind of hero — the industrial worker such as salesmen, clerks, and “cops” (Johns-Heine and Gerth 1949, 110). In the 1930s, diverse professionals such as writers and engineers began to eclipse the businessman as the “bearer(s) of success-values” that had emerged in the previous decade (Johns-Heine and Gerth 1949, 110).

Hammett captured this shift in values in his writing. His original creation, *The Continental Op*, labored in working-class anonymity without a name. Sam Spade follows the Op, and is more sophisticated, yet he is cynical and he distrusts the establishment. He takes matters into his own hands to get the job done. The Op and Spade are true working class heroes. *The Maltese Falcon*, therefore, can be evaluated in the context of a period of the shifting values of 1920s society, and of a disillusioned post-war America and the socio-political currents that flowed from that disillusionment. There is an element of foreignness in *The Maltese Falcon* that associates evil with the qualities of the falcon. In Huston’s film version of the story, Gutman’s first name is spelled as “Kasper,” which perhaps suggests a foreign threat (Luhr 1995, 26).

The critic Katharine Fullerton Gerould wrote about “The Hard-Boiled Era” in 1929, the same year that Hammett was working on his final text for the soon-to-be-published novel. She saw hard-boiled fiction as a novelty, and an ugly one, focusing on the decline of American civilization, writing “We sit at the feet of the hobo, the bruiser, the criminal, and learn, not because of their superior intelligence, but because the nastier details of their lives is something new to us” (1929, 266). If in her view crime literature represented a down-slope slide of American society, Hammett was little inclined to disagree with her, at least not altogether. In an introduction to Hammett’s novels, Sinda Gregory characterized hard-boiled fiction as an “urban genre whose big-city atmosphere pervades the work until the city itself becomes almost a character” (Gregory 1985, 22).

*The Maltese Falcon* became popular at a time when the world was unsettled and “the bubble of idealism was pricked” (Allen 1931, 16). In America, there was a growing apathy of Americans toward anything that reminded them of the war (Allen 1931, 16). Labor strife burdened the country with strikes and unrest (Allen 1931, 34), incidents that poured locally onto the streets of San Francisco in violent clashes between labor and management. These were akin to strife that Hammett experienced and chronicled as emerging between mine workers and unions in his 1929 novel *Red Harvest*. He had worked as a Pinkerton operative in an undercover job to undermine the efforts of the Industrial Workers of the World. In the words of Hammett’s daughter Jo, “what papa did as an undercover man and what he saw done left a deep and lasting impression on him” (Hammett, Layman, and Rivett 2001, 60). There was an eroding prosperity reflected in increased unemployment that mushroomed into the ugliness of the Great Depression. There also was corruption at the national level (Teapot Dome, for example) that seemed

to seep down into the roots of local society where politicians and law enforcement ushered in “an era of lawlessness and disorderly defense of the law” (Allen 1931, 33). A series of six magazine articles published in an essay called the *Shame of Cities* (Steffens 1904) captured the pervasiveness of corruption in municipal government. Against this backdrop, Hammett wrote *The Maltese Falcon*, which puts a cynical twist on reality, trust, mores, and wealth.

It was also an era when there was a trend toward socialistic ideas in the ranks of labor and among liberal intellectuals (Allen 1931, 35). Many imaginations had been “nourished during the war years upon stories of spies and plotters and international intrigues” (Allen 1931, 35). *The Maltese Falcon* is an international story in which Hammett weaves the plot around the search for a medieval artifact of undetermined value. The story revolves around a band of characters that come to San Francisco in search of the Falcon, while detective Sam Spade is forced to navigate numerous symbolic references in order to get at the truth. One of Hammett’s characters, Casper Gutman, derives from one of Hammett’s experiences with the Pinkerton Agency during which he shadowed a man in Washington, D.C. who was suspected of being a German secret agent in the early days of World War I (Hammett 1934, viii). The story contains many of the themes present in American society at the time, including greed and distrust.

Hammett captures many of the major themes present in American society in his five novels, which deal with the occult (*Dain Curse* 1929); corruption (*Red Harvest* 1929); greed (*The Maltese Falcon* 1930); politics (*The Glass Key* 1931), and excess (*The Thin Man* 1935). He wrote little after these major works and turned his talent to editing the work of his companion, Lillian Hellman. He served stints as a Hollywood screen-

writer, which did not hold his interest. Many would come to the same conclusion as Phillip Cody had at *Black Mask* — Hammett was difficult to work with. Hellman became an established playwright under Hammett’s tutelage (Hellman 1972). Hellman’s writing career waned after Hammett died in 1961, when she was still only 56 years old.

Dashiell Hammett was not a spokesman for his era, nor was he considered a mainstream writer such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, or Sinclair Lewis. He merely carved out a slice of the age and captured its essence in a timeless geographical representation of the socio-political and cultural aspects. In the words of Raymond Chandler, Hammett “did over and over again what only the best writers can ever do at all. He wrote scenes that seemed never to have been written before” (1944, 58).

Among his peers Hammett was known as the ace performer (Chandler 1944, 57). Hammett’s prose reflected the language, character, and landscape of American society. His stories captured the mood of the time, set in San Francisco’s urban landscape. In *The Maltese Falcon*, the reader feels the “cold steamy air” that comes through Spade’s apartment window, and hears the Alcatraz foghorn in the background. Spade visits the crime scene where his partner has just been murdered and where “an automobile popped out of the tunnel beneath him with a roaring swish” — within walking distance from the corner of Bush and Taylor streets where Spade uses the telephone (Hammett 1930). There is no map, no picture, just a mental image that takes on physical shape in the film (1941).

San Francisco provides the landscape for Hammett’s best work, which follows the formula of a detective story, but is in reality a story more about a detective. Hammett felt that *The Maltese Falcon* was his best work (Hammett, Layman, and Rivett 2001, 49). The recognition of the Library of Congress lends testament to Hammett’s assertion.

The geography of San Francisco is vital to Hammett's canon, but not exclusively. In some of his work, Hammett invents geography (Wolfe 1980). In *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett borrows elements from local geography. Miles is murdered against the backdrop of a dark and foggy San Francisco night. Hammett also transports geography. The Continental Op, Sam Spade's literary predecessor, was transferred from the Baltimore office of the Pinkerton Agency to San Francisco. Hammett modeled the Op after assistant supervisor James Wright, under whom Hammett learned the detective code, which consists of three elements: Anonymity, morality, and objectivity (Nolan 1969, 27; Layman 1981, 11, 12). In *The Maltese Falcon*, Spade sets out to avenge the murder of his partner, but he breaks some the rules of the detective code along the way. He sleeps with Miles's murderess and appears to lack objectivity by representing competing interests.

Hammett's San Francisco evolved substantially from the city's notorious heyday as home to the Barbary Coast, where characters like Frank Norris's unsavory and sinister McTeague emerged (Norris 1899) as modern-day California slowly materialized (Starr 2005). Hammett plotted his Continental Op alongside other protagonists (The "Whosis Kid" in 1925) and Leonidas Doucas ("Ruffian's Wife," also in 1925) who foreshadowed the salacious and sensational cast that Hammett created for *The Maltese Falcon* (1934, vii). These characters and plot situations were eventually expanded into longer stories (Layman 1981, 90).

"Spade had no original," Hammett claims in his introduction to the 1934 Modern Library edition of *The Maltese Falcon*. This edition is notable because *The Maltese Falcon* was the first detective novel published in the prestigious Modern Library series (Layman 1981 107). The language that Hammett uses to describe his creation does not

reveal much: “He [Spade] is a dream man” (Hammett 1934, vii). Hammett scholars such as Richard Layman think Hammett was being sly and that he was “looking in the mirror when he wrote that passage” (Layman 2005a, 14; January Magazine.com).

The plot of *The Maltese Falcon* is simple yet intricately spun out. The characters are tragic and vulnerable. The story contains parables that juxtapose and reinforce the themes of greed and deceit. With a message both timeless and vague, there is irony, lightheartedness, and on occasion an almost a slapstick quality to the plot. The story is layered with geographical expressions. Three-quarters of a century later there is still much debate about those expressions. This thesis is an attempt to view *The Maltese Falcon* through a geographic lens, even if the view that results is a sometimes-kaleidoscopic view of American society.

## Chapter 2

## METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Hammett gave murder to the kind of people that commit it,  
not just to provide a corpse.

—Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”

A review of the relevant literature has taken me into a diverse array of topics. They are paltry when compared to the partial list of Hammett’s reading that is documented in the *Selected Letters of Dashiell Hammett 1921-1960*, edited by Richard Layman and Hammett granddaughter, Julie Rivett (2001, 627-632). While there are few definitive statements to be made about Dashiell Hammett, a credible starter would be that he was the personification of Arts and Letters. In *Dashiell Hammett: A Daughter Remembers*, daughter Jo recounts that “Papa was an omnivorous reader.” She claimed her father would say, “Lock me in a room with a set of encyclopedias and I’ll come up with a plot” (HLR 2001, 94).

At the outset of my literature search I hoped to find a single definitive source that revealed where Hammett mined his material. Unlike *The Maltese Falcon* characters Casper Gutman (who didn’t get far in the novel) and Joel Cairo, who each agreed to continue their more-or-less cooperative search for the dingus, I gave up on my quest. The trail ran cold. Hammett covered his tracks well — which seems to have been his intent (Wolfe 1980, 1). He left a sufficient number of clues to let anyone with an interest shape their own theory about The Falcon. For me, the meaning lies in the Flitcraft parable, which I discuss fully in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Simply put, when the quest is achieved,



and that which was desired is attained, one settles back into the same routine. Nothing has really changed. The randomness of life takes on a degree of certainty. In *A Daughter Remembers*, Jo Hammett recalls that her father expressed delight in telling the story about Flitcraft — “as if it were a gift he had received that was just right” (HLR 2001, 100-101).

#### BOOKS AND OTHER PUBLISHED WORKS BY DASHIELL HAMMETT

##### *The Maltese Falcon* (1930)

There are numerous editions of *The Maltese Falcon* in a multitude of languages. Original editions with the black bird ominously displayed bedazzled with jewels against a resplendent yellow backdrop are available in 2009 at an asking price in excess of \$125,000 on Internet sites such as Alibris.com. The 1934 edition by the Modern Library is the first detective novel by this prestigious publisher (Layman 1981, 107). This is an especially useful volume because the introduction is by Hammett, who tantalizes the audience with bits of information that lend insight into the story. For example he declares, “Somewhere I had read of the peculiar rental agreement between Charles V and the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem.” Explaining his plot, he writes, “I thought I might have better luck with these two failures [two of his short stories that featured the “Continental Op”] if I combined them with the Maltese Lease in a longer story.” Of his characterization he says, “Brigid O’Shaughnessy had two originals, one an artist, the other a woman who came to Pinkerton’s San Francisco office to hire an operative” (Hammett 1934, vii-ix). My copy of the Modern Library edition of *The Maltese Falcon* came from a private collector and it never leaves my library. However, I work from a 1957 edition published by Alfred A. Knopf, Hammett’s original and long-time publisher.

My 186-page edition is red and black leatherette.

I also use a 217-page 1992 Vintage Crime/Black Lizard edition that proves to be especially handy because of its laminate cover (or perhaps because it feels like the lead-coated dingus). All references in this thesis, except for those made to Hammett's 1934 introduction are to this volume. There are twenty chapters in *The Maltese Falcon* — “foolproof baby” (Fearing 1935).

Hammett wrote four full-length novels in addition to *The Maltese Falcon*: *The Dain Curse* (1929a), *The Red Harvest* (1929b), *The Glass Key* (1931), and *The Thin Man* (1934). *The Dain Curse* and *The Red Harvest* were serialized in *Black Mask* (as was *The Maltese Falcon*) before publication in book form. These two novels featured Hammett's nameless detective, The Continental Op, who appeared in some twenty-seven short stories (Gale 2000, x), and who narrates the stories in the first-person (Gale 2000, 187-193).

The “Op” was replaced by the more urbane Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*. Spade narrates in the third person. According to Ellery Queen in “Meet Sam Spade,” an introduction to a 1944 Dell pocket book, Spade appears in three short stories: “A Man Called Spade”; “They Can Only Hang You Once”; and “Too Many Have Lived.” These stories “lacked the bite and tension of Falcon” (Nolan 1969, 83). Neither *The Glass Key* (Hammett's only story whose main character is not a detective) nor *The Thin Man* (a lighthearted story about a boozy retired detective and his wealthy wife) features either The Continental Op or Sam Spade. (Gregory 1985, 116 & 149).

*Selected Letters of Dashiell Hammett 1921-1960* (2001)

The letters from Hammett's personal collection were published by one of his

granddaughters, Julie M. Rivett (a daughter of Jo Hammett), in collaboration with Richard Layman, a Hammett scholar and literary trustee for the Hammett estate (Layman and Rivett 2001). This is not a kiss-and-tell book, but it contains valuable insight and special literary moments. A sizable collection of letters, now archived at the University of Texas (Austin) is a further source on Hammett's life that is relatively unexplored.

*The Continental Op* (1974)

Edited by Steven Marcus, Hammett's first biographer, who picked several "Op stories" for a companion volume, which is notable because it contains one of the stories ("The Whosis Kid," 161) that Hammett mentions in his introduction to the 1934 Modern Library edition of *The Maltese Falcon*). The Op remained nameless in all of the stories, although Hammett originally meant to give him a name (Nolan 1983, 47). The Op narrates in the first person (Spade's account is all third-person) and can be described as a "code hero" (Marcus 1974, xxv). In the broader sense, a code hero lives by a sense of personal conduct like the frontier gunfighter who restores law and order to a lawless town. More specifically, the detective in the urban milieu stands fast and keeps to his code of honor in a corrupt society. For an organization man, such as The Op, this code may be a code of conduct dictated by the agency. For an independent operator, such as Spade and other hard-boiled detectives, the code is self-imposed. The Op is based on James Wright, the assistant manager of Pinkerton's Baltimore office who was Hammett's mentor (Nolan 1983, 9). The Op worked for the Continental Detective Agency and followed their rules, Sam Spade works for his own agency, and plays by his own rules.

*The Smart Set Anthology* (1934)

A collection of original works by a variety of authors from Mary Austin to William Butler Yeats, with F. Scott Fitzgerald, Aldus Huxley, and James Joyce thrown in for good measure. *The Smart Set* is often referred to as a “slick” magazine because it was published on better quality paper than the rough-cut paper used by pulp magazines. The slicks were perceived to have a more highbrow readership that was attracted to better quality subject matter. Slick readers were willing to pay a higher cover price; this enabled publishers to pay writers more than they would be paid by pulp magazines. There is a Dashiell Hammett gem in this anthology. His short story, written in 1923, “From the Memoirs of a Private Detective” contains twenty-nine vignettes from his Pinkerton days that are laden with irony, juxtaposition, and humor.

BOOKS AND DOCUMENTARIES ABOUT DASHIELL HAMMETT

*Dashiell Hammett: A Daughter Remembers* (HLR 2001)

Josephine Hammett Marshall collaborated with Richard Layman on a warm and sensitive biography of her father. Jo, the younger of Hammett’s two daughters, holds nothing back. In *A Daughter Remembers*, she expresses with equal aplomb the disappointment and the pleasure she obtained from her relationship with her father. This is a moving story, which demonstrates that much of what biographers write about Hammett is embellished and untrustworthy. Jo is named after her mother, Hammett’s estranged wife (they were never legally divorced in the United States), to whom Hammett dedicated *The Maltese Falcon*: “TO JOSE.” Jose was Hammett’s nurse in a Tacoma Army Hospital

where he convalesced after being injured in World War I.

*The Hard-Boiled Omnibus* (1946)

The *Omnibus* is a collection of short stories edited by Joseph T. Shaw, who replaced Phillip Cody, Hammett's first editor at *Black Mask Magazine*. Shaw's dialogue with Hammett is original. Shaw's introduction is only five pages long, but it lends insight into Hammett's grasp of crime writing. The exchange between Shaw and Hammett defines the genre of hard-boiled as belonging "to the characters rather than the school of writing" (Shaw 1946, viii). Shaw's admiration for Hammett is clear. As an added bonus, the *Omnibus* is packed with *Black Mask* writers, who in Shaw's words, "observed the cardinal principle in creating the illusion of reality; they did not make their characters talk tough; they allowed them to" (Shaw 1946, viii). The pulp practice of writing under one or more penname is demonstrated in this volume with the story of Raoul Whitfield and the one he wrote under his *pseudonym*, Ramon Decolta. Pulp writers often wrote under assumed names to get more stories published (they were limited to one story per issue) to augment the meager pay rate that was as low as a penny per word. Hammett referred to his pulp writing as "Blackmasking" (HLR 2001, 42).

*The Big Knockover* (1962)

This volume, published a year after Hammett's death, includes selected short stories and short novels edited by Lillian Hellman, who wrote the introduction. Hellman provides spare, but insightful details about the man with whom she spent some thirty "on-and-off-years." Most of Hammett's stories in this edition had been published previously,

except for “Tulip,” which was Hammett’s unfinished novel (304-353).

*Dashiell Hammett: A Casebook (1969)*

According to its author, William F. Nolan, *A Casebook* was the first book-length treatment of Hammett and his work. The book is the result of Nolan’s exhaustive research that covers Hammett’s magazine fiction to his poetry. (Hammett also reviewed the works of other mystery writers and his critiques could be punishing.) Nolan notes Hammett’s use of geography in his prose: “Hammett’s ability to utilize the area in dramatic terms: his streets, banks offices were all quite real, all part of the San Francisco scene” (Nolan 1969, 29).

Nolan’s second book, *Hammett: A Life at the Edge* (1983), is also useful and spans a fifteen-year period of research that enabled him to offer a more personal account of Hammett’s life (Nolan 1983, xii). Nolan has a keen eye for Hammett’s use of geography in his second book, and attributes the use of locale in *The Maltese Falcon* as “deliberately obscured” (Nolan 1983, 94).

*Dashiell Hammett: A Life (1983)*

This pseudo-biography was written by Diane Johnson, who is not considered a Hammett scholar, but who wrote her story with the cooperation of Lillian Hellman, the executrix for Hammett’s literary and business estate (Johnson 1983, xiii). Hellman was Hammett’s long-time companion. Johnson fills in the gaps of Hammett’s personal life, especially in his later years.

Hellman maintained tight control over Hammett’s affairs and gained control of

his estate in a complicated legal maneuver after his death. It can be presumed that Johnson had access to materials that were unavailable to others. A serious Hammett scholar would question why a book that was written in 1983 fails to mention Nolan's pioneering work, if not the work of emerging Hammett scholar Richard Layman (1981). Johnson also appears as a commentator in the *American Masters* film about Hammett.

*Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett* (1981)

This Richard Layman volume marks the beginning of a long-standing association with anything biographical about Hammett. Layman is the pre-eminent Hammett scholar and the literary trustee for Hammett's estate. In this book, he acknowledges Nolan's work and he includes an extensive checklist of Hammett's work. Layman, like Johnson (1983, 83), provides insight into Hammett's use of the third person narrative voice for *The Maltese Falcon* "that gives the characterization of Spade added strength" (Layman 1981, 108). Layman's status as a Hammett scholar is evidenced by his selection to deliver the Diamond Anniversary speech on *The Maltese Falcon* to the Library of Congress on Valentine's Day 2005 (Layman 2005a).

*Beams Falling: The Art of Dashiell Hammett* (1980)

Peter Wolfe places Hammett's body of work on a literary plane and examines the themes in Hammett's canon rather than the transgressions in his personal life. For example, Wolfe notes that criminals are generally portrayed as being unhappy. He alludes to Hammett's "career-long theme of man's basic corruptibility" (Wolfe 1980, 58). Another example offered by Wolfe is that Gutman "already lives well, spends lavishly, and moves

freely” (Wolfe 1980, 17), but he, and other characters such as Cairo, seek even more power and money despite an already well-positioned station in life.

Wolfe addresses Hammett’s inventiveness in “The King’s Business” (1927) in which he creates the geography of a country by giving it “a history, topography and a politics” (Wolfe 1980, 68). Hammett invents a state within the country, populates it, and “gives it a network of streets and then builds it a train station and a luxury hotel, a police headquarters and an Executive Residence” (Wolfe 1980, 68). Wolfe concentrates on the Op character, while he characterizes *The Maltese Falcon* as being too eccentric to be a whodunit (Wolfe 1980, 122). Wolfe’s work is original and one of a kind. His title is a reference to Hammett’s repeated use of falling beams in his title and themes from the novel’s Flitcraft parable.

#### *Private Investigations* (1985)

Sinda Gregory’s quite respectable work is less about Dashiell Hammett as a person than about the content of his five novels. She alludes to the detachment in American society in the 1920s that disrupted intellectual, artistic, and social life and helped generate “a new kind of seriousness in American literature” known as hard-boiled (1985, 18). Gregory places Hammett’s works in the center of society’s changing attitudes (18). She characterized hard-boiled fiction as an “urbane genre,” incorporating “the extremes of squalor and elegance, the claustrophobic oppression of the people, cars, and buildings, the excitement of the motion, the unreality of lights and lifestyles that blur the day and night and provide the stimuli for the frantic pace of most hard-boiled fiction” (Gregory 1985, 22). Gregory’s introduction is a solid assessment of the context of the hard-boiled



genre, and places the work of Hammett and his contemporaries such as Carroll John Daly and Raoul Whitfield as a new form that reflects a discomfort — but acceptance — of urban society (Gregory 1985, 1–28).

*Dashiell Hammett (1985)*

Julian Symons is a well-published British author. He was the long-time critic for the *Sunday Times* of London. In this book, he brings a uniquely British view to Hammett's work and he also explains the differences between British and American crime stories (Symons 1985, 3). While his work attempts to be comprehensive, Symons tries, as other have, to analyze the Flitcraft parable, but he gives up by indicating that Hammett was trying to say something, “but what?” (Symons 1985, 70). Symons recovers nicely by acknowledging Hammett's ability to frame a story in a manner in which “everything is clearly seen and exactly noted, as though the subject was sitting for his portrait” (Symons 1985, 43).

*Dashiell Hammett Detective Writer (1999)*

Jake Walezky's 1999 video in the “American Masters Film” series documents Dashiell Hammett's life. Included are interviews with daughter Jo and all three of Hammett's biographers, Steven Marcus, Diane Johnson, and Richard Layman. The fifty-six-minute documentary offers balanced insight into Hammett's persona, but not necessarily his literary works.

## BOOKS, CRITIQUES, ADDRESSES, LECTURES, AND RENDERINGS ABOUT HAMMETT'S WORK

*Hammett's Moral Vision* (2007)

George J. "Rhino" Thompson wrote his doctoral dissertation on Hammett's work in 1972 (Thompson 2007, 2). In that respect, he shares something with Robert Parker, the famed mystery writer who devoted part of his 1971 dissertation to Hammett's writings. Thompson's work appeared in *The Armchair Detective*, and recently became available in book form. In 1972, Thompson's work was pioneering, but by 2007, it has lost some of its freshness. Thompson, like Wolfe, alludes to Hammett's canon (as proffered by Andre Gide in 1944): "the depiction of deception as a way of life" (Thompson 2007, 28). Thompson suggests that Hammett's work presages the notion of a "self-corrupting society" (Thompson 2007, 29). He states that even Raymond Chandler, an ardent Hammett admirer, "failed to perceive the full complexity and artistry" in Hammett's work (Thompson 2007, 33).

## "The Simple Art of Murder" (1944)

Raymond Chandler's classic and seminal essay on the detective story has no equal. It appeared in the December 1944 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, and is available online at Atlantic.com. The title of the essay also refers to a collection of Chandler's short stories. The essay is more about the art of crime fiction than specifically about Hammett's work. Chandler, like Hammett, wrote for *Black Mask* and he showers praise on Hammett's work, referring to him as the "ace performer" (57), who "wrote scenes that never seemed to have been written before" (58). On *The Maltese Falcon*, Chandler wrote:

“Once a detective story can be as good as this only the pedants will deny that it could be even better” (58). This statement contradicts George Thompson’s statement that Chandler failed to “perceive the full complexity and artistry” in Hammett’s work. Chandler wrote the timeless and consummate description of a detective: “But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid” (59).

*A Dashiell Hammett Companion* (2000)

Robert Gale has compiled an invaluable reference volume that provides an exhaustive account of each of the characters who have appeared in every one of Hammett’s works. He also includes a bibliography of other authors who cite the character or the work, so this becomes a particularly comprehensive work. There could be better cross-reference, however, in Gale’s volume. For example, the explanation of Casper Gutman is not linked to “Leonia Deuces,” who foreshadows the Gutman character (Nolan 1983, 59).

*The Critical Response to Dashiell Hammett* (1994)

Edited by Christopher Metress who has performed a scholarly effort of assembling critiques of Hammett’s major works. Not all critiques are kind to *The Maltese Falcon*, or quick to recognize the value of a novel literary form. The nearly-legendary literary critic Edmund Wilson found the story “not much above those newspaper picture strips in which you follow from day to day the ups and downs of a strong-jawed hero and a hardboiled but beautiful adventuress” (71).

*Reading Early Hammett* (2004)

In this book, Leroy Panek provides a brief but effective critical take to Hammett's works prior to *The Maltese Falcon*. Panek covers Hammett's magazine writings, along with many of his Op stories, and he includes a comprehensive chronological primary source bibliography that parallels Nolan's effort (*Dashiell Hammett: A Casebook*, 1969).

*Dashiell Hammett* (1984)

Dennis Dooley takes a simplistic approach and focuses on Hammett's readily-available short stories and his five novels. The book is short and readable, and attempts to cast Hammett in the context of the early twentieth century in a socio-political setting. Dooley's effort is a good place for a reader to start to enjoy Hammett; especially one who is not interested in the scholarly works that often over analyze Hammett.

*Dashiell Hammett's Magazine Work* (1968)

E. H. Mundell is credited with the assembly of a list of magazine appearances, along with two non-magazine pieces. One of the non-magazine references is the aforementioned 1934 Modern Library edition of *The Maltese Falcon*, while the other reference is *It Creeps by Night*, edited by Hammett, with no date. Mundell's book should be used with caution because of its early publication date and the lack of clear editing; but nevertheless it should be appreciated because it reflects one of the earliest attempts to chronicle Hammett's work in a pre-electronic age.

"Guns, Gams, and Gratitude" (2005)

*January Magazine* offered this survey of novelists paying homage to and express-

ing their opinions on Hammett's contribution to detective fiction. The piece, which also contained Kevin Burton Smith's review of *Vintage Hammett*, was timed to coincide with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the publication of *The Maltese Falcon* (January Magazine.com).

BOOKS, ESSAYS, FILM AND RADIO ABOUT *THE MALTESE FALCON*

*Literary Masterpieces Volume 3: The Maltese Falcon* (2000)

This book by Richard Layman, who is at the forefront of Hammett study, takes the scholarly approach. It traces the evolution of the written word, and offers, with little editorial interference, a concordance of the earliest version of "The Maltese Falcon" in *Black Mask*, through the publication of the novel in 1930, citing the more than two thousand edits made to it (57-58). Editions of *Black Mask* are rare, and complete editions are rarer because of the acidic nature of the paper, which makes Layman's efforts to locate and compare these texts extraordinary.

*Discovering the Maltese Falcon and Sam Spade* (2005)

In this omnibus volume, Richard Layman expands on his 2000 effort into the Falcon's role in pop culture by including movie, stage, and radio productions, and he traces the genesis of the story from pulp to novel. Layman also includes a bibliography of English- and foreign-language publications of *The Maltese Falcon*. He also includes unique information about the film prop, the set, and even the budget.

“There’s Only One Maltese Falcon” (2005a)

This is an excerpt of Richard Layman’s commemorative address before the Library of Congress on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the publication of *The Maltese Falcon* in book form. Layman delivered an advance version of his address to *January Magazine* on Valentine’s Day (January Magazine.com). Layman’s address explores the cultural significance of The Falcon, “because it operates on several levels” (15).

Layman also took part in an interview conducted on the National Public Radio show *Talk of the Nation* on 09 February 2005. Layman discusses the enduring aspects of *The Maltese Falcon* and the elements that make it so distinctive in American literature. As a bonus, mystery writer and Hammett-aficionado, Robert Parker, makes an impromptu phone call to the show, adding his own distinctive twist to Hammett’s legacy. (Parker wrote his 1971 PhD dissertation on Hammett, Chandler, and Ross MacDonald.)

*City of San Francisco Magazine* (4 November 1975)

This special sixty-page souvenir edition on Dashiell Hammett contains many gems that include an interview with Phil Haultain, a former Pinkerton Agent who worked with Hammett (13). The magazine also includes copies of the comic strip written by Hammett for the San Francisco *Call Bulletin* (19), along with photos of places where Hammett lived and worked while in San Francisco. The magazine provides a geographical focal point for looking at Hammett’s life and work in San Francisco.

*The Maltese Falcon: John Huston, Director* (1995)

This critique of *The Maltese Falcon* includes commentary and a frame-by-frame analysis of the movie. It includes articles by James Narremore, James Agee, and Nino Frank, who is credited as being the originator of the term film noir. It also includes biographical sketches of John Huston, Humphrey Bogart, and Dashiell Hammett. The book not only offers a scholarly look at the 1941 classic, but it also discusses the 1931 and 1936 films (176-180).

“Nesting Fiction in Fact: *The Maltese Falcon* in San Francisco” (2007)

This is the text of Julie M. Rivett’s presentation at the Writers and Book Gala in Rochester, New York on November 30, 2007. Rivett is Hammett’s granddaughter who co-edited *Selected Letters of Dashiell Hammett 1921-1960* with Richard Layman (2001). *The Maltese Falcon* was chosen as one of the books in “The Big Read” as part of a National Initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a program designed to “restore reading as the core of American culture.”

“Chasing the Maltese Falcon: On the Fabrication of a Film Prop” (2007)

In her article in the *Journal of Visual Culture* (2007; 6; 219), Vivian Sobchack explores the obsession with The Falcon. Sobchack ascribes imaginary and actual value to the Falcon that evolved from the novel to film, and ultimately to a material obsession.

*The Maltese Falcon* — DVD: Three Disc Special Edition (2006)

The set contains all three Warner Brothers screen versions of *The Maltese Falcon*

(1931), *Satan My Lady* (1936), and John Huston's classic form of the novel put to film (1941). By viewing all three of the films, one is able to understand Huston's genius in his 1941 version. One also finds the seed of film noir in the 1931 film, which also remains faithful to Hammett's story. The 1936 film captures the slapstick aspect of the story, but it lacks the dramatic tension among the characters.

*Smithsonian Legendary Performances: Dashiell Hammett* (2004)

This set of audiotapes contains the condensed version of Huston's film classic (1941) for radio that "marked the only time that all four principal actors reprised their roles on the airwaves" (notes, 12). The radio production appeared on 20 September 1943, with Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade. The radio version remains true to the novel, though it is abridged. Hammett had left for his second stint in the Army just before the radio production, so it is not clear if he consulted on the production. The true enthusiast for *The Maltese Falcon* can read the book and watch Huston's film with the radio broadcast playing in the background.

"On Reading *The Maltese Falcon*" (1995)

Paul P. Abrahams's article in the *Journal of American Culture* offers a political interpretation that projects Spade as a creation by Hammett that mocks the pretense of World War I and its aftermath. Abrahams also explores the symbolic reference of women portrayed in *The Maltese Falcon* as symbols of the women's movement.



“The Image of the Maltese Falcon: Reconsidering an American Icon” (2007).

This article in *European Journal of American Culture* (26:3, 2008) by Douglas Torgerson examines *The Maltese Falcon* as a symbol that is not only an American icon, but also a metaphor. As an icon, *The Maltese Falcon* dominates pop culture in parody, nostalgia, or even kitsch. As a metaphor, *The Maltese Falcon* conveys meanings that are exotic, mystical, and symbolic of power that reflects Hammett’s Marxist tendencies.

#### BOOKS AND JOURNAL ARTICLES ABOUT CRIME AND PULP FICTION

*Mortal Consequences: A History From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (1972)

Julian Symons traces the roots of the emergence of crime fiction to the celebrated French police chief Vidocq, a criminal turned police chief who started the first modern detective agency (22). Symons advances two theories on crime writing: That detective fiction emerged after organized detective forces came into existence (The Vidocq influence), and that Edgar Allen Poe wrote detective stories before organized police forces emerged (27).

*Celebrated Criminal Cases of America* (1910)

This work, which offers a condensed history of San Francisco through its criminal life, was edited by Thomas S. Duke, for a time chief of police for San Francisco. A reprinted edition is readily available even with the requisite missing pages. The book figures in *The Maltese Falcon* on Sam Spade’s bedside table in Chapter 2 and as reading material for Casper Gutman in Chapter 19.

*Art in Crime Writing: Essays on Detective Fiction* (1983)

Edited by Bernard Benstock, *Art in Crime Writing* is a collection of essays on the modern-day detective. It examines the genre from a literary perspective.

*The Rough Guide to Cult Fiction* (2005)

This is a compact summary of fiction writers by Michaela Bushell, Helen Rodiss, and Paul Simpson. Hammett (113), who aspired to a higher form of literature, is listed in alongside accomplished writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald (84), Ernest Hemmingway (119) and James Joyce (140).

*Pulp Culture: Hardboiled Fiction and the Cold War* (1985)

Woody Haut provides a continuum of pulp fiction in post War II America and he explains how it has become embedded in our everyday culture. Haut demonstrates the evolution of pulp magazines to paperback fiction. The book is not a history of pulp magazines, but rather an insight look into the pulp culture.

*The Dime Detectives* (1988)

Ron Goulart's book is a scholarly overview of crime pulp history that focuses on the pre World War II era when pulps thrived. Goulart has also edited a collection of detective fiction from pulp magazines (*The Hardboiled Dicks*, 1965) that provides stories from lesser-known writers such as Raoul Whitfield and Frederick Nebel, Hammett contemporaries who were among Hammett's acquaintances.

*The Black Mask Boys (1985)*

William Nolan, an early biographer of Hammett (1969), provides a sampler of stories by writers who were featured in *Black Mask* magazine. Nolan includes a thorough history of the magazine, lists its early authors, and describes the writing market the pulps offered.

*From Modernity's Detection to Modernist Detectives: Narrative Vision in the Work of Alan Pinkerton and Dashiell Hammett (2003)*

Christopher T. Raczowski focuses on Hammett's detective fiction through the lens of Alan Pinkerton, the founder of Pinkerton National Detective Agency. Pinkerton was America's version of Vidocq, the famous French criminal turned detective. The Pinkerton agency has a storied history that includes providing intelligence to President Lincoln during the Civil War, and dealing with labor unrest in the twentieth century. Hammett's writing was influenced by his tenure as a Pinkerton operative, and at least one Hammett novel, *Red Harvest*, can be attributed to his experience to quell labor unrest in a mining town in the American West.

*American Film Noir: The History of an Idea (1995-1996)*

Published in the *Film Quarterly*, James Naremore attempts to define the seemingly indefinable concept of film noir. He also identifies the "sacred list" of the five original films considered to be noir.

*Mystery, Violence and Popular Culture* (2004)

In this collection of essays about Westerns and mysteries and the role they play in popular or mass culture, author John Cawelti draws on examples from a broad range of expression that includes not only film, but also music, literature, and television.

*Kenneth Fearing, Selected Poems* (2004).

Kenneth Fearing was a journalist and crime writer in addition to being a poet. He wrote about money, corruption, business, and betrayal. This volume of Fearing's work was edited by Robert Polito, who is the director of The Writing Program at The New School. Polito also edited a volume that binds together three Hammett novels, including *The Maltese Falcon*, under a single cover (2000).

PERIOD, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL HISTORIES

*Only Yesterday* (1931)

Frederick Lewis Allen's quick paced version of the 1920s years was written from an eyewitness perspective in 1931. Allen's book offers an excellent backdrop for the historical context of Hammett's fictional inroads into the era. Lewis carves out this period in American society in an informal breezy fashion that brings the reader inside the living room of a typical American family.

*The Shame of the Cities* (1904)

In 1904, Lincoln Steffens wrote a series of magazine articles for *McClure's Magazine* that focuses on corruption in six major U. S. cities in the East and the Midwest.

The book offers a look at American society in the pre-war era at a time when Hammett began to develop his ideas about greed and corruption.

*California: A History* (2005)

Historian Kevin Starr's latest book is a one-volume history of California that includes a discussion on the arts, literature, and entertainment, and how they helped California become an "imagined place." Starr develops the idea of California as an inspiration for a new genre of writing that emerges in the 1940s.

*San Francisco in Fiction* (1995)

*San Francisco in Fiction* is a collection of essays compiled by David Fine and David Skenazy that treats San Francisco as a place that "presents an unusual form of American regionalism for the writer of fiction." Chapter 5 is devoted to Dashiell Hammett and his use of San Francisco as place. Paul Skenazy also edited *The New Wild West: The Urban Mysteries of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler* (1982), volume 54 in Boise State University Western Writer Series.

*The Barbary Coast* (1933)

Herbert Asbury's insightful history of San Francisco weaves a story of one of America's most famous cities from its beginning in 1776 when it was a settlement outpost known as Yerba Buena to the raucous period of 1849 when the Gold Rush changed the social, economic, and political landscape.

*McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899)

*McTeague* is Frank Norris's classic novel about San Francisco at the turn of the twentieth century, offering a glimpse of the social landscape that Hammett would likely have encountered. Much like Hammett's San Francisco, Norris's is pre-Bay Bridge (and Golden Gate Bridge) so the plotting is similar: The participants take a ferry to Oakland (like Spade's secretary Effie). Norris, like Hammett, captures the element of greed in human behavior. While this is a literary novel, it is similar to *The Maltese Falcon*, in terms of personality and character.

"Values in Mass Periodical Mass Fiction, 1921-1940" (1949)

Patrick Johns-Heine and Hans G. Gerth 1949 article in the *Public Opinion Quarterly* examines shifting values in mass-market fiction. The authors analyze the change in thematic content that occurred in five magazines with mass-market appeal in the 1920s and 1930s.

*San Francisco Noir* (2005)

Nathaniel Rich's filmography is a catalog of film in the noir genre set in San Francisco, though not necessarily filmed on location there. Rich connects each film to its landmark site, thereby making his account a highly geographical interpretation of film. By connecting each film to its landmark site, Rich's work is a geographical interpretation of film.

*San Francisco in the 1920s* (1999)

*San Francisco in the 1920s* is a documentary produced by the San Francisco television station, KRON-TV. The ninety-minute video, directed by J. Swanson, is a depiction of life in San Francisco in the 1920s and offers insight into the socio-political environment that Hammett experienced.

GEOGRAPHY OF LANDSCAPE

“Places for Mysteries” (1978)

Douglas R. McManis’s *Geographical Review* article explores the geography of place in British detective-mystery fiction through the work of two British mystery writers, Dame Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers.

“Learning from Looking: Geographic and Other Writing about the American Cultural Landscape” (1983)

In this *American Quarterly* article, geographer Peirce Lewis takes an introspective look at America with a sweeping account of how people, objects, and ideas come together in its cultural landscape.

“Murder in Moscow” (1995)

Gary Hausladen’s *Geographical Review* article describes the sense of place in murder mysteries as expressions of character and plot. Hausladen identifies “cultural” murder mystery as a sub-genre, apart from the police procedural.

“Strange Countries and Secret Worlds in Ruth Rendell’s Crime Novels” (1998)

Also from the *Geographical Review*, Lisa Kadonaga’s article discusses the way in which mystery novels intersect with academic geography by looking at the transition in crime novels from the “how” and “who” to the “why” of the crime, which serves to place the emphasis of the story on the cultural and psychological aspects of the crime.

“The Landscapes of Sherlock Holmes” (1985)

Yi-Fu Tuan’s *Journal of Geography* article is a critique of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s creation Sherlock Holmes as a work of art that uses criteria established by W. H. Auden. These criteria are “nowness” and “permanence,” which Tuan sees as relevant to cultural geography because they provide a sense of place and time.

“Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach” (1991)

Yi-Fu Tuan’s article in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* provides a cultural explanation for the making of place through effective language. Tuan uses the example that the written words of fiction impact the real world.

#### THE LANDSCAPE OF *MALTESE FALCON* LITERATURE AND CRITICISM

A superabundance of sources exist on *The Maltese Falcon* and its creator, Dashiell Hammett, items that take up everything from minute plot elements to the proclivities, morays, and foibles of author Hammett in his everyday life. Some of these are notable, and are signature behaviors tellingly transferred to Hammett’s fictional foils. Such clinical discoveries amount to dissections of success. But in the final analysis, the



qualities that Hammett implanted in Sam Spade are not so unlike the features of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional hero, Sherlock Holmes, who like Sam Spade developed a life of his own, a life that sometimes vexed his creator (Ian Fleming, J.D. Salinger, Vladimir Nabakov, and Joseph Heller had similar issues with the outsize life of their fictional protagonists).

It may well be that Sam Spade's success forever diluted Hammett's creative juices. While Sherlock Holmes was a figment of Great Britain's Victorian era, invested with many of the mannerisms of the educated elite, he was more than willing to duke it out with the underworld roiling English (and European) society; despite a prodigious cocaine intake and manifold ill social graces, it was Holmes's talent to intercede equally well with royalty or ruffian. And like Holmes, Hammett's creation Sam Spade was a novelty, as the prolix literature on *The Maltese Falcon* suggests.

Ultimately, Spade can be considered an artistic creation because he satisfies W.H. Auden's injunction for a work of art. Like Holmes, who commenced his fictional life in the late 1880s, with stories written for him by Conan Doyle until 1914 (ceasing just fifteen years before *The Maltese Falcon* began to appear in print), Sam Spade was a literary — and cultural — creation that endured. Let there be no doubt: Holmes and Spade, separately and serially, satisfy Auden's injunction for art, that it possess "newness" and "permanence" (Tuan 1985, 55).

Yi-Fu Tuan, in "The Landscapes of Sherlock Holmes" (1985) demonstrates that Auden's criteria for a work of art are portable, and can be re-tasked. The beauty of Tuan's assessment is in its simplicity if not in the universality of descriptions that are not to be interpreted as consensus.

A work of art can have mass appeal, be simplistic, make a statement, and yet fall short as a classic. Or it can hit the trifecta, and the creator can walk away with pockets filled with large denomination bills, carefully wrapped with paper slips, yet be left wondering for months, years, decades just what it is that succeeded, where prior (or subsequent) efforts had never scored big. The works of Andy Warhol's plastic art and Grant Wood's *American Gothic* come to mind: statements, yes, but difficult to imagine as timeless classics; they have the virtue of authenticity to their time — but endurance forever is much more difficult to imagine.

Dashiell Hammett struck it big once; had he stopped with *The Op* or *Red Harvest*, he would be remembered, and no doubt fondly, as a good period novelist. But he found the elephant in his imagination, and turned it loose to rampage on the fictional universe. It changed how many people lived and altered how they saw themselves. It changed identity and how cities and their people lived their lives, talked, and interacted. Among the purposes of cultural geography is the interpretation of historical significance in a work of art. In *The Maltese Falcon*, there is much to be plumbed.

## Chapter 3

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF HAMMETT'S SAN FRANCISCO

“Nowness” and “permanence” are characteristics of a work of art.

—Yi-Fu Tuan, quoting W.H. Auden

Placing a work of art within the context of a period of time enables us, as later visitors to a work, to read the embedded code of the creator. There is a danger of overanalyzing and spending too much time trying to understand the point, and in the act, miss an opportunity for entertainment, which is, in part, the author's purpose. Museums, until recently, provided an example of directing thought, but sometimes to the exclusion or even fear of generating a divergent opinion. They may sometimes be criticized for telling a story from just a single point of view. Literature can offer the same temptation.

Certainly, the carrying forward of diverse themes all at one time is important, and that can make for good academic fodder. The French are famous for accepting the complexity of a work of literature or philosophy — they, after all, have venerated the American gangster film (and produced their own, in homage). Their devotion can take singular form: After all, they are fans of Jerry Lewis (“Le Gran Jerry”) and the Three Stooges, a fact that Americans can hardly fathom. In *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture*, John Cawelti demonstrates how “throwaway” literature can be retranslated by another culture into something entirely different, and then return to its culture of origin (2004, 112-119). Cawelti cites as examples American crime stories that were popular in book and film, but then forgotten until they were “devoured” by the French in translation after the war and reintroduced under the French term “noir.” (Cawelti 2004, 118).

## PLACE-MAKING IN THE OFFICE OF SPADE AND ARCHER

“So I came to San Francisco to get her.”

—Miss Wonderly to Sam Spade, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930)

When Sam Spade tells his assistant Effie Perine to “shoo her in,” he is referring to an unscheduled visit by a certain Miss Wonderly (a contrived name that can only be fictional) who has come to discuss a grave matter. The reader has just been introduced to detective Samuel Spade, a San Francisco gumshoe — a private dick — whose looks are described as “pleasantly like a blond satan.” Miss Wonderly has called on Spade to solve a problem: Corinne, her younger sister, is missing. She tells Spade that her little sister has run off to San Francisco with a man named Floyd Thursby. So far so good — this is what detectives do. They help solve other peoples’ problems, including locating missing persons. The premise is plausible.

But with subtle geographic clues, as early as Chapter 1, Dashiell Hammett conveys place on multiple levels, and subverts the likelihood of Miss Wonderly’s tale. Hammett, who had been a real-life detective, often uses clues and implications, some of which were likely much more readily understandable in 1930 than they seem today, simply because idiom has grown stale and customs less opalescent. The distinction is important because *The Maltese Falcon* is so embedded in American culture that one size does not fit all. For example, for those who have not read *The Maltese Falcon* but have seen the 1941 film version (there are three film versions), place is conveyed in the opening credits, as first-time director John Huston rockets us to a familiar spot — the Bay Bridge,

spanning from footings in the foreshortened Rincon Hill in San Francisco to landfall in Oakland. Huston used stock film footage from an announcement of the opening of the bridge in November 1936. But when Hammett penned his classic, there was no Bay Bridge; though conceived as possible as far back as Gold Rush days, building of the Bay Bridge wasn't begun until 1933 (still after Hammett's published version of the novel in 1930). This points to a considerable migration by addition (and deletion) of material charting variations between book and film (Rich 2005, 21-22). Yi-Fu Tuan's use of W.H. Auden's comment about the "nowness" of time is clearly demonstrated by Huston's shot of the bridge, which allows historians to place *The Maltese Falcon* within the context of a particular time period (Tuan 1985, 56).

The novel and the film share a certain uniqueness associated with the social, political, and physical landscape of San Francisco, but also demonstrate subtle differences in geographic time. These differences should not be considered as a material digression from the story, but the changes play to a here and now of geography. Throughout Huston's film there are subtle geographic instances that demonstrate place-making. And in Chapter 4 — "*La Paloma*," — Spade's trusted assistant Effie must take a ferry boat to check out "an alleged historical fact from centuries old" with her cousin Ted, who teaches at the University of California, in Berkeley. In the film Huston omits the scene, presumably because he is at a geographic crossroads, since there now is a San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge (later, The James "Sunny Jim" Rolph Bridge) to transport Effie. Another example occurs in Chapter 20 — "If They Hang You," when Spade sends Brigid over for the murder of Miles. Huston, as screenwriter, updated Spade's allusion to her likely place of incarceration from San Quentin (established in 1852) to Tehachapi —

opened in 1932 as the California Institution for Women. Again, that wasn't a fact Hammett would have at his fingertips because it wasn't yet "fact." But as a screenwriter, working a decade after the original novel was published, John Huston was nothing if not up-to-the-moment.

Place is nonetheless Hammett's stock in trade. At the outset, Miss Wonderly conveys place when she recounts her false story — that goes along with a false name — about her non-existent younger sister. She sums up the bogus events that led her to the office of Spade and Archer. Corinne is seventeen and Thursby is a married man of thirty-five. Spade's partner, Miles Archer, opens the office door and walks to a place near where Miss Wonderly is sitting in an "oaken arm chair beside his (Spade's) desk." She tells Spade her story. As Spade narrates he describes Miss Wonderly in vivid detail:

She was tall and pliantly slender, without angularity anywhere. Her body was erect and high-breasted, her legs long, her hands and feet narrow. She wore two shades of blue that had been selected because of her eyes. The hair curling down from under her blue hat was darkly red, her full lips more brightly red. White teeth glistened in the crescent her timid smile made. (Hammett 1930, Chapter 1)

Clearly Miss Wonderly, no matter what her real name, is a knockout. She breaks off her story when Miles Archer walks into the office. In case we're in doubt, there is a wonderful shadow image of the agency's name — Spade and Archer — cast on the office floor by sunlight streaming through the glass door (Luhr 1995, 32): This is how we are introduced to Sam Spade's partner.

The reader might ask why Miss Wonderly hasn't gone to the police with her story. Her account of a runaway girl who has been transported across state lines by a married man twice her age must raise suspicion in Spade's mind. But Miles Archer unwittingly

tingly defuses this potentially awkward moment, by asking, “Can he cover up by marrying her?” Miss Wonderly’s tale must be a familiar one to detectives such as Spade and Archer. It is a tale with dark implications: A young runaway leaves the East or the Midwest and seeks refuge in a faraway big city that musters all of the bleak connotations of urban living in the 1920s. Spade reassures Miss Wonderly, because that is what detectives do: “Just leave that to us.”

The “us” Spade refers to is the San Francisco office of Spade and Archer and includes their office assistant, Miss Effie Perine. Miss Wonderly sits next to Spade’s desk, which is “dotted” with cigarette ash. It is varnished yellow, giving it a matching quality to Miss Wonderly’s chair. She is all decked out and is perhaps seeking reassurance that she has come to the right place. The buff-curtained window and the “thin bell and muffled whirl of Effie Perine’s typewriting” lend a sense of place of a working office. The vibrating sound of a power-driven machine “somewhere in a neighboring office” reinforces the working class atmosphere of Spade and Archer’s establishment. While the quality of their detection is as yet unknown, the office layout is clearly Spartan, a somewhat down-at-the-heels working-class walk-up. Hammett reveals little about the physical location of the office, almost in purposeful disguise.

The Spade and Archer Detective Agency is precisely the kind of place to go when someone wants his or her business kept on the hush. Pulp writers like Hammett and Raymond Chandler offered a proletarian alternative, a “presentation of self” that was reflected in the office surroundings in which their hard-boiled creations labored. At a big firm with matching furniture you would run the risk of a loss of privacy. The level at which Spade and Archer operate would give a respectable family from the East some

sense of confidence that their name would be kept out of the papers (a request Miss Wonderly would make later in the story). Hammett describes a setting that puts Miss Wonderly at ease. Spade reassures his customer that her concerns about Thursby are real. “We’ll know how to handle him,” Spade says with a smile. The power of place lies in Spades words and his demeanor. The setting of the office is austere yet reassuring.

Hammett strikes at the core of human geography in the making of place (Tuan 1991). He accomplishes this through his use of language and description: “But you can trust us to take care of that.” The power of the word *trust* is an example of language’s capacity for nuance and subtlety, beyond what simple physical action can (Tuan 1991, 694). The setting of Spade and Archer’s office evokes a feeling of trust. So much so that after Spade utters his reassurance to Miss Wonderly she immediately responds with an earnest: “I do trust you.” The bond between Spade and Miss Wonderly has been set in a perfidious manner. She leaves the office after hiring Spade and Archer — she trusts them to do the job. Trust is a pervasive theme.

Trust is an on-going theme in Hammett’s works (Wolfe 1980). Through the use of the word, he conveys a sense of intimacy, of circling around a theme, in the exchange between Sam Spade and Miss Wonderly. Spade appears to accept her story as each attempts to disarm (or scam) the other in an exchange where both parties acknowledge that they trust each other.

In the poem, “Dear Beatrice Fairfax,” the poet and crime writer Kenneth Fearing captures that precious moment when trust emerges between two deceiving people— “foolproof baby with that memorized smile” (Fearing 1935). Spade and Miss Wonderly



are lying through their teeth and use the word trust to create a bond of false hope. The deception is mutual, advanced by agreement between two consenting adults:

Foolproof baby with that memorized smile,  
 burglarproof baby, with that rehearsed  
 appeal,  
 reconditioned, standardized, synchronized, amplified,  
 best-by-test baby with those push button tears,

Your bigtime sweetheart worships you and you alone,  
 your goodtime friend lives for you, only you,  
 he loves you, trusts, needs you, respects you, gives  
 for you, fascinated, mad about you,  
 all wrapped up in you like the accountant in trust,  
 like the banker trusts the judge, like the judge  
 respects protection, like the gunman needs his  
 needle, like the trust must give and give —

He's with you all the way from the top of the bottle to the  
 final alibi,  
 from the handshake to the hearse, from the hearse to  
 the casket,  
 to the handles on the casket, to the nails, to the hinges,  
 to the satin, to the flowers, to the music, to the  
 prayer, to the graveyard, to the tomb,

But just the same, baby, and never forget,  
 it takes a neat, smart, fast, good, sweet doublecross  
 to doublecross the gentleman who doublecrossed the  
 gentleman who doublecrossed  
 your doublecrossing, doublecrossing, doublecross friend.

(Fearing 1934 in Polito 2004 ).

Trust, or lack of it, gives Spade an out when Archer jumps at the opportunity to take Miss Wonderly's case. It's a case that involves tailing a dangerous suspect at night. This gives Spade some breathing room to think things through; and since he suspects Archer of a vaguely lecherous motive, Spade achieves a kind of moral high ground. Hammett uses language to express Miles's intentions as Miles responds to Spade: "Sweet." In-

deed, sweet is another word that has powerful implications. In *A Daughter Remembers*, we are reminded by the mystery writer's younger daughter, Jo, that Hammett "was deceptively simple" (HLR 2001, 69). He was a minimalist with dramatic instincts; he understood the irony in everyday life. Spade is having an affair with Miles's wife, Iva, and Miles is smitten with Miss Wonderly. Miss Wonderly is Spade's sacrificial offering to Miles, a temporary purging of the soul. Archer reminds Spade that: "Maybe you saw her first, Sam, but I spoke first." Spade grins "wolfishly" at Miles who anticipates his rendezvous with Miss Wonderly later that night.

In the beginning of Chapter 1, Hammett describes Sam Spade as a pleasant looking "blond satan." Perhaps it is Hammett's lapsed Catholic faith that refuses to pay homage to the fallen angel who has crossed over to the dark side, and keeps the name common and lower-case. Effective language "is implied or informally woven into the presentation" (Tuan 1991, 684). Hammett goes into great detail about Spade's facial features. "His yellow-grey eyes were horizontal." Hammett employs a "v motif" that is "picked up again by thickish brows rising outward from twin creases above a hooked nose." Clearly Hammett alludes to the features of a wolf. Spade is an amalgam of the devious devil and the cunning wolf. At the close of the chapter, Hammett's use of word play foreshadows events. The wolfish Spade has set a trap for Archer, instead of being trapped himself. Though he does not have a firm grasp on the situation, Spade sends Miles Archer to his death. The combination of devil and wolf conjures up an image of someone who cannot be trusted, yet Spade reassures his client in the presence of his partner to trust him to do the right thing: "foolproof, baby."

Miss Wonderly entered the detective office “with tentative steps,” but she is anything but tentative in her dealings with Spade. It is disarming when she claims to trust Spade. But that claim lays the groundwork for their relationship throughout the story as Miles is sent to his destiny. Miss Wonderly and Sam Spade are complex individuals and their relationship has been defined from their first meeting in the office of Spade and Archer.

#### LITERARY ANTECEDENTS

He didn't just use the town as a setting: San Francisco was a character in Hammett's work.

—Walter Hinkle, *The Imagined City*

Hammett abruptly changes place in one turn of the page. This lends a dramatic quality to the story. His audience is shifted from the ordinary office of Spade and Archer to the jarring, unsettling, sound of a telephone ringing in the darkness. Once again Hammett uses language to convey place (Tuan 1991). For an instant, place is defined in a non-physical sense—the ringing of a telephone. Hammett abruptly changes the scene in one turn of the page, lending a dramatic quality to the story. There is purposeful intent to Hammett's strategy.

Hammett told Henry Block, his editor at Knopf, “I started *The Maltese Falcon* on the way to you by express last Friday, the fourteenth (June 14, 1929). Though I hadn't anything of the sort in mind while doing it, I think now that it could very easily be turned into a play” (HLR 2001, 49). The letter was sent from Hammett's San Francisco apartment at 891 Post Street. That site served as the model for Sam Spade's apartment in the

Huston film. The apartment is one of several in which Hammett lived while in San Francisco. In 1926, Hammett was advised by doctors to isolate himself from his family because of his contagious medical condition. The Post Street apartment conveys a rich sense of place as the model for Sam Spade's apartment (Layman (ed.) 2005, 7, 134).

#### SAN FRANCISCO AS PLACE

“Maybe you could have got along without me if you kept clear of me. You can't now. Not in San Francisco.”

—Sam Spade to the Fat Man, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930)

Sam Spade utters this line to Casper Gutman in Chapter 11 in a supercilious manner. It comes at the end of a tempestuous meeting at which they discuss the Falcon's worth, the details of its ownership, in whose possession it is, where it is, what it is, and who is on the level. By this first of several meetings, much has transpired. Spade's partner has been murdered, and several individuals with dubious origins have come to Spade for assistance in locating an object of undetermined origins. This place called San Francisco makes it all possible.

Sam Spade's town is well chronicled in other books set in San Francisco. Herbert Asbury's *The Barbary Coast* (1933) confirms the image of the place where Frank Norris's infamous McTeague lived an amoral urban existence (1899). Even Mark Twain, in *The Gilded Age*, invokes the sense of San Francisco when he comments on a buggy ride in the thick San Francisco fog, guided by the ears of the horse (van der Zee and Jacobsen, 1980, 85). That San Francisco is cold, corrupt, and conflated by its geography and the

characters who roam it supports Warren Hinkle's observation that Hammett uses San Francisco as a character in his story. James Naremore, writing on film noir, describes the way in which Hammett creates the character against the backdrop of "the Hearst Press, the Barbary Coast, and the most famous of Chinatowns" (Naremore 1983, 54). The influence of these places on Hammett percolates beneath the surface of the story.

Hammett personally experienced the places he wrote about. He attended Munson School of Stenography and Typewriting, which was listed in the 1907 *Crocker-Langely San Francisco Directory*. The school was listed as the Munson School for Private Secretaries at 624 Sutter Street, within walking distance of Hammett's apartment. Hammett attended the school to sharpen his writing skills. One gets the idea that it's no coincidence that Hammett embeds his story in San Francisco: He is personally embedded in its landscape.

Spade's reliance on newspaper accounts reflects Hammett's personal interest in reporting. In Chapter 3, Mr. Freed, an employee of the St. Mark Hotel (note the word-play) consoles Spade as he is retracing Miles's steps in search of clues to his murder. Freed knew of the murder, as he tells Spade, "I've just seen in the [San Francisco] *Call*." In Chapter 4, Joel Cairo, described by Hammett as The Levantine, refers to a newspaper account: "May I ask Mr. Spade, if there was, as the newspaper inferred, a certain ah-relationship between the unfortunate happening [Archer's death] and the death a little later of the man Thursby?" Even in urgent situations such as in Chapter 12 when Spade returns to his office and learns that Brigid is missing (again), he gains insight from a cab driver. Spade and Brigid had shared a ride and then she continued on. "She rapped on the glass and said [to the cab driver] she wanted to get a newspaper." In Chapter 14, Spade

searches Cairo's room at the Belvedere Hotel with the consent of Luke, the house detective. The search appears to be in vain until Spade finds a newspaper with a missing section in the wastebasket, which turns out to be an important clue. The missing part was the notice of ship arrivals. San Francisco's physical landscape — the fact that it is a port city — is an essential part of the plot. The “nowness” of the newspaper accounts portrays the 1920s.

Hammett's brief employment at Pinkerton Agency in San Francisco is somewhat shrouded in mystery because few records remain. Hammett claims to have been involved in two cases that foreshadow the plot and perhaps the characters in *The Maltese Falcon*. One of the cases, reported by Hammett biographers, was the theft on the ocean liner *Sonoma* that sailed into the port of San Francisco missing some of its English gold coins (Layman 1981, Nolan 1983). Hammett claims to have played a role in locating the missing coins before the ship set sail on its return voyage to Sydney. This was a trip that Hammett was scheduled to take as a Pinkerton operative, and one he was looking forward to taking. The irony was that Hammett's good detective work deprived him of the opportunity. In *The Maltese Falcon* the missing treasure is en route on the freighter *La Paloma* that burns in San Francisco harbor while its captain, Jacobi, escapes with the loot.

Hammett's second case with the Pinkerton Agency achieved national press attention and was reported by Hammett's biographers (Layman 1981, Nolan 1983). Roscoe (Fatty) Arbuckle was a movie star of the 1920s who was accused (unjustly it would turn out) of sexual deviance with a woman who died in his hotel room. The press had a field day reporting on Hollywood excesses. It was just the kind of story a Hearst newspaper would toss to its readers, without letting the facts get in the way. Dashiell Hammett's

work on the case resulted in Arbuckle's eventual acquittal, although the damage done to his film career was irreparable. In *The Maltese Falcon* the suave international — and bulbous — figure named Casper Gutman takes on the nickname The Fat Man. While it seems the name might have occurred to Hammett because of the Arbuckle case, he claimed he patterned Gutman after a reputed spy that he tailed as a Pinkerton (Hammett 1934, viii).

#### BARBARY COAST

“Most things in San Francisco can be bought, or taken.”

—Sam Spade to Brigid O’Shaughnessy, *The Maltese Falcon*

In Chapter 4, Spade visits Brigid at her apartment. She disappeared after Miles’s murder and had resurfaced at a different apartment with a new name. Brigid confesses to Spade that her story about her sister is false, to which Spade said, “We didn’t exactly believe your story. We believed your two hundred dollars.” Spade inferred that Brigid paid too much for the story to have been truthful. Brigid throws herself on Spade’s mercy and continues to seek his protection; she wants the matter kept clear of the police. “Must they know about me at all?” she asks. Brigid plays the trust card, going to her knees as she begs for Spade’s help, to which Spade responds by demanding a five-hundred-dollar retainer. In San Francisco most things are for sale — even trust.

Later that evening, Spade returns to his office after paying a visit to his attorney, Sid Wise (an appropriate name for an attorney), to discuss client confidentiality. Presumably he is thinking about Brigid’s request to keep things quiet with the police. Spade tells Sid to get his hat “and we’ll go see the right people.” When Spade meets with Brigid

he tells her, “We don’t have to make anything public that hasn’t already been made public,” suggesting that the meeting Spade and Sid had with “the right people” has been successful. Spade also tells Brigid, “I don’t mind a reasonable amount of trouble.” This reinforces the trust that was established at their first meeting; that Spade and Archer know how to handle things. But there is not a great deal of love lost: after a brief encounter with Miles’s widow, Iva, presumably to take the temperature of their relationship, Spade has Effie bring in the painters to scrape Archer’s name from the firm’s door sign (another image cast in shadow on the floor). Spade remarks to Effie after getting Brigid’s five hundred dollar retainer, “I think we got a future. I always had an idea that if Miles would go off and die somewhere we’d stand a better chance of thriving” (Chapter Three).

Spade’s comment to Brigid about the way things are done in San Francisco is not hyperbole. Although he doesn’t specifically refer to it by this name, the Barbary Coast real estate was reduced after the 1906 earthquake to “the single block on Pacific and Montgomery streets, a short stretch of dangerous and disreputable though fare” (Asbury 1933, 99). The name Barbary Coast became generally accepted in the 1860s. Reports using the term were reported on in the *Call* (Spade’s newspaper of choice in *The Falcon*), by a local historian in an 1878 study called *Lights and Shades of San Francisco*, and in the same year in an article in the *New Overland Tourist* (Asbury 1933, 98-101). San Francisco (originally called Yerba Buena) grew from a town of 459 in 1847 to an estimated 30,000 in 1851, with a police force of twelve men (Duke 1910 3, 6). Among the increased population were some of the most desperate criminals in the country who likely found entertainment in the “places in San Francisco where liquor was sold, 46 of which had gambling houses attached” (Duke 1910, 4 & 6).



An equally infamous area—among many—was the Tenderloin, known for its “colony of gambling resorts, cabarets and houses of prostitution which in later years flourished around Mason, Powell, Eddy, and Larkin streets and other thoroughfares which lead into Market Street” (Asbury 1933, 99). San Francisco’s Tenderloin is the area in which Spade practices his craft, and where Hammett lived. The area is bounded on one side by Chinatown, which provided the setting for many of Hammett’s earlier stories that featured the Continental Op.

#### CHINATOWN

Where Bush Street roofed Stockton before slopping downhill to Chinatown. Spade paid his fare and left the taxicab.

—Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*

Hammett refers to Chinatown in Chapter 2, which is important to the reader because of the image of place that it creates. Chinatown provides a frame of reference for the reader without imparting the physical boundaries that clutter the crime scene. This is similar in approach to the way Hammett uses the image of the Barbary Coast. He builds on the raucous and lawless image of San Francisco without a direct reference. The reader is more likely to be familiar with the Barbary Coast, or Chinatown than the Tenderloin, where Miles Archer meets his fate. Hammett builds on this image when Spade tells Brigid of the ways of the West, where things are either for sale or are taken. There is permanence in Hammett’s use of Chinatown that satisfies W. H. Auden’s second criteria for a work of art (Tuan 1985, 56). The reference is all that Hammett needs to conjure an image of “dark

alleys about which we know little and which are the breeding grounds of fear, anxiety, and inadmissible passions” (Tuan 1985, 56).

At the beginning of Chapter 2, Hammett differentiates Spade from his predecessor, the Continental Op, by creating a more urban image, while he also creates an urban space. The Op had many a foray into dens of inequity. Spade is different, so Hammett places Miles’s murder on Chinatown’s doorstep in a tunnel-like urban space where Burritt Alley drops to an acute decline along a slab of concrete that connects Chinatown to the outer world. The cars below enter and leave Chinatown “with a roaring swish.” The infamous alley where Miles “bought it” leads to a steep drop where his body came to a rest. Hammett also lived at 20 Monroe Street in San Francisco (Nolan 1983, 64-65). The location is cheek-by-jowl with Burritt Alley — urban place becomes urban space.

#### THE URBAN LEGACY

“This is my game . . . I’m in business here.”

—Sam Spade, *The Maltese Falcon*

When Dashiell Hammett arrived in San Francisco in 1921, he found a city that had been rebuilt after the great earthquake and fire of 1906. A massive public works project aided by a sprinkling of wealthy private donors dedicated to the arts helped to give San Francisco a new look. The city that had considered adopting the principles of The City Beautiful movement before the earthquake was rebuilt from dust and ashes. The geography of San Francisco has always been visually distinctive, lending an aura of insular magnificence. On first impression, San Francisco’s visual uniqueness appears to be matched by

the cultural diversity in the 1920s, when the majority of the population either immigrated or were descendents of immigrant parents (Swanson 1999).

San Francisco appeared to be a wide-open city, but it also was off limits to some who lived there. It was a city of boundless energy in part because of the Pacific Ocean that funneled through the Golden Gate. The Pacific Ocean made San Francisco an inviting port of call for sea merchants, sailors, and émigrés like Joel Cairo and Casper Gutman, who came to San Francisco to find a bejeweled artifact. In the 1920s, San Francisco was also a getaway for the Hollywood crowd who came to town by train (Swanson 1999).

Conspicuously absent from *The Maltese Falcon* is any character from Asia, although the icon arrives from Hong Kong on Capitan Jacobi's ship *La Paloma*; and Brigid, Cairo, and Thursby all conducted business there. Asia represents the "other," possibly reflecting the fact that San Francisco was a society closed to those of Asian descent. In the critical studies literature, there has been some attention to Joel Cairo as a manifestation of the "orientalist" urge, but there is some question of how far Hammett intended that to go and how much is being read in from a vantage point almost eighty years later (Torgerson 2008). The 1931 film, however, connects Spade to San Francisco's famous Chinatown.

When Hammett came to San Francisco in 1921, he briefly returned to the Pinkerton Agency for the final time before leaving to pursue other endeavors that culminated in the writing of three novels by the end of the decade (*The Red Harvest*, *The Dain Curse*, and *The Maltese Falcon*). The 1920s in San Francisco were comparable to any other post-war city in the United States that began to thrive, reel back on its heels from the im-

impact of national scandals, lunge forward from the pull of laws that overcorrected the perceived ailments of society, and eventually keel over from the effects of a devastating economic collapse.

Organized crime seemed to benefit from the impact of Prohibition in many major U. S. cities. By the close of 1924, violence and corruption were bywords through much of urban America. San Francisco was no exception, although it did not achieve the notoriety of Chicago. This was the kind of crime Hammett wrote about in his Continental Op stories, which seemed to emphasize criminal folkways embedded in the geography of the San Francisco landscape. San Francisco was like Sam Spade, it took care of its own business. The local cops seemed to turn the other way when enforcing Prohibition. In *The Maltese Falcon*, police detectives Polhaus and Dundy have a drink with Spade after he is questioned the night of Miles's murder. "The *Volstead Act* was a joke and a boon to the local economy" (Layman 1981, 22).

A distinction also can be made about labor relations in San Francisco in the 1920s. The accumulation of wealth in the West was a result of natural resources that included land, minerals, and waterways. Mining, a labor-intensive endeavor, thrived in the previous century. Attempts to organize mine workers not only in the West, but throughout the United States, were rebuked by mine owners often in violent confrontations. It appears that Hammett personally encountered this in the copper mines. Hammett's novel, *Red Harvest* (1929), is about the conflict between miners and mine owners. The story was drawn from Hammett's days as a strikebreaker with the Pinkerton Agency (the Pinkerton Agency was perceived by many to be anti-union and had a history of siding with management). About Hammett's strike-breaking days, biographer, Richard Layman re-

vealed: “He said that his most exciting works as a detective came during the Anaconda Strike of 1920-1921 when the huge mining corporation finally broke the I.W.W. attempts to unionize the miner” (1981, 16). The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) were a strong-willed, and relatively radical, group of American workers who viewed World War I as a ploy to enrich the corporate treasuries of munitions makers and mining companies (Johnson 1983, 22). Hammett asserted that a company official at Anaconda offered him five thousand dollars to kill union organizer, Frank Little (Nolan 1983, 14). This is the same amount of money Joel Cairo, *The Levantine*, offers Spade for the Black Bird — perhaps the allusion is to pieces of silver, tendered for betrayal.

But there was a quiet sense of acquiescence to the labor movement in San Francisco in the early 1920s, perhaps because the town was bustling. A group known as the International Association of San Francisco comprised most of the business luminaries, who banded together to keep labor in check (*San Francisco in the 1920s*, 1999). The group was able to keep a lid on labor issues and operate in the open, and it was one of the most successful attempts to suppress labor in the United States (*San Francisco in the 1920s* 1999). Here again, San Francisco seemed to differentiate itself from the rest of the country. The difference would dissipate into labor strife in the decade following the Great Depression, when Hammett was nearing the peak of his productivity as a writer, and when he left San Francisco for New York, where his last novel (*The Thin Man*) was written.

## Chapter 4

## BREAKING THE TRADITION: DASHIELL HAMMETT AND THE HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE

[Dashiell Hammett] wrote scenes that seemed never to have been written before.

—Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”

Dashiell Hammett broke with tradition, and is acknowledged as one of the originators of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction. The genre is included in the broad horizon of literature that covers tragedy to romance and comedy, and also includes science fiction, the western, and the detective story (Cawelti 2004, 133). The detective genre has existed for centuries. For instance, there is an element of crime in *Oedipus Rex*, which argues for its being classified as a murder mystery. For the purpose of my thesis, however, I will only discuss modern classic detective fiction that dates back to the end of the nineteenth century.

Edgar Allen Poe created the first great fictional detective Chevalier Auguste Dupin (Symons 1972, 27). Poe wrote detective fiction before there was a detective department at Scotland Yard, and before formalized police work emerged in America. Poe wrote “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), which is considered to be the first “locked room” mystery, where a dead body is found in a room that for all practical purposes is sealed from the outside world, and the method of murder and/or entry becomes a quizzical topic for the remainder of the story (Symons 1972 27, 29). Charles Dickens created Detective-Inspector Bucket, the first fictional British detective in *Bleak House* (1851). Dickens’s work helped shift public sentiment away from the romantic view of the

criminal as a hero who had been repressed by an unjust society (BBC 1978, 15). This view was aided by real-life rogue criminals who turned their talents to police work. Among such figures were Frenchman Eugène François Vidocq (1875-1857), who was appointed Chef de la Sûreté Nationale; and Englishman Jonathan Wild (1683-1725), who organized the first attempt at policing (as an unofficial “thief-taker”) in London during the eighteenth century. In keeping with the contrast between detective and criminal, Wild was eventually hanged for complicity in criminal activities (British Broadcasting Company 1978, 13).

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, patterned forms of the detective genre evolved in Europe in part because of the increase in literacy, which was aided by the increase in the availability of reading materials. These included, but are not limited to, broadsheets, pamphlets, and penny dreadfuls. Broadsheets and pamphlets sprung up as a kind of sub-literature. Penny dreadfuls were nineteenth-century British serialized fiction publications that offered topical stories in abridged or serialized format that was less expensive to buy (and produce) than novels (Symons 1972 36-37). Penny dreadfuls were initially aimed at the juvenile market, but their readership expanded due in part to the advent of free public libraries and “subscription libraries” where one person would “subscribe” to a penny dreadful, but the text would be shared with other informal subscribers, until little was left after the hand-to-hand passing around but limb and stained pages (Symons 1972, 38).

The advent of Sherlock Holmes, the creation of Scottish physician Arthur Conan Doyle, achieved success into the early part of the twentieth century by offering an erudite Victorian approach to crime solution. Conan Doyle’s style typifies classical detection

where crime is portrayed as a temporary aberration in English society. Sherlock Holmes and his ever-present confidant, Dr. Watson, together ferret out evildoers of various ilk and restore order, and good prevails over evil. Some critics believed that the British writers were superior to their American counterparts. In an essay entitled “The Simple Art of Murder,” Raymond Chandler, an American raised in England and who became an accomplished mystery writer in America, chided those who made this assessment. Chandler characterized English writers as not being among the best writers in the world, but being the “best dull writers,” because their stories “do not really come off as problems” (Chandler 1944, 56). Chandler’s essay is considered by many to be the definitive assessment of the detective genre.

Dashiell Hammett also weighed in on the British (classic) approach to mystery writing. In his introduction to the 1934 Modern Library edition of *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett revealed that his colleagues at Pinkerton Detective Agency eschewed the riddle-solving approach in the Holmesian tradition. This surely constitutes an admission by Hammett that he had read Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s work. Whether or not Hammett consciously set out to overhaul the classical approach to crime fiction is a matter of conjecture. The statement that can be made with confidence, however, is that while the English perfected the art of crime writing in the nineteenth century, all that was about to change as Hammett and his *Black Mask* colleagues reworked the conventions and the formulas of the genre in the twentieth century. Hammett and Conan Doyle wrote in the same genre and used the same conventions, but they approached it using different formulas.

Genre conventions are applied to plot, theme, and character (Cawelti 2004, 13). And this is where Hammett begins to break with classic detective fiction. The English



approach has been described as two-dimensional, essentially character and plot, with an emphasis on plot. The British detective tends to be devoid of emotion in the spirit of Chandler's description of the "best dull writers." Douglas R. McManis (1978) and Gary Hausladen (1995) look beyond Raymond Chandler's assessment, and while they don't take direct aim, find other worth attributes in mysteries. McManis dwells upon his observation "that the vast reading public is exposed to a host of geographical information from the detective-mystery genre" (1978, 319).

A good example of Hammett's use of geography in *The Maltese Falcon* is Sam Spade's use of the shipping news page to determine boat arrivals, which allows him to settle on *La Paloma* as the delivery vessel for the statuette. Hausladen takes a broader view of cultural murder mysteries and concludes that "without a sense of place, the plot is needlessly enigmatic" (1995, 66). Hausladen also cries of a need for "realistic accuracy." In the same *La Paloma* example, San Francisco is a realistic home for Hammett's plot because in any major port of call, the shipping news is important. The syllogism is simply put: No port, no ship; no Black Bird, and no realistic plot.

The British mystery writer generally wrote from the Victorian perspective, when the evildoer was revealed and the social order was restored. There was a "common impression that the Victorian Age in Britain was one of settled calm," but this was not the case (Symons 1972, 41). Early twentieth-century American life was chaotic. The United States was edgy after a war that did not deliver its promise of creating a better place. Hammett arrived on the writing scene in the 1920s. He was a native son who wrote for a format that could be considered similar to the English penny dreadful and broadsheets in mass appeal, but he did that in a unique American style. The pulp magazine provided the

perfect vehicle for Hammett to express his tough, terse prose between the colorful art-adorned covers.

The inside of pulp magazines was all American. In his introduction to *The Hard Boiled Omnibus*, Joseph T. Shaw, *Black Mask* editor, describes his goal for the magazine: “We wanted action, but held that action is meaningless unless it involves recognizable human character in three-dimensional form” (Shaw 1946, vi). Shaw deserves much of the credit for establishing the hard-boiled convention that emphasized the three-dimensional aspects of plot, character, and emotion that was the trademark of the *Black Mask* school.

While Shaw played a role in the break in convention, the formula belonged entirely to Dashiell Hammett and Shaw credits him: “Obviously, the creation of a new pattern was a writer’s rather than an editor’s job” (Shaw 1946, vi). Hammett’s formula became known as the *hard-boiled school* of writing that jumped off the pages of *Black Mask* magazine in the 1920s. Raymond Chandler described it as a school that defines a style that belongs to everybody and to no one (Shaw 1946, vii). Scholars often connect formulas to particular time periods, which help place literature in the context of the period (Cawelti 2004, 134). This is the “nowness” that Tuan refers to (1985). In the case of the formula perfected by Hammett, one needs to focus on the 1920s in American society in order to place his writing into the proper historical context.

## HAMMETT'S HARD-BOILED WORLD

It is not a fragrant world, but it is the world you live in . . .

—Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”

A central element in my thesis is to place *The Maltese Falcon* within the context of its time, and to determine the themes that Dashiell Hammett uses in his narrative. Hammett's story is solidly rooted in the twentieth century; it is not a genteel story of an earlier, more polite, era. He wrote about what he knew: The mean streets of a detective working in the 1920s. During this time period the national experience of World War I had been idealized and propagandized. It was a period characterized as one in which “idealism was on the ebb;” its bubble had been pierced (Allen 1931, 16–17). The carnage of the war gave way to the realism of “needless sacrifices made to the failed god of nationalism” (Abrams 1995, 97). To use Raymond Chandler imagery, it wasn't a very fragrant world.

In *Sam Spade*, Hammett created an urban figure, who is both romantic and independent. While there are moral slips, Spade is so memorable because he will not break his own rules. Spade moved in rhythm to the beat of American society in the 1920s, and he was able to keep up with the frenetic pace of the big-city atmosphere (Gregory 1985, 22). Urban malaise underlies much of Hammett's work (Wolfe 1980, 21).

The forces at work in Hammett's story were social, political, economic, and cultural, and they resulted in complete upheaval in the way people went about their everyday lives. In *The Maltese Falcon* this atmosphere is reinforced by the dark of the night, the cold, impersonal urban space where Miles Archer's body is found, the dull moaning of a

foghorn, and suspicious foreign figures with nicknames such as the Levantine, or the homegrown petty crooks armed and dangerous with nicknames like “the gunsel.” Throw in a nefarious international figure dubbed by Hammett (and so tagged by various characters in the story) “The Fat Man” and you have all the ingredients of a multicultural stew.

Gutman seems to have no personal allegiances; his citizenship is unknown, he lives well, and he is utterly demonic in his pursuit of the precious artifact. Traveling in parallel, Spade makes no moral judgment about the fragrance of the world. He lives by his own personal code. He sees society as being corrupt, but he does not shun it or stand apart from it. Spade is a product of urban society, his judgment is subject to criticism, and he has flaws. Spade is “real as a dime” as he negotiates his way through the urban maze. Hammett uses the term “real as a dime” in his 1920s short story “The Gutting of Coufig-nal” (Hammett 1972).

Hammett calls Spade a “dream man” (1934, vii), but he is an enduring one. He is the archetype of a hard-boiled detective during a period of transformation in American cities. The term used is urbanization. It represents a time when American cities thrived as commerce blossomed and the effects of America’s industrial revolution drew increasingly more people into cities to live and work. “Survival in the urban jungle requires toughness, practicality, and clarity of mind” (Wolfe 1980, 40).

U. S. cities became gathering places for workers who began to labor in tedium as processes such as “Fordism” and “Scientific Management” became the buzz words, (and inventions such as the elevator and the filament electric light bulb stirred the imagination in creative minds to reach the heights in buildings called skyscrapers, while making the twenty-four-hour-a-day sweatshop possible. The American worker labored in a new kind

of environment that mass-produced instead of crafted, or they supported others in offices. In a sense, America in the 1920s had lost not only its innocence and spawned a lost generation, but its citizens had lost their individuality. In contrast, Spade is fiercely independent and he answers to no one but himself. He knows when to cut a deal or work an angle. For many of his readers who toiled in the tedium of factories and the tight spaces of offices, Spade offered an escape into another way of being.

A SCHOLAR OF SLEAZE: WATCHING THE DETECTIVES . . .

Hammett took murder out of the Venetian Vase and  
dropped it into the alley.

—Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”

Biographers, critics, and scholars of Dashiell Hammett have spent a great deal of time analyzing his canon in an attempt to find meaning in his stories. This search often results in overlooking the obvious. Hammett plotted his stories in the rhythm of everyday life and made his characters “real as a dime.” His five novels, written over a period of approximately five years, provide a gateway to the issues that confronted modern society. In his major works, Hammett addressed the occult (*Dain Curse*), labor unrest (*Red Harvest*), idealism and greed (*The Maltese Falcon*), political corruption (*Glass Key*), and boredom and materialism (*The Thin Man*). He also left behind an unfinished novel (*Tulip*) from 1952, about an aging writer who realized that he was past his prime. Hammett’s final attempt at writing came after what appeared to be a long self-imposed exile, during which he devoted his time to his paramour, Lillian Hellman, and collaborated with her on

most of her major works. Hellman achieved fame as a playwright with many major works to her credit. Hellman tackled topics that were as ordinary yet provocative as those addressed by Hammett in his own writings. Their relationship flowed with the juices of everyday life and it was as destructive as it was fulfilling, as Hellman and Hammett fed off each other.

Like the style of writing he made popular, Hammett's own world in the 1920s can be described as *hard-boiled*. During this decade, keen observations were being made about the American cultural landscape. Cultural geographer Carl Sauer's 1925 article "The Morphology of Landscape" is a prime example (Lewis 1983, 243). Peirce Lewis's essay "Learning from Looking and Other Writing about the American Cultural Landscape" places Sauer among those who pay attention "to the tangible fabric of physical and human landscape" (Lewis 1983, 244). The same can be said about the keen observations made by Hammett, who wrote on violence and changing sexual mores.

Although Hammett was not a cultural geographer in the academic sense, he paid close attention to the details of every day life. The hard-boiled fiction that was alive and well in the 1930s, and coming from so many talented writers, was a crucial part of Hammett's world view. As David Madden puts it, in the beginning of *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties*, these authors write about the world of the thirties "in a way that is at once an objective description and an implicit judgment of it" (1968, xvii). Hammett had a sense of what was important and he mined his data from the ethos of 1920s American society. Hammett observed, but he did not pass judgment; he left that up to his reader. It has been said of his readers that they were interested in the story, even if the element of crime was stripped from the story (Shaw 1945, vii). The plot of Hammett's stories was rooted in

life, to which his readers could relate. Hammett learned the importance of astute observation while working as a detective; his diverse experiences gave him the confidence to handle unique situations.

#### PRIVATE DICK

“I’m a detective and expecting me to run criminals down and let criminals go is like asking a dog to catch a rabbit and let it go.”

—Sam Spade to Brigid O’Shaughnessey: *The Maltese Falcon*

A key component of Hammett’s mastery of the hard-boiled genre is demonstrated in his use of the argot of the streets — “the speech of the common man” (Chandler 1944, 58). It is the language that provides passage to criminal folkways that define a subculture (Wolfe 1980, 16). Hammett shared some of his insights into these folkways in “Memoirs of a Private Detective,” an essay he wrote in 1923, and which was published in *The Smart Set* in 1934 (Hammett 1934, 85-89; Wolfe 1980, 16). *The Smart Set* was considered a slick magazine, and Hammett’s article demonstrates that he aspired to a “high brow” readership. In “Memoirs” he experiments with an essay format, in contrast to the short story that would become his meal ticket. Hammett’s insights into criminal behavior are crisp and clear; they are laden with the irony and cynicism that became his trademark.

These excerpts demonstrate this:

- I was falsely accused of perjury and had to perjure myself to escape arrest (8).
- I know a detective who once attempted to disguise himself thoroughly. The first policeman he met took him into custody (13).

- Once in Seattle the wife of a fugitive swindler offered to sell me a photograph of her husband for \$15 (15).
- The slang used by criminals is for the most part a conscious, artificial growth, designed to confuse outsiders more than for any other purpose (17).
- Pocket-picking is the easiest to master of all the criminal traits. Any one who is not crippled can become adept in one day (18).
- I knew a forger who left his wife because she learned to smoke cigarettes when he was serving a term in prison (22).
- The chief difference between the knotty problem confronting the detective of fiction and that facing the real detective is that in the former there is usually a paucity of clues, and in the latter altogether too many (27).
- I knew a man who once stole a Ferris-Wheel (28).

(Rascoe and Conkin 1934, 85-89)

In Chapter 20, Spade delivers his classic “I won’t play the sap for you” speech to Brigid O’Shaughnessy, reminding her that he is foremost a detective. Hammett makes frequent reference to his real-life “private detecting” experiences in his early letters to the editor of *Black Mask* (HLR 2001, 21).

In *Letters*, Hammett alludes to his familiarity with forged fingerprints (23), the art of shadowing (24), overcoming the fear of personal conflict (25), and his employment at the Pinkerton National Detective Agency (27). In Chapter 20 of *The Maltese Falcon*, Spade emphasizes the fact that he is a detective and that detectives don’t release criminals, particular when ones who have put a couple of “pills” into your partner.

This chapter is clearly the story’s denouement, and Hammett strikingly elects to follow the rules of his English predecessors. In the previous chapter, the dingus turned



out to be a fake, and all that remains is for Spade to deal with Brigid who, it turns out, “knocked off Miles.” Spade is about to send her “over.”

#### ARGOT: THE IDIOM OF THE PRIVATE DICK

Surely you too are one of them, as your speech gives you away.

—Gospel of St. Matthew

In “The Passion of the Lord” in Matthew 26:14-27:66, the Apostle Peter denies that he knows Jesus, the Nazarean (Wansbrough 1992). The assembled crowd accuses Peter of lying because his manner of speech gives him away. Peter’s denial fulfills the prophecy that what was written in the scriptures. Whether one accepts the credibility of the bible is not the issue, but the reference to the importance of language is. Language has been a sorting technique since recorded history. Humans undoubtedly used symbols before they used language to communicate. The caves at Lascaux, France, or the glyphs of ancient Egypt are examples of early communication through the use of non-verbal symbols. Story-telling, and later writing, were the means of communication as humans became social beings. In the spoken language, a system of codes is often used to denote special meaning. Ask any trucker who warns fellow truckers of a speed trap about the code of the highway, or ask a restaurant worker who points out a pesky patron to a fellow worker via a code. Hammett used his own code, which he reflected in word play (HLR 2001, 63). In *The Maltese Falcon* he used the word *gunsel* not as a gunman, but the alternative meaning, “A boy used for immoral purposes.”

Hammett is a master at word play, ostensibly to ward off the censors, but also because of his sheer affection for language and its possibilities. In *A Daughter Remembers*, Jo Hammett reveals that “Papa loved all kinds of word play” (HLR 2001, 63). Hammett used word play in *The Maltese Falcon*; aside from the fact that more than two thousand edits were made between the *Black Mask* version and the Knopf publication (Layman (ed.) 2005, 169). Richard Layman’s *Discovery of the Maltese Falcon and Sam Spade* conducts a painstaking page-by-page review of these edits and found that the alterations were not attempts to censor Hammett’s work (Layman (ed.) 2005, 168-176). Hammett requested that his editor at Knopf “go a little easy on the editing” should “you use *The Falcon*.” Hammett was recalling what he considered to have been unnecessarily stringent editing of an earlier novel, *The Dain Curse* (Layman (ed.) 2005, 49). Some of these edits were the result of Hammett’s style of punctuation, while others were to censor language or excessive violence. Perhaps Hammett was being coy and using word play in *The Maltese Falcon* to match wits with the censors. In so doing, he was able to get a few words by them, perhaps by distracting them with the more mundane act of placing commas, semicolon, and periods where they belonged.

Hammett ostensibly uses the word gungel in *The Maltese Falcon* to mean a gunman, but his daughter Jo explained that an alternative meaning for gungel is a boy used for immoral purposes (HLR 2001, 63). Sam Spade and Wilmer (aka The Gungel) have an especially tense relationship in *The Maltese Falcon*, and in the novel, Spade insults him with a reference to “goose-berry lay,” which is an allusion to stealing wash from backyard clothes lines (HLR 2001, 63). In *The Maltese Falcon*, Wilmer is often referred to as “the boy,” and despite an outward toughness that includes carrying two guns and kicking

a drugged Spade in the face after he falls to the ground, it is clear that “the boy” is the object of Joel Cairo’s affection, whom Spade refers to as “the fairy.”

Another word play with possible layered meaning is the word *dingus*. Spade often refers to the Falcon, which in reality is an object of art, as a dingus — a thing — in an irreverent way. In Chapter 11, Spade tells Casper Gutman that he doesn’t know the actual worth of the dingus but “I know the worth you people put on it.” The reference to the Falcon as a mere thing helps to deflect other more obvious meanings, including the idiomatic reference to a penis. The ambiguous nature of Spade’s references to the dingus fits Hammett’s cynical outlook on life — and to the value that some invest in objects.

#### THE TRADE

I’d like to know whether anything is going to come of this advertising racket or not.

—Dashiell Hammett, quoted in HLR 2001.

In *Letters*, Hammett lends insight into his expectations for the brief career in advertising (HLR 2001, 29-30). Hammett’s term as advertising manager for a San Francisco jeweler gave him the experience to write newspaper copy. He attended a local school to hone his writing skills after leaving the Pinkerton Agency for the final time in 1922 (Nolan 1999, ix). Ill health played a continuing role in Hammett’s employment, whether it was braving the cold of San Francisco’s nighttime fog in pursuit of bad guys, or hemorrhaging from the recurrence of lung disease inside the office of Albert Samuels Jewelers. Hammett contracted tuberculosis (a disease his mother also had) when he was a stateside ambulance driver shuttling returning troops to Army hospitals during World War I. Despite

suffering bouts of the illness throughout his life, he remained undaunted. He even volunteered to serve his country in the Aleutians during World War II, hardly an easy assignment for someone with a lung ailment.

Despite the nature of his job, writing always played a key role. He was often cited approvingly for his production of “concise, neatly fashioned case notes” at the Pinkerton Agency (Nolan 1999, ix), and he met with similar approval when he wrote advertising copy at Samuels Jewelers (HLR 2001, 51). Brigid O’Shaughnessy is said to be patterned after a woman Hammett worked with at Albert Samuels — and what a work environment it must have been (Layman 2005, 106). A modern-day human resources officer would simply perish of shock on the spot.

During World War II, Hammett edited the camp newspaper in Adak, Alaska, in the Aleutian chain. The paper has since become famous in its own right (Layman 2000, 120). He chronicled the experiences of his misspent youth in *Letters* when he says that he attended “a fraction of a year in high school—Baltimore Polytechnic Institute” and became “the unsatisfied employee of various railroads, stock brokers, manufacturers and the like” (HLR 2001, 27).

Many of Hammett’s short stories reflect themes based to these occupations, and he patterned the Continental Op on his Pinkerton supervisor, James Wright. Hammett left detective work in 1922 to try his hand at fiction writing (HLR 2001, 27). He viewed his break with the Pinkerton Agency as the beginning of his new career in writing, though he credits his experiences for his insight into human behavior cast against the backdrop of schemes, capers, and angles in the carnival of life.

## ARTS AND LETTERS

Not burdened with any academic baggage, he made his own judgments.

—Jo Hammett, *A Daughter Remembers*

In *A Daughter Remembers*, Jo Hammett provides a glimpse into her father's reading habits. She explains, "Papa was an omnivorous reader" and that he would tell her that if locked in a room with a set of encyclopedias "I'll come out with a plot" (HLR 2001, 94). Jo Hammett also equably presents a softer side of the man who has been deemed by many to be the originator of the hard-boiled school of fiction. Hammett read the classics as well as the "tonier magazines." Hammett presented himself to the editorial department at Alfred A. Knopf with an impressive array of literary expertise. His references included "more recently published fiction, book reviews, verse, sketches and so on, that include twenty or twenty-five magazines. The magazines that published Hammett's works include *Bookman*, *Saturday Review*, *Life*, *Judge*, *Sunset* and *Western Advertising* (HLR 2001, 45). By the time Hammett wrote the first version of *The Maltese Falcon* (1928), his voracious reading habits combined with varied and diverse careers to provide a solid foundation from which to write fiction.

Hammett's stories seemed to hold something back from the reader, giving the dramatic effect of classical literature. In the style of Greek tragedy, the murders in *The Maltese Falcon* occur off-stage and drive the plot on-stage. Almost incidentally, at the end of the story, Detective Sergeant Polhaus tells Spade of Gutman's murder: "Anyways

we got it from Cairo, Gutman's dead. The kid had just finished shooting him up when we got there." Gutman often refers to Wilmer as his son, but is murdered by him.

There is a bit of classic tragedy in *The Maltese Falcon*. Hammett uses the third person narrative for dramatic effect (Symons 1985, 13), enabling a rational or *logos* account as angst builds until the climax is reached in Chapter 20. Hammett waits to the end to inform the reader that Spade is going to send Brigid "over" for Miles's murder. This fulfills the goal Hammett set out to accomplish when he advised Blanche Knopf that he wanted the solution to break on the detective and the reader the instant that the detective reaches the conclusion (HLR 2001, 46). Spade and Oedipus are alike: both stand to benefit from the death of someone near and both can be accused of false moral judgment due in part to their intellect or hubris (Segal 1983, 178). Oedipus sleeps with his mother; Spade is involved, and has been apparently for some time, with his partner's wife, Iva.

*The Maltese Falcon* has an air of classical literature, which Hammett so enjoyed. He reveals this fact in *Letters* (1929): "Though I hadn't anything of the sort in mind while doing it. I think now that it (*The Maltese Falcon*) could really be turned into a play" (J. HLR 2001, 49). In 2008, *The Maltese Falcon* was turned into a play, with a number of off-Broadway versions.

## THE HELLMAN CONNECTION

For years we made jokes about the day I would write about him.

—Lillian Hellman, “Introduction,” *The Big Knockover*

Dashiell Hammett met Lillian Hellman in the fall of 1930 at a Hollywood restaurant (Nolan 1983, 114). Their initial friendship developed into a complicated relationship. They were both married at the time, though she would divorce while Hammett remained married to his first wife Jose, who had obtained a Mexican divorce that had no legal standing in the United States. Hammett’s and Hellman’s relationship was but conventional; although they found comfort in each others’ company in a tumultuous, yet caring relationship. Hellman was a brilliant playwright and was full of literary ambition, a perfect soul mate for Hammett. They were both temperamental, which gave the couple an air of eccentricity, if not intellectual insecurity.

The energy in Hammett’s writing had all but dissipated in the 1930s, perhaps because he had accomplished all that he could with the detective genre. Hellman offered a fresh intellectual outlet, because she aspired to high literary and dramatic goals, which Hammett failed to attain with detective mysteries. *The Thin Man* was published in 1934 and Hammett’s best writing days were behind him, while Hellman’s were yet to come. Her work was brilliant, although she admitted that she had “unhappily abandoned creative writing” by 1930, having decided that she could no longer reach her goal (Nolan 1983, 144).

Hellman credited Hammett's help in her introduction to a book named *Bad Company*. In the book, a student at a Scottish boarding school accuses her two female teachers of lesbian behavior. Hellman transformed the book into a drama called *The Children's Hour* (Nolan 1983, 145). Just as in the true-life Fatty Arbuckle case, the teachers were acquitted of the charges, but their careers were ruined. Hellman's work achieved high literary acclaim. A particularly difficult critic referred to her a "the new Chekhov" (Nolan 1983, 148). Another success followed with another play, *The Little Foxes*, which was set in a town in the deep South during the 1900s with the industrial revolution as a backdrop" (Nolan 1983, 166). Hammett (who counted the southern writer William Faulkner among a select group of good friends) played the role of critic. In 1941, Hellman again achieved success with the play, *Watch on the Rhine*, which Hammett adapted as a screenplay in 1943.

Hammett and Hellman fed off one another. He was her staunchest critic and most avid supporter during her productive years, at a time when his own talents were waning. After one particularly tough editorial bull-session, Hellman threatened to quit. Hammett's response was predictable: "No one but us gives a damn if it gets finished or not" (Nolan 1983, 167). When the final curtain came down on Hammett's life Hellmann was still his companion. Thereafter she tightly controlled the literary affairs of his estate, protecting how he was perceived and used. It was a final act of fealty for a couple that gave new meaning to the term "scrappy." Sometimes-lovers, long-time friends and co-dependents, theirs was a relationship that could give a good working definition of the term "hard-boiled."



## Chapter 5

*THE MALTESE FALCON*

If this book had been written with the help of an outline or notes or even a clearly defined plot idea in my head I might now be able to say how it came to be written.

—Hammett, “Introduction,” *The Maltese Falcon* (1934)

Dashiell Hammett’s introduction to the Modern Library edition of *The Maltese Falcon* is as close as one can get to the origins of a now-classic novel. Modern Library’s publication of the book acknowledges its importance and originality because “it was the first detective novel so honored” (Layman (ed.) 2005, 104). Nevertheless, at least five years had passed since Hammett’s June 16, 1929 letter to Alfred Knopf declared “I started *The Maltese Falcon* on its way to you by express last Friday, the fourteenth” (HLR 2001, 49). In those five years, Hammett’s reputation as a writer had grown. At least four of his five novels had been written, and his final novel, *The Thin Man*, would be published in 1934. It is possible that Hammett, a man who shared little of himself with those around him, was not only looking back but perhaps holding back.

Although he claims “I can remember more clearly where I got most of my characters” (Hammett 1934, vii), the information omitted may be as important as what is shared. “Brigid O’Shaughnessy had two originals, one an artist, the other a woman who came to Pinkerton’s San Francisco office to hire an operative to discharge her housekeeper, but neither of these women was a criminal” (Hammett 1934, viii). In *Discovering the Maltese Falcon and Sam Spade*, Richard Layman cites an interview in which Ham-

mett's friend and former employer, the jeweler Albert Samuels, claimed that Hammett confided to him that co-worker Peggy O'Toole, affectionately called Margaret by Hammett, was the model for Brigid's character (Layman (ed.) 2005, 106). Of Gutman's origins, Hammett disclosed: "He was suspected — foolishly, as most people were — of being a German secret agent in Washington D.C., in the early days of the war, and I never remember shadowing a man who bored me as much" (Hammett 1934, viii). Hammett makes no suggestion that *The Fat Man* was derived from Hammett's experience with Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle.

Hammett further admits that he combined two of his short stories — "The Whosis Kid," and "The Gutting of Couffignal" with the Maltese lease in his longer story (Hammett 1934, vii). Hammett is vague about the Maltese lease, which is the backbone of the story. He refers to the lease as a "peculiar rental agreement between Charles V and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem" about which he had read "somewhere" (Hammett 1934, vii). His vagueness seems intentional (Hammett 1934, vii). Hammett was a voracious reader, but not well traveled. He did not leave the United States (or its territorial interests) for his military service; he did spend time in several large U. S. cities in the 1920s. Seattle, San Diego, and San Francisco are ports of call with an influx of international travelers and military personnel. The same can be said for Hammett's home city — Baltimore. These places could well have provided a casual contact or a bit of fortuitous reading that pointed Hammett in the direction of the Maltese lease.

## ORIGINS

“What do you know, sir, about the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, later called the Knights of Rhodes and other things?”

—Casper Gutman to Sam Spade: *The Maltese Falcon*

In Chapter 13 of *The Maltese Falcon*, Sam Spade and Casper Gutman meet for a second time to talk about the Black Bird. Their first meeting, in Chapter 11, ended in a tempest as Spade throws his drinking glass and spits out his ultimatum — Gutman has until 5:30PM that day to do business, or no business would be done. Spade’s outburst seems real, but his loud “Whew!” on the elevator gives the reader a clue that this was a show put on for the benefit of Gutman and Wilmer. The show works, as Gutman sends Wilmer to tell Spade he is ready to do business. But first he has to give Spade a history lesson.

Gutman’s apartment 12-C at the Alexandria Hotel — the name another image of exotic lands — is an appropriate setting for teaching Spade the lesson. At the outset, Gutman is emphatic: “These are the facts, historical facts, not school history, not Mr. Wells’s history, but history nevertheless.” The reference is to H. G. Wells’s popularized *A Short History of the World*, published in 1920, and that made world history all the rage. The lesson is historically accurate and detailed, and it calls into some question Hammett’s claim that he wrote the story without the help of an outline or notes (Hammett 1934, vii).<sup>1</sup> Gutman asks Spade, “What do you know, sir, about the Order of St. John of Jerusalem

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<sup>1</sup> “There are no known prepublication texts of *The Maltese Falcon*,” writes Richard Layman. The two published versions of the novel are the first, serialized in *Black Mask*, and the book-form publication in 1930 by Knopf (Layman 2000, 56-57).

(Knights Hospitaller), later called the Knights of Rhodes and other things?” Spade, ever fast on his feet, waives his cigar to make his point: “Not much — only what I remember from history in school — Crusaders or something.” Gutman acknowledges that Spade has learned his history well and begins to broaden the lesson.

Gutman asks Spade if he remembers that Suleiman the Magnificent “chased” the Hospitallers out of Rhodes in 1523. He asserts this fact in a manner that suggests he possesses special knowledge — like owning a map to a hidden treasure. Spade responds with a simple “No.” Undaunted, Gutman continues to weave the story of the Order’s exile to Crete, and their eventual emancipation in 1530 by Charles V of Spain. The benevolent ruler gave three islands in the archipelago off the coast of southern Italy to the Hospitallers for their use as a safe haven. The three islands were Malta, Gozo, and Tripoli. Gutman holds up three of his puffy fingers to make his point. The use of the islands was conditioned upon the payment of an annual tribute — a form of rent — to the emperor in acknowledgement of their fealty. The rent was to be paid in one live falcon.

Gutman continues to deliver his lesson to Spade in a husky whisper: “Have you any conception of the extreme, immeasurable wealth of the Order at that time?” Spade’s response sums up Hammett’s mastery of the street vernacular: “If I remember, they were pretty well fixed.” Spade’s response deflects Gutman’s ingenious reconstruction of a medieval story through a cultural artifact, a story-telling that allows Hammett to attach people and place to the statuette. Hammett’s careful use of voice, and ceding control from one character to the next in *The Maltese Falcon*, looks beyond “thinking of these things as things” and reveals the relationship between people and things, and between people and place, allowing personality to join plot (Leone and Potter 1988, 213).

Gutman's estimate of the value of the Falcon may be debatable, but the lore ascribes to it a cultural richness. Falcons are ancient icons and have been revered in many cultures. For example, in Persian mythology the falcon is called *Shahbaz*, which is still in use today as a proper name. In Egyptian lore, the falcon is the symbol of the god Horus. Egyptian iconography gained popularity as a result of the discovery of King Tut's tomb in 1925. Hammett's use of an ancient icon lends symbolism to his story, a movement in literature employed by writers in the nineteenth century (Symons, 1899). In fact, one proponent of the symbolist movement, Villiers De L'Isle-Adam, was a descendent of sixteenth-century The Grand Master of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem who defended Rhodes against 200,000 Turks "in one of the most famous sieges in history; it was he who obtained from Charles V the concession of the Isle of Malta for his Order, henceforth the Order of the Knights of Malta" (Symons 1919, 21). Gutman weaves the story of people, place, and artifact, and thereby he attaches a greater meaning to the dingus. He is about to inform Spade about his role in the drama, but Gutman needs a refill and rises to fill his and Spade's glasses. "You begin to believe me a little?" he asked as he works the siphon.

Gutman's story is authenticated by two present-day sources: *The Shield and the Sword: The Knights of St. John* (E. Bradford, 1972) and *The Knights of Malta* (H. J. A. Sire, 1994). Sire praises Suleiman as "the greatest ruler in the history of the empire, under whom the power and civilization of Turkey reached their zenith" (Sire 1994, 57), while he disputes some of the historical information presented in earlier books. Bradford echoes praise for Suleiman (known as The Lawgiver) who was "destined to be the greatest ruler

in Turkish history . . . and to be feared as and honored at the same time throughout Europe as Suleiman the Magnificent” (Bradford 1972, 109).

The precision with which Hammett weaves the historical facts into the *The Maltese Falcon* is a testament to the manner in which he plied his craft. It also attaches a greater meaning to the story despite the fact that Spade often refers to *The Maltese Falcon* as merely a dingus. The reference to dingus could be a term of endearment, a form of recognition by Hammett that the facts are overwhelming. In such instance, the glee in which Gutman tells the story is a reflection of Hammett’s excitement over having found the story, and could explain why he offers so little background of the “Maltese lease” in the introduction he wrote to the Modern Library edition.

The Hospitallers’s history dates back to the Crusades (eleventh through the thirteenth centuries) when relics, including the remains of saints, images, paintings, and anything deemed to be holy, were sought after. Even body parts of martyrs such as the bejeweled hand of Saint John the Baptist were treasured. The history of the Crusades is a fascinating account of medieval lore that juxtaposes greed and bravery in the name of God. It is precisely the type of story that would interest Hammett, who was a lapsed Catholic. Hammett saw the folly in human nature and was of a mind that greed was mankind’s downfall. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Gutman, Cairo, and Brigid — and seemingly Spade, until the very end — betray each other for the sake of gain despite the fact that they all appear to be living well. Gutman forsakes his daughter, Rhea, and pursues the dingus for seventeen years in a fruitless effort. He also betrays Wilmer and agrees to make him a scapegoat, despite the fact that he thinks of Wilmer as a son. In the end, Wilmer turns the table and murders Gutman, his surrogate father. Once again *The Mal-*

*tese Falcon* follows the code of Greek tragedy, dispatching justice or vengeance, and settling order upon the landscape.

#### THE LITERARY JOURNEY BEGINS

In the pages of *Black Mask*, the private eye was born.

—William F. Nolan, *The Black Mask Boys*

The private eye emerged in the 1920s, first in untrimmed pages of the pulpwood fiction magazines, but within a decade he could be found in hardbound books, on American movie screens, and even in the funny papers (Goulart 1988, 1). In *The Dime Detectives*, Ron Goulart chronicles crime pulp history, illuminating the journey of the American private eye. Hammett was a member of an illustrious group of writers who wrote stories for the pulp magazines of the pre-World War II period (Haut 1995, 4). By the end of the first world war, there were fewer than two dozen pulp magazines. By the mid 1930s, the number had grown to two hundred (Goulart 1965, xi). Clearly pulps fed American readers' appetite. Many pulp writers moved to the West, and when they weren't writing for the movies in the 1930s, they were turning out pulp stories, many of them set in southern California (Goulart 1965, xvii). At the beginning of his career, Hammett was not much different, although his regional angle was northern California.

The literary journey of *The Maltese Falcon* begins in *Black Mask* where it was serialized in five monthly installments beginning in September 1929. Most of Hammett's early writing appeared in *Black Mask*. In 1922, he wrote under the assumed name Peter Collinson (in detective language Collins means a nobody; Hammett added "son" as in son

of nobody). These stories mainly featured a nameless detective, The Continental Op, who appeared in more than fifty short stories and two novellas and were later published in book form (Nolan 1985, 91-92). Hammett also serialized two other novellas: *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Glass Key* without the Op. It was common practice for Hammett to use the short-story format and combine two or more into a longer story. One of Hammett's stories, *The Dain Curse* (1929a), appears to suffer from this technique.

For all the acclaim *The Maltese Falcon* receives, and for Hammett's close identification with the hard-boiled genre, *The Maltese Falcon* does not fit into that category. The hard-boiled world was violent and the hard-boiled "dick" did not mind using his gun "to grind up a little meat" (Symons 1972, 136). In Chapter 2, "Death in the Fog," Spade's response to Lieutenant Dundy is "None. I don't like them much." Spade is not violent, although he is quick-tempered and prone to a little roughhousing. Violence in *The Maltese Falcon* is kept to a minimum. The four murders in the novel (Archer, Thursby, Captain Jacobi, and Gutman) all occur off-stage. Spade is a romantic, a tragic one, torn between two very different women. Beneath the surface, *The Maltese Falcon* is a story about a detective who doesn't play by the book because he lacks trust in what he finds around him. Trust — or the lack of it — is a pervasive theme in *The Maltese Falcon*, much as Hammett's other works reflect his career-long theme of man's basic corruptibility (Wolfe 1980, 58). Hammett sees crooks as people beset by greed, they do not share, but "they betray each other" (Wolfe 1980, 58). Gutman, Bridgid, and Cairo all attempt to dupe each other in order to gain possession of the Falcon, despite the fact that they forge alliances to achieve their goal. Hammett understands these alliances are fragile and plays on the fact that given the opportunity individual greed will destroy the group. If there is a



weapon in *The Maltese Falcon* it is the Falcon itself, which becomes the instrument of destruction for a variety of lives — almost everyone we meet, except for the cops, Spade, and Effie.

#### THE PRODUCTION OF PULP

*The Maltese Falcon* may or may not be a work of genius.

—Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”

By the time Raymond Chandler wrote his essay “The Simple Art of Murder” for *The Atlantic Monthly* in December 1944, *The Maltese Falcon* had been serialized in *Black Mask* (1920), published in book form by Alfred Knopf (1930), and had its most successful screen adaptation (1941). In approximately fifteen years, *The Maltese Falcon* achieved a standard against which detective fiction would be judged. In the words of Raymond Chandler, a contemporary of Hammett’s at *Black Mask*, “Once a detective story can be as good as this, only the pedants will deny that it could be better” (Chandler 1944, 58).

The serialization of *The Maltese Falcon* in a pulp was a potentially limiting factor for Hammett’s career. Pulp were not as highly regarded as were the slick magazines such as *The Smart Set*. Slicks published the works of writers who were seen as forging new literary trends, such as modernism. Pulp writers were equated with less intellectual themes, such as adventure and mystery that did not contain the emerging philosophical techniques embracing symbolism, impressionism, and existentialism. The publication of *The Maltese Falcon* in a pulp magazine had the potential to limit its acceptance as serious literature because of the stigma of such publications as “low brow” reading (Goulart 1988, 9).

Initially, *The Maltese Falcon* was rarely discussed as literature despite Hammett's desire to attain a higher form. In a letter to Blanche Knopf on March 20, 1928, Hammett reveals his literary aspirations: "I'm one of the few — if there are any more — people moderately literate who take the detective story seriously. I don't mean that I necessarily take my own or anybody else's seriously — but the detective story as a form. Some day somebody's going to make 'literature of it' " (HLR 2001, 47).

The decade of the 1920s is characterized as a "response to the cultural malaise of Victorian repression" (Singal 1987, 12). Using this illustration, Spade can be viewed as a detective in the tradition of early twentieth-century modernism, which was a deliberate departure from tradition. Spade's "vision does not provide direct access to an independently existing truth, but that truth is produced by and within a specific social concept for its usefulness" (Raczkowski 2003, 647). In *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett creates a narrow line that Spade must straddle between seeing and knowing (Raczkowski 2003, 631). Hammett lets Spade endure emotional (but not physical) pain through the use of twentieth-century modernist devices, such as paradox and ambivalence (Singal 1987, 14).

An example of seeing and knowing is the way in which Spade deals with Brigid. Outwardly, she appears to be a victim of factors beyond her control—the classic *femme fatale*—yet Spade knows she is a dangerous woman capable of deceit. Even Gutman tells Spade to be cautious in his dealings with Brigid. Hammett uses paradox by creating opposites in the complex relationship between Cairo and Wilmer; the gentleness of Cairo's (the effete) in contrast to the toughness of Wilmer (the kept boy). Hammett creates ambivalence by fusing the contrasting emotions of Spade's relationship with his partner's wife, Iva. Spade is amorous with Iva, yet contemptuous of her. He scorns her as the

grieving widow, yet in the end, after he sends Brigid over, Spade gives the impression that he may return to the warmth of Iva's arms. Brigid is a hunter who becomes the prey. She is incredulous at the matter-of-fact way he turns on her. Some say Hammett was influenced by Henry James's 1902 novel *The Wings of the Dove* (Layman 2000, 74-75).

#### THE MALTESE FALCON IN FILM

Warner's has already produced three different motion pictures based on *The Maltese Falcon*, the first and the third under the title in about 1931 and 1941, and the second under the title *Satan Met A Lady* in about 1936.

—Richard Layman, *Discovering The Maltese Falcon and Sam Spade*

The question "Have you ever read *The Maltese Falcon*?" is not so easily answered. Many think they have. But have they read the pulp version? It is unlikely since existing copies of the pulp versions are rare (and nearly priceless), largely due to the acidic quality of the paper that disintegrates over time. Others think they have read the book, when in fact they have seen the third movie version of *The Maltese Falcon*, directed by John Huston and starring Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade. Two earlier versions predate John Huston's classic.

The Huston film, in a large part, reads straight from the book. The book and the movie have merged into one, but have gone separate ways in terms of geographic time. As Huston's film opens, a picture of the four-year-old Golden Gate Bridge is spread across the screen and the scene dissolves into a shot of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay

Bridge (Layman (ed.) 2005, 310). When the novel was published in 1930, neither the Golden Gate nor the Bay Bridge had been built. In Chapter 14 of the book, Spade's loyal assistant Effie takes a ferry to visit her cousin "who teaches history or something over at the University (at Berkeley)" (Hammett, 1930). Her mission is "to check out "an alleged historical secret" with her cousin on the "Christy" side of the family. Upon Effie's return she encounters a boat that had been on fire "and smoke blew all over our ferry-boat." If Effie had taken her trip in 1941 she would have used the Bay Bridge to get to Berkeley whether she traveled by car or by public transit.

Huston's use of the bridges in the film updates geographic time by using an already iconic symbols of San Francisco. *The Maltese Falcon* is not only the most widely admired movie in the film noir genre, but it is also the one most closely associated with San Francisco" (Rich 2005, 21). Director John Huston "gives extraordinary attention to the city's geography, even its geographic time; the torrent of numbers and locations serves as a constant reminder of the presence of the city in film. They function to overwhelm the viewer with meaningless details, just as Sam Spade, in the search for the Maltese Falcon, finds himself lost in a baroque tangle and contradicting and puzzling information" (Rich 2001, 21). Among some filming errors, perhaps the most obvious was the scene in which *La Paloma*, the ship that carried the precious Falcon from Hong Kong, is on fire and the fire fighters putting out the blaze are wearing Los Angeles Fire Department helmets (Rich 2005, 22). Huston rushes this scene. In the novel, Hammett weaves the details in intricate geographical detail. Effie has just returned from the visit to her cousin across the Bay via Ferry. At dockside, ash speckles her nose. She notices, and upon her return to the office, mentions to Spade that a boat was on fire. The name of the

boat is, of course, *La Paloma*. Huston does not use this scene in the film — though it is impossible not to notice the similarity between Hammett’s novelistic description and the equivalent scene in the wonderful 1994 Bryan Singer-directed film, *The Usual Suspects*, where a boat burns to the waterline

#### REPLICATION

My four Sam Spade stories have been successful. Apart from republication, readers have inquired and have asked for more.

—Richard Layman, *Discovering The Maltese Falcon and Sam Spade*

The four “Spade” stories referred to above are *The Maltese Falcon*, and three short stories collected in a paperback book titled *A Man Called Spade* (1944). The great Ellery Queen wrote the introduction to the collection. The short story “A Man Called Spade” continues with some of the characters in *The Maltese Falcon*. Effie is still Spade’s loyal assistant; and Lieutenant Dundy and detective Tom (assuming Polhaus) are still on the police force. Brigid, of course, has been “sent over.” Gutman was murdered by Wilmer, and Cairo is out of the picture. In “They Can Only Hang You Once” Spade is still devil-like, while in “Too Many Have Lived” Hammett continues to emphasize Spade’s facial features: “His face given a not unpleasantly Satanic cast by the v’s of his bony chin, mouth nostrils, and thickish brows.” Even Spade’s office is much the same as it was in *The Maltese Falcon*. The curtain on the window is still buff, but Spade tells Effie to “push” Miss Harlan into his office, instead of “shoo” her in.

Replications of *The Maltese Falcon* occurred in radio broadcasts, as well. One such performance — the condensed Screen Guild version from 1943 — features “the one time that all four principal actors reprised their original roles on the airwaves” (Smithsonian Legendary Performances 2004, 12). The radio broadcasts provide another dimension to *The Maltese Falcon* by demonstrating the ways in which the story adapts to other media while retaining its literary form. In *Letters*, Hammett reveals that he thought *The Maltese Falcon* could be turned into a dramatic play. He plotted the scenes in a manner that emphasizes the dramatic effect of the story. The radio broadcasts allow the listeners to envision the story through the dialogue. The dialogue is quicker thanks to movie screenplay, which has been described as “less an adaptation than a skillful editing of the novel” (Luhr 1995, 151).

Hammett’s plan for a dramatic stage production of *The Maltese Falcon* was fulfilled in 2008. *The Maltese Falcon* appeared in several off-Broadway productions. Another “re-publication” of *The Maltese Falcon* occurred in 2008 when it was chosen as a featured book for The Big Read, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts. The story has not changed in over seventy-five years, yet a new generation is reading it.

With the input from Mr. G, a local high school English teacher, who uses film and literature to teach students, we introduced *The Maltese Falcon* to his class of seniors. Mr. G was certain that he had read the novel before in his undergraduate or graduate days when he majored in English at Stanford University. I reminded him that Hammett biographer Richard Layman was a Stanford graduate, but purportedly, Layman’s request to do his masters thesis on Hammett was denied because it was not considered literature. Fortunately, my thesis request faced no such obstacle at the University of Nevada, Reno, be-

cause my committee members, Dr. Gary Hausladen and Dr. Starrs, offer a film class in the Geography Department that plays to standing-room-only crowds. The professors have authored articles and book, and have lectured on the geography of landscape in film.

Mr. G's class met at 8:00 AM, which offered its own set of unique challenges. For our exercise, we used a worksheet that Mr. G. developed to facilitate a discussion about characterization. We also developed a vocabulary list with words such as proletariat, malaise, detective, *femme fatale*, and hard boiled. The semester ran for approximately twelve weeks and we covered at least two chapters of the twenty-chapter novel per week. Students were encouraged to read the assigned chapters outside of class and to come prepared to discuss them. Each student was assigned one of the characters and an additional component called landscape. The latter was roughly equivalent to the physical and/or emotional component in the chapter.

Midway through the semester I began to introduce scenes from Huston's film and the American Masterpiece biography on Dashiell Hammett. We listened to segments of the Smithsonian Legendary Performance radio presentation. We ran them to achieve uniformity so that what was written could be played out on the screen and visualized by listening. There were some moments of disappointment when the students read from Chapter 19, in which Gutman palms the thousand dollar bill and Spade stripped-searches Brigid, a scene missing from the film. The students were further disappointed that the censors had taken the scene in which Brigid spent the night at Spade's apartment and reduced it to a morning shot in the film.

The class was mesmerized by the Fat Man and the bottom-to-top camera shots of Casper Gutman sitting in his regal pose in a straight back chair. The visual style of Gut-

man's character comes alive on screen — the way he shares a drink with Spade, smokes a cigar, grasps the back of his neck when the statuette of The Falcon turns out to be a fake, even the way he plants his hat on his head with a sense of resignation at the end. The Fat Man's character is masterfully portrayed on screen.

One final class exercise was a written essay about particular characters. Students Amanda, Melina, and Wanda offered their assessment of Brigid, using the vocabulary word *femme fatale* to describe the character. The last sentence of their essay reads: “Brigid being the way she is, will be getting herself into a lot of trouble.” Jessica and Jason took on Spade's character and they saw “Mr. Spade as an ambitious detective that is always up to challenge himself and is highly a respected and intelligent man.”

Somewhere, Sam Spade is baring a slightly wolfish grin, and poor Brigid nods in solitary agreement from her prison cell.



## Chapter 6

## THE STUFF OF THE FALCON

“It’s the stuff dreams are made of . . .”

—Sam Spade to Sgt. Polhaus, film, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941)

In the novel, the film version, and the radio broadcast, Sam Spade delivers his classic “I won’t play the sap for you speech” to Brigid O’Shaughnessy. Her attempt to secure the dingus through seduction and sedulous effort had gone array. The Maltese Falcon represents the fleeting ideal.

With the exception of Sam Spade, who professes no special belief in the Falcon, all who pursued it fell victim to its spell. Greed and betrayal beset those who chased the bird; for some it was fatal. When the Falcon arrives at Spade’s apartment, he backs away and lets the others hover. His disengagement is unequivocal; Spade gives up the statuette and all it represents, just as he gives Brigid over to the authorities.

## INCLUSIONS

“Talk . . .”

—Spade to O’Shaughnessy, *The Maltese Falcon*

Spade has carried Miles’s murder around with him: “When a man’s partner is killed he’s supposed to do something about it.” His motives become clear: Spade has waited to the very end to inform Brigid that all along, through thick and thin, his mission was to solve his partner’s murder and he has little trust that the police can accomplish the mission.

Hammett intentionally disguised Spade's intent. In *Letters*, Hammett writes Blanche Knopf that he wanted to adapt a detective story to the stream-of-consciousness, where the detective carried the reader along "showing him everything as it is found, giving him the conclusions that are reached, letting the solution break on the both of them together" (HLR 2001, 45-47).

While Hammett wrote *The Maltese Falcon* in the third person and not in the "stream of consciousness": Hammett carried out his goal by having Spade act in the third person, but not as a narrator. Spade makes no judgments along the way and does not try to sway the reader. Despite the lack of narration, there is an existential quality to the novel that emphasizes the here and now of Spade's world. Huston's film does not convey Hammett's clear purpose. The film is not narrated in the third person, so those who know the story from the film only do not get a sense of the novel until the final scene. However, this does not detract from Huston's production, which for the most part is loyal to the novel in terms of dialogue and context.

In the final scene, John Huston, as Hammett did in the novel, turned Spade loose and allows his pent-up emotions to be unleashed. It is not clear at what point in the story Spade figures that Brigid is responsible for Miles's murder (both Hammett and Huston do a good job of crafting their denouements). Spade, a man who has had emotional outbursts, is ready to uncoil on Brigid. Hammett plotted his story with an emphasis on "character conflict," which was one of Joseph Shaw's goals when he took over the reins of the *Black Mask* in 1926 (Shaw 1946, vii). In this final chapter and scene, the layers of meaning are stripped away like the enamel that covers the Falcon's crust of lead.

The detectives have hauled away the no-good-niks, who have attempted to flee the scene, bound again for Constantinople in their search for the elusive loot (Constantinople was changed to Istanbul in 1930, a fact reflected in the 1941 film). But the job is not done. What remains to play out is the conflict between Spade and Brigid. The statuette of The Falcon is a fake, but in Hammett's words, "That's no big deal. If you kill a symbol, no crime is committed and no effect is produced" (Shaw 1946, vi). Hammett qualifies his statement: "To constitute a murder, the victim must be a real human being of flesh and blood" (Shaw 1946, vi). The Falcon is a symbol and its value proved worthless. Those who have pursued it ruined their lives. They were victimized by their own greed.

The novel and the film unify in the final scene making the case for those who have "read the film" and are certain they have read and absorbed the enduring moral lesson of the novel. Even the radio dramatization is faithful to this scene — Brigid cries and Spade delivers rapid-fire lines like gunshots. This is the 1920s, after all; murder and mayhem appear regularly in the urban realm. Miles was gunned down in an urban moment, but his murder had not been solved. Reader, film viewer, and radio listener are all about to find out what Spade has been thinking. Spade is "face to face with her" and is "very close to her." He utters the line: "They'll talk when they're nailed—about us." In Huston's film, the scene plays out under bright light. The brightness in the room illuminates the answer to the question of who killed Miles Archer. The scene is a close-up that emphasizes character conflict.

Spade angrily rips through the details of Brigid's complicity in the affair: "God damn you, and talk!" Brigid then retraces her steps from Constantinople when she and Joel Cairo threw in together against Gutman: "We thought we would get it for ourselves."

She explains her connection to Thursby in Hong Kong. After they pinned a bad check charge on Cairo “We left him in Constantinople, in jail—something about a bad check.” Spade understands how that works: “Something you fixed up to hold him there?” Then Brigid explains her connection to Captain Jacobi, which doesn’t put her in a good light: “I met Capitan Jacobi and I knew his boat (*La Paloma*) was coming here (San Francisco), so I asked him to bring a package for me—and that was the bird.” “Then—then I was afraid of Gutman.” Brigid has tied up all of the loose ends for Spade who takes in all of the details, and who, maybe, just maybe she thinks, is still on the fence. The reader, filmgoers, and radio listener may still not be sure what Spade is going to do. This is the *Black Mask* formula advocated by Joseph T. Shaw: “the formula or pattern emphasizes character and the problems inherent in human behavior over crime solution” (Shaw 1946, vii).

As the scene continues to unfold Brigid tries to hook Spade: “And then I was afraid Gutman would find me — or find Floyd and buy him over. That’s why I came to you and asked you to watch him for — .” “That’s a lie,” Spade said. He has finally learned the details that led Brigid to the office of Spade and Archer that first day with her story about her non-existent sister Corinne. Spade had the rest of Brigid’s story figured out, and he takes it from there: “Miles hadn’t many brains, but he wasn’t clumsy enough to be spotted the first night.” Spade kept a mental image of the crime scene. Miles was shot at close range, and his gun remained holstered on his hip. Spade knew his partner well. “Miles hadn’t many brains, but Christ, he had too many years experience as a detective to be caught like that by the man he was shadowing. Up a blind alley with a gun tucked away on his hip and his overcoat buttoned? Not a chance. He was dumb, but not dumb enough for that.” Spade delivers this with a wolfish smile, similar to the one he

shared with Miles the night Miles trumped Sam's right to accompany Brigid, and then Miles went off to shadow Thursby — and to meet his demise.

Brigid knows that unpredictable look and she probably has an idea what is coming. “Don't—don't talk to me like that Sam! You know I didn't! You know . . .” Spade confronts Brigid: “Talk.” They draw closer, each for a different reason. The scene is played out in the mind of the reader and on the screen. The radio listener, who may have not read story or seen the film, might lean forward to catch Spade's lines. The reader, the viewer, and the listener begin to understand what Spade understands: That Brigid planned to pit Thursby against Miles to rid herself of Thursby, just like she did with Cairo and Gutman, and just like she used Jacobi and others. This is her game; she killed Miles, taking advantage of exactly the same politics of sex and seduction. But Spade will not play her game.

Brigid, like Spade, is an archetype — she is the classic *femme fatale*, a role well suited to film noir. In film noir, the traditional male and female roles are reversed. Women seek power and men are emasculated (Luhr 1995, 9-12). It is not quite fair to criticize Spade for allowing Brigid to writhe under the illusion of romance. Spade is a cad, but Brigid has been dishonest with him. She has used all of her womanliness — her intellect, her charm, and her body — to get at Spade, just as she has done with others. But with it has not worked with Spade and Brigid is as much insulted as she is outraged at being betrayed. In this scene, Hammett's ability to use impressionism in his writing style is made clear. Spade's hand shakes and jerks. “Impressionism is one of Hammett's favorite techniques” (Wolfe 1980, 36). “Blood streaked Spade's eyeballs now and his long-held smile had become a frightful grimace” (Hammett 1930). Brigid is incredulous: “You've

“You’ve been playing with me? Only pretending you cared to trap me like this? You didn’t — care at all? You didn’t — don’t — I-I-love me?” Once again, Huston is faithful to the scene in his film version, but what makes the film version particularly effective is the manipulation of space: Spade drawing close, grabbing Brigid; her returning the favor by snuggling up against him and exuding desire — it’s a waltz, of a sort, and within that room, the story is brought to life in ways that even the novel could not match. Huston uses the apartment like a dance floor — or a fight ring. To the victor goes control and power, and the loser goes to jail. The control of the film frame is *mise-en-scène* at its best. Everything is in place and the viewer is drawn into the scene (Luhr 1995, 158-159).

Brigid killed Miles Archer and Sam Spade is going to send her over for it. Here Hammett reveals Spade’s motives; how he is wired. Foremost, Spade is a detective, just like his creator Hammett is a detective. Detectives live by a code of honor. Hammett learned the code early on as a Pinkerton. He patterned the Continental Op after his supervisor, James Wright, who instilled in him the code of honor (Layman 2000, 61; Nolan 1983, 9). Spade adheres to the code, but he may bend the rules a bit, sleep with his clients, hell, and even sleep with his partner’s wife; but he won’t break the rules that matter. If a detective does that he violates the code, and that’s just plain bad for business, “bad for every detective everywhere.” This is especially the case “When one in your organization gets killed its bad business to let the killer get away with it. When a man’s partner is killed he’s supposed to do something about it.” Detectives run criminals down and it’s not natural to let them go free; that’s like “asking a dog to catch a rabbit and let it go.” Brigid still doesn’t get it: “You’re not serious. You don’t expect me to think these things you’re saying are sufficient reason for sending me to the . . . ?” Brigid doesn’t buy the

detective code and presses Spade for more reasons. Spade gives her another reason, summed up in terse, tough Hammett prose: “I won’t play the sap for you.”

#### EXCLUSIONS

“He went like that,” Spade said, “like a fist when you open your hand.”

—Sam Spade to Brigid O’Shaughnessy, *The Maltese Falcon*

The Flitcraft parable does not appear in the Huston film, or in the radio broadcast. Spade tells the parable to Brigid at the beginning of Chapter 7. This chapter is especially heavy with symbolism. The “G” in the title represents Gutman. When Brigid responds to Cairo’s question about Thursby she uses the tip of her right forefinger to trace a swift G in the air. This gesture does not appear in Huston’s film. In the radio broadcast, Brigid explains “G” is Fatman to which Cairo exclaims “Gutman.” It is almost as if there is a curse that comes with Gutman’s name, which everyone is afraid to speak or mummer. The novel, film, and radio production convey this symbolic meaning. The chapter starts out in the present tense; adding the here and now of geographic place. “Spade sat down in the armchair beside the table and without any preliminary, without any introductory remark of any sort, began to tell the girl about a thing that happened some years before in the Northwest.” The entire Flitcraft narrative is readily available, but its length demonstrates the significance it has for Hammett — and the importance of its exclusion from the Huston film. Years later, Hammett’s daughter Jo recalls how “Papa plunged into the story without any explanation” (HLR 2001, 100).

Spade had not been told very definitely what to do when he found Flitcraft. They talked in Spade's room at the Davenport. Flitcraft had no feeling of guilt. He had left his first family well provided for, and what he had done seemed to him perfectly reasonable. The only thing that bothered him was a doubt he could make that reasonableness clear to Spade. He had never told anybody his story before, and thus had not had to attempt to make its reasonableness explicit. He tried now. "I got it all right . . . but Mrs. Flitcraft never did. She thought it was silly. Maybe it was. Anyway it came out all right. She didn't want any scandal, and after the trick he had played on her—the way she looked at it—she didn't want him. So they were divorced on the quiet and everything was swell."

Here's what happened to him. Going to lunch he passed an office building that was being put up—just the skeleton. A beam or something fell eight or ten stories down and smacked the sidewalk alongside him. It brushed pretty close to him, but didn't touch him, though a piece of the sidewalk was chipped off and flew up and hit his cheek. It only took a piece of skin off, but he still had the scar when I saw him. He rubbed it with his finger—well, affectionately—when he told me about it. He was scared still, of course, he said, but he was more shocked than really frightened. He felt like somebody had taken the lid off his life and let him look at the works.

Flitcraft had been a good citizen and a good husband and father, not by any outer compulsion, but simply because he was a man who was most comfortable in step with his surroundings. He had been raised that way. The people he knew were like that. The life he knew was a clear orderly sane responsible affair. Now a falling beam had shown him that life was fundamentally none of these things. He, the good citizen-husband-father, could be wiped out between office and restaurant by the accident of a falling beam. He knew then that men died haphazard like that, and live only while blind chance spared them. It was not, primarily, the injustice of it that disturbed him: he accepted that after the first shock. What disturbed him was the discovery that in sensibly ordering his affairs he had got out of step, and not into step, with life. He said he knew before he had gone twenty feet from the fallen beam that he would never know peace again until he had adjusted himself to this new glimpse of life. By the time he had eaten his luncheon he had found his means of adjustment. Life could be ended for him at random by a falling beam: he would change his life a random by simply going away. He loved his family, he said, as much as he supposed was usual, but he knew he was leaving them adequately provided for, and his love for them was not of the sort to make absence painful.

"He went to Seattle that afternoon," Spade said, "and from there by



boat to San Francisco. For a couple of years he wandered around and then drifted back to the Northwest, and settled in Spokane and got married. His second wife didn't look like the first, but they were more alike than they were different. You know, the kind of woman that play fair games of golf and bridge and like new salad-recipes. He wasn't sorry for what he had done. It seemed reasonable enough to him. I don't think he even knew he has settled back naturally into the same groove he had jumped out of in Tacoma. But that's the part of it I always liked. He adjusted himself to beams falling, and then no more of them fell, and he adjusted himself to them not falling." (*The Maltese Falcon*, Chapter 7, "G in the Air")

Here Huston takes a calculated risk and avoids the scene. This is defensible for someone who has been so faithful to Hammett's verse. There has been much scholarly debate about Flitcraft (Marcus, 1975; Wolfe, 1980; Marling, 1983; Thompson 2007). There is a metaphysical tone to the story, one that is difficult to adapt to the screen without gimmicky special effects. There is also the risk that it could distract the viewer from the symbolism of the Falcon. Huston avoids any reference to Flitcraft and keeps the film rooted in the dialogue between the characters, thereby giving emphasis to grittiness of the noir genre. Huston injects additional symbolism at the conclusion with a reference to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which alludes to the mystical quality of the dingus. This reference does not appear in the novel. Spade's reference to Flitcraft in the novel, and Huston's reference to *The Tempest* in the film, gives *The Maltese Falcon* a contemporary quality. Each successive generation that reads the novel or views the film, can ascribe its own particular meaning to the story. Even after seventy-five years, *The Maltese Falcon* is still being debated.

An example of context symbolism used by both Hammett and Huston is Spade's bedside reading. In Chapter 2 of the book, Hammett pulls the reader out of the office of

Spade and Archer without warning into Spade's bedroom and the ringing of the telephone in the dark. This sudden and jarring change of scene demonstrated Hammett's dramatic instincts, as well as his sense of place. "Cold steamy air blew in through two open windows, bringing with it a half a dozen times a minute the *Alcatraz* foghorn's dull moaning." Hammett roots a sense place in the geography of the outside elements and the interior of Spade's apartment. "A tiny alarm-clock, insecurely mounted on a corner of Duke's *Celebrated Criminal Cases of America* — face down on the table — held its hands at five minutes past two."

The reference to Duke's book is purposeful. The opening chapter of the book is titled "Brief History of the San Francisco Police Department" (Duke 1910). Knowing this, we understand Spade's response to the San Francisco Police Department, and his lack of confidence in their ability to navigate the ins and outs of Miles's murder. Spade's interest in the book authenticates him as a student of crime. Spade is serious about his craft, as was Hammett. The era of the 1920s is often portrayed as one of lawlessness, corruption, and urban malaise: A perfect setting for film noir. The book on crime appears in the story again in Chapter 19, as Gutman smokes a cigar and reads *Celebrated Criminal Cases of America* "now and then chuckling over or commenting on the parts of its contents that amused him." Gutman is amused by crime; his character is perverse. In the film, Gutman, played by an oversized Sidney Greenstreet, holds an outsized copy of the book while he sits in a comfortable chair in Spade's apartment. Gutman and the others are whiling away the evening waiting for delivery of the Falcon. Huston kept the book reference in the film because of its important historical context.

Mention needs to be made regarding the treatment of Gutman. In Hammett's

novel Spade learns that Gutman is murdered by his surrogate son Wilmer. Spade sums up this act in Chapter 20, “If They Hang You,” with an unemotional, “he ought to have expected that” (Hammett 1930). Gutman is also killed off in the radio broadcast. Only in Huston's film does Gutman live for another day.

In the film's final scene Huston lets Spade vindicate himself and bring a resolution to Miles Archer's murder. Spade held onto Gutman's thousand dollar bill because he knew Gutman would use that against him when captured. In the final scene, Brigid's dream that Spade might not send her over is shattered. Huston cheerfully kills off the symbol of hope, rather than eliminating Gutman. He injects a choice phrase from *The Tempest*, which is absent (though not inconceivable) in Hammett's novel. The image of a shattered dream is reinforced as Brigid descends behind the barred gate of the elevator. Once again, Huston uses symbolism, and carries out the intent of Hammett's story.

#### THE ENDURING FALCON

I believe that we are talking today about *The Maltese Falcon*, seventy-five years after its first publication, because it operates brilliantly on several levels.

—Richard Layman, Address to the Library of Congress

The recognition of the diamond anniversary of the publication of *The Maltese Falcon* by the Library of Congress is a testament to its enduring value in American culture. The book was published on Valentine's Day, 1930. This is befitting of the romantic Sam Spade who protects Iva from the police (Spade sends her to see his attorney Sid Wise),

tries to protect the gullible Effie from herself (her sisterly intuition about Brigid is way off), takes the time to call for medical attention for Gutman's daughter Rea (who was drugged by her father), and saves Brigid from her entanglements (but won't let her get away with murder). No wonder the ordinarily cynical Dorothy Parker refers to Sam Spade as her Lancelot "with whom after reading *The Maltese Falcon*, I went mooning about in a daze of love" (Johnson 1983, 102).

The book's recognition by the Library of Congress has rekindled interest in the story, although for some it has never wavered. A replica of the Falcon has perched at John's Grill in San Francisco for many years. The restaurant is mentioned in the book, but not in Huston's film, in which Spade walks out of the Midnite Café to catch a cab ride to Burlingame. Spade is an urban dweller and in his daily round, he would eat at the better restaurants as well as John's Grill. He is familiar enough to ask the waiter "to hurry his order." John's Grill was a respected San Francisco eatery when Hammett penned his novel. In November, 2008, John's Grill celebrated its one hundredth birthday and offered a twelve-inch replica of the Falcon (John's Grill.com). The restaurant has long been a gathering spot for Hammett buffs, where the signed reproduction of the Falcon was on display until someone stole it and other Hammett memorabilia in a real-life caper around Valentine's Day, 2007 (Glionna 2007; Koopman 2007; McKinley 2007). Life does imitate art.

Whether in parody, manner of speech, dress, or urbanity, Sam Spade conjures up an image of a romantic, fast talking tough guy, who doesn't own a gun and who dresses in a trench coat and fedora (Spade uses a top coat and does not use a wide-brim hat). Woody Allen's *Play It Again Sam* (1969) is a parody that spoofs the Sam Spade charac-

ter. There have also been advertisements that mimic Sam Spade's character. Some of Spade's expressions and phrases have become common place. The expression you're either in or out is attributed to Spade who tells Gutman "You'll comply or you'll get out"; Spade also derides Wilmer and tells him "The cheaper the crook, the gaudier the patter." Hammett retains some of his hard-boiled roots. In Chapter 2, Spade responds to a late night visit by Dundy and Polhaus as "birds cracking foxy," and says that he doesn't like "you birds coming in and trying to put the work on me" (Hammett 1930). In Chapter 10, Spade gets tough with Wilmer, who has been tailing him, telling Wilmer "People lose teeth talking like that" (Hammett 1930).

In the end, Spade does the right thing, but it's not the easy thing. He turns his partner's murderess over to the police after he sleeps with her, shares a special story with her that she doesn't quite get, and forces her to make breakfast for the men she has double-crossed after strip-searching her in their presence. There is no small arrogant male-ness to Spade. He often exasperates Effie, who learns in the Monday morning newspaper that she has misjudged Brigid. Effie has worked alongside Spade, almost as a substitute partner after Miles's death. Perhaps Effie is angry that her boss turned on Brigid. Spade tries to console her, but to no avail. "Don't, please, don't touch me," she said brokenly. For all the empathy Effie shows toward Brigid she has no patience for Iva. In the final scene, Iva is waiting in the outer office. Spade tells Effie: "Well, send her in."

The endurance of the falcon story is remarkable. A new generation is reading it. It selection for the 2008 The Big Read places *The Maltese Falcon* alongside the works of Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, and Jack London. Like a screw-top wine that scores second place in a Napa Valley taste off, *The Maltese*

*Falcon* has been placed on a reading list that has made its way around the country. While some argue the novels of Hemingway and Fitzgerald are being read less, *The Maltese Falcon* is gaining readership, a sign of a truly classic writing that does not age, because it has become embedded in American culture. Hammett would be pleased to know that his story is being reprised on stage in playhouses across the United States, fulfilling his prediction that *The Maltese Falcon* “could very easily be tuned into a play” (HLR 2001, 49).

Richard Layman theorizes that *The Maltese Falcon* operates on several levels, including internationally (Layman 2005, 15). When Hammett filed an affidavit in a 1948 lawsuit over copyright infringement by Warner Brothers, he referenced publications—and translations—that include “Denmark, Spain, France, England, Germany, Hungary, Sweden, and Portugal, as well as English on the Continent” (Layman 2000, 68). The book has also been published from Argentina to Yugoslavia, Asia, Asia Minor, Israel, and Japan (Layman (ed.) 2005, 339-342).

Huston’s film *The Maltese Falcon* has proven to be as enduring as the book. There have been successful foreign adaptations. The film compresses time and space. In one case, Huston has been too eager to compress time; the ultimatum Spade delivers to Gutman gets scrambled from novel to film (Luhr 1995, 68). The post-war anxiety and claustrophobic feel of urban living are realistically portrayed through the dialogue (Layman 2005, 314-320). San Francisco is a port city and its landscape accommodates immigrants, cargo, and dreams. The film captures San Francisco as the terminus of the Falcon’s journey. Brigid and Thursby arrive on a fast boat, and wait for Captain Jacobi’s precious cargo to arrive on *La Paloma*. A boat is a fitting passage for an artifact that was

hijacked on the high seas by pirates. The scene of the boat passage is left to the viewer's imagination.

#### SEARCHING FOR THE IDEAL

“It's a fake,” he said hoarsely.

—Casper Gutman, *The Maltese Falcon*

Spade professes no special belief in the falcon's value but he is reminded of its worth by Gutman who makes two proposals to him. Spade can receive twenty-five thousand dollars upon delivery of the falcon and another twenty-five thousand upon Gutman's arrival in New York; or he can settle for 25 percent of the proceeds Gutman receives from its sale. In Chapter 13, Gutman estimates the minimum value of the Falcon to be “one million, upwards of two million dollars.” Neither does Spade profess any special belief in the existence of the Falcon: “I don't know what it is.” He has a vague idea of what it looks like from Cairo's description of it: “The ornament is a statue”; and from Brigid's: “It's a black figure, as you know, smooth and shiny, of a bird, a hawk, or a falcon about that (her hands spread twelve inches apart) high.” Gutman simply refers to it as a “black bird” and indicates that “neither of them knows exactly what the bird is. Spade ultimately gets a look at the dingus when Captain Jacobi stumbles into his office—a dead man walking. Even so, Spade makes a brief examination of the bundle that Jacobi carried (while Jacobi is lying on the floor), but he fails to examine it closely other than to acknowledge that it is the Falcon. Spade makes no proclamation about its worth and summarily takes it to a baggage check and leaves Effie the duty of dealing with the police and Jacobi's death.

At this point, we are not sure what Spade will do, whether he will take Gutman's offer, whether he is out to avenge or solve Miles's murder, whether he really loves Brigid or Iva. Hammett disguises Spade's motives. Hammett is a study in contradiction. He covers up for co-workers who may have inspired his characters — he was amorous with the co-worker who has the mettle of Brigid yet he proffers a different explanation for the genesis of the character. During the 1950s, Hammett is blacklisted for his failure to name names, yet he was a patriot who served in two world wars, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. There's a lot of Spade in Hammett despite his declaration that "Spade had no original." Hammett arranged Spade's life like his own. He accepted the random ordering of things as the ideal, and then he adjusted his patterns — like Flitcraft — so that beams no longer fell. Spade, like his creator, is a person of logic; he accepts the randomness in life.

Spade the sentimentalist accepts the truth while others fail to see the logic in the truth. Shortly after Miles's murder, painters are seen re-working the "Spade and Archer" name, painted on glass at the men's office, so it instead reads "Samuel Spade," alone; no mourning period, there. Ultimately Spade is like Flitcraft—"he won't deny reality" (Layman 2000, 97). Hammett confirms the ideal when Spade does the right thing by turning Brigid over to the police. Spade is the only one who could have done this. He could have let her go and let Wilmer take the rap for Miles's murder, since he had already murdered Thursby, Jacobi, and Gutman. Hammett built tension into the novel through his characters.

Hammett fashioned Spade — "the dream man" — like a spirit from the nether-world. He takes on form in disguise, solves the problem when called upon to do so, and



then returns to his previous form, unwilling or unable to negotiate the everyday rigors in life. Hammett drew on his own character. His daughter Jo stated that Papa “could not put up with the everyday clatter and confusion of family life” (HLR 2001, 69). Hammett uses Spade to inflict the parable of Flitcraft on Brigid. It doesn’t quite take. Life has certain randomness to it, while it seems to be ordered. Hammett understands this and projects the ideal through Spade. There’s a certain randomness and irrationality that has become ordered in the ideal. Through it all, Spade, like Hammett, remains the free spirit. *The Maltese Falcon* is their type of case. It is good for business with the promise of a large reward that never materializes. Spade remains undaunted, as was Hammett, who earned a great deal of money, reportedly up to \$100,000 per year during the Depression, but he died broke. The ideal is just that way — fleeting.

## Chapter 7

## CONCLUSION

There's only one Maltese Falcon.

—Richard Layman, *January Magazine*

*The Maltese Falcon* is embedded in numerous layers of American life. The story is one that is presented, and works, in several forms: As a novel, in film, as an early effort in pulp fiction, and in re-creations, whether for serious, for parody, or for casual entertainment purposes. A 2005 acknowledgement before The Library of Congress crowns *The Maltese Falcon* as a special literary and cultural achievement.

A geographic interpretation of *The Maltese Falcon* in time, place, and space offers insight into the factors at work when Sam Spade moved off the pages of the pulp magazine, *Black Mask*, and into broader American consciousnesses. But timely is not timeless: Spade, his creator, and the dingus could have disappeared from the scene nearly as quickly as they appeared. Instead, they continue to be reinterpreted in ways that demonstrate a recurring interest reflecting the up-to-the-minute nature of the story.

There is a distinctive immediacy, a here and now, to *The Maltese Falcon*, and a topically existential quality to a complicated story that is told in a swirl of people and places. Only in the final chapter, at the end of the book or film, are uncertainties of plot and character resolved, and then only through peeling layers of wrapping off the physical thing that Spade refers to as “the dingus.” Simply put, *The Maltese Falcon* conveys meaning through simple recurrent themes that include greed, trust, romance, illusion, redemption, randomness, independence, and cynicism. *The Maltese Falcon* holds an inti-

mate conversation, a dialogue, with each theme, and it speaks in a cacophony of voices, each worthy of geographic interpretation. There is both an independent and interdependent nature to the dialogue that is of, from and about a unique era in America that was golden, corrupt, prosperous, skeptical, and a bit more perverse.

#### CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

“. . . and there’s only one Maltese falcon.”

—Casper Gutman to Wilmer, *The Maltese Falcon*

There is a universal appeal that contributes to the enduring quality of *The Maltese Falcon*. At least three levels of the novel, and the later John Huston version of the film, work independently. The question, “Have you ever read *The Maltese Falcon*?” cuts to the independent existence and appeal of the book. A “yes” answer is usually constrained by someone’s admission that they’re sure they read the story, but that it was sometime ago, but of course they have seen the movie. The response can be further qualified by the existence of two earlier film versions, besides John Huston’s classic 1941 adaptation; one bears the name of Hammett’s eponymous story (1931) and another does not — *Satan Met a Lady* (1936). The initial film stays close to Hammett’s novel and foreshadows elements in noir with shadowy images and urban representations. The second film deviates in tenor and drifts into a lighthearted nearly-slapstick take that, although there are moments of humor in the Huston version, detracts from the plot in *Satan Met a Lady* (the allusion in the 1936 title to “Satan” is to Hammett’s description of Sam Spade in the novel). The

*rara avis* that Gutman leaves for Brigid “as a little memento” is swapped out for a different cultural icon (the Horn of Roland) in the second film.

Neither the first or second film casts the depth of the character development in Huston’s film. Here Humphrey Bogart becomes Sam Spade, the archetypal detective, and Brigid O’Shaughnessy became the very type specimen of the *femme fatale*. The Huston film extends to a heretofore-unknown boundary that became a form of expression, film noir. The film alone is a notable artistic endeavor. It works on its own as a form of expression independent of the 1930 novel. But what is most remarkable is the pairing of a markedly successful novel with a brilliant realization on film. The force of the two together speaks to something vast and fresh that the United States invented and then delivered successfully to the rest of the world — perhaps on the same scale as jazz or the confidence man or cult religions or skyscrapers.

On another level, the enduring quality of *The Maltese Falcon* can be attributed to Sam Spade, who in manner of speech, dress, and demeanor is the archetype of detective who won’t play the sap for a dame, even one he’s fallen for. Spade, like the physical statuette of the Falcon, is an iconic figure operating at a level independent of the story. Spade’s image extends to pop culture in advertising, parody, and dialogue: He’s the archetype, a shadowy figure dressed in a trench coat with upturned collar and a fedora pulled down to eye level with hands in his pockets and an upward roll of the hips in his gait. This evokes a character with a clenched jaw able to engage most women with the endearing salutation of “Sweetheart . . .” That is offensive to some, by the standards of 2009, but it was an acceptable use of 1920s jargon. There is even a “nowness” to the word, and a “permanence” to Spade’s character. For the multitudes that have seen the

1941 Huston film, Humphrey Bogart is Sam Spade hands down. Not so fast, counter those purists who remain faithful to the novel: That can't be, because Spade is described on the book's pages as a pleasant looking blond satan. The *Maltese Falcon* purist might argue that Spade's creator Dashiell Hammett are one and the same, despite Hammett's explanation that Spade is a fictional character—"he is a dream man."

*The Maltese Falcon* endures on another level that can be ascribed solely to its creator Dashiell Hammett. The author was a product of Baltimore, a city on the Mason-Dixon Line: neither quite North nor South. Hammett held, but could not hold on to, various jobs that exposed him to a kaleidoscope of experiences. He came west to recuperate after a state-side stint in The Great War and after serving as an operative in the employ of the famed Pinkerton National Detective Agency, where he became exposed to the criminal element in American society. Not all crime was against society, and some became an enemy of the state because of their beliefs in worker's rights. That the Pinkertons were hired on as strike breakers and considered anti-labor must have been hard to square for Hammett's principles, which certainly by the time he'd been in San Francisco for a time were squarely Marxist in philosophical sympathy. Hammett rejoined the Pinkertons after he came West to recuperate from a wartime ailment. He wrote *The Maltese Falcon* when he lived in San Francisco where the cauldron of labor relations would periodically boil over into the streets. The region was known as The Barbary Coast, and later in Herb Caen's formulation, Baghdad by the Bay, but it was well known for police corruption, yellow journalism reflected in the Hearst newspapers, and xenophobia against Asians who could not vote, or own property. Many of Hammett's short stories reflect the preva-

lence of anti-Asian sentiment, rampant corruption, and pure violence that is associated with the hard-boiled type of detective fiction, of the sort written memorably by Hammett.

Hammett broke with classical detective fiction tradition when he began writing short stories for pulp magazines in the 1920s. The stories were not tied up with neat and tidy abstract solutions. His stories reflect a different tension, with angst and human emotion that often met with a violent resolution. In Hammett's version of the telling, American society was not polite; in that regard, he was profoundly modern in his literary sensibilities, and he didn't regard literature as a vessel used to deliver a fairy tale. Hammett broke again from convention when he used the detective format to plot the story of *The Maltese Falcon*. The story was serialized in the pulp magazine *Black Mask* before it was published as a novel in 1930. Pulp had a unique and different readership that, if mainstream, was decidedly less than genteel. But successive editions of the novel attest to its nearly universal appeal. The story is a timeless tale of the search for treasure told from a uniquely American perspective with an element of foreign intrigue told during the time when America was weary from World War I and distrustful of anything foreign. The theme of trust and betrayal loom large as men and women are perverted by greed and lust that lends a soap-opera quality to the story that dissolves into simplicity over fool's gold and a murder.

The Falcon is anything but simplistic; it works interdependently on the three levels associated with the story, its creator, and the protagonist. There is complex human drama that flows with juices from the veins of the characters that spin a web. There also is a foreign pall that is cast over the story that matches the mood of the country. When The Falcon arrives in San Francisco on *La Paloma* (the Spanish derivative for dove, the

eternal symbol for love or peace) the foreign threat is no longer imminent — it is real and present danger. The Falcon story is just another story without the characters. Mark Twain's Mississippi was there for the taking until Huck Finn embellished it with a certain vernacular. John Steinbeck's Mother Road in *Grapes of Wrath* was just another travelogue, until Jack Kerouac has Dean and Sal chronicle their trip in *On the Road*. Of course, there are others, by Gad, but let's talk about the bird.

#### GEOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

“Come in. Sit down. Give me your hat.”

— Caspar Gutman to Sam Spade, *The Maltese Falcon*

There's a mystical quality about *The Maltese Falcon* — a past, present, and future that work in a way that defies definition, but deserves adjectives: simple, beautiful, and poetic. Spade and Hammett are nearly one; Hammett's daily round becomes Spade's. There is an elemental quality of James Joyce in the way Hammett carves out a sliver of his life and creates Sam Spade. On Valentine's Day across the Nation, especially in San Francisco, many still celebrate publication of *The Maltese Falcon*, and on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008, when John's Grill in San Francisco celebrated its one-hundredth-anniversary, the restaurant was remembered most fondly of all as the spot where Sam Spade dined with regularity.

The geography of *The Maltese Falcon* is about place, and more. Hammett penned his story in a San Francisco apartment that was just a brisk walk away, through Union Square, itself an urban treasure that reflects city planning when squares became gathering

spots where people could express themselves. Powell Street defines one of the edges of Union Square where Hammett would have walked onward to the St. Francis Hotel that became the “St. Mark” in *The Maltese Falcon*. Spade’s partner Miles worked the lobby that night he put a tail on Thursby. This time Hammett continues to walk down on Powell Street to Market Street where it terminates. Hammett worked at Albert Samuels Jewelers on Market Street that was in the shadows of the Flood building where Hammett worked as a Pinkerton operative for the final time in the 1920s. A quick distance from Market Street and Hammett is in the Tenderloin, where Spade eats his meal at John’s Grill.

San Francisco was, is, and remains walkable, and its geography is not only physical, but an atmosphere that connotes a feeling of many moods. A dark foggy night is the classic Gothic scene for a murder. The architecture of San Francisco is dotted with Victorian houses, the fabled “Old Painted Ladies.” The site where Miles Archer was murdered is an easy walking distance from Spade’s apartment. Consider the scene: It is deep into the night and the Alcatraz foghorn is belching its warning cry into the foggy air. During the day the crime scene is in Hammett’s daily round, giving him a mental image of how a body would come to rest after it fell backward through a flimsy wooden rail to the street below. At night Spade take a cab to the crime scene, it being too damn cold to walk. These simple maddening details are clues to a story written by a man who covered his trail like an Indian scout. Hammett’s early biographer hired a private detective to fill in the gaps in his life and the story that takes place in one of America’s most proximate and walkable cities. That’s why geography adds an interpretive dimension to *The Maltese Falcon*.



The realness in *The Maltese Falcon* comes alive in its geography. The noir in the film is no accident. San Francisco is the place where the Golden Gate Bridge reaches across an incoming Pacific Ocean to save the City referred to as Baghdad by the Bay from total isolation. Brigid and Thursby came in that way on a faster boat to get a jump on Captain Jacobi's *La Paloma* that had safely stored the Falcon. There was no bridge to duck under where the vast Pacific enters and leaves at will. San Francisco is a port city where the likes of Cairo and Gutman enter, move about freely to conduct their business, and leave. Immigrants come to port cities because of the ease in transportation, availability of work, and the ability to be absorbed into ones class. San Francisco's Chinatown is an example. Port cities are romantic like ancient ports of call; they attract men of the sea. Port cities can be places of beauty are cinematographic when the sun glistens off the bay and the salt air invigorates ones senses that come alive at night and seeks other pleasures. Ports of call can be accommodating and San Francisco does not disappoint.

There is an independent quality to Sam Spade that comes alive with geographic interpretation. Spade's office, apartment, and the way he confronts law enforcement officials each tell us about his independent streak. Spade has a frontier spirit; he that is not afraid to take someone on, to protect his client, or to stand up for what he thinks is right. Most of all when Spade wants something done he does it himself, he has this thing about trust. Spade's independent frontier spirit dissipates into a raw energy that will risk it all and push it to the limit and then give it away for what is right. It's that boom or bust mentality that reaches beyond any material object or dingus.

In the end he turns over the Falcon to Detective Sergeant Polhaus and sends Brigid over for the murder of his partner Miles. Huston's film captures the risk Spade is

willing to take in the lone picture of a thoroughbred race horse in full stride on a sparse apartment wall, and captures the risk he won't take when Brigid is behind the gate in the elevator ready to descend to her own private hell. She gambled and lost. Spade warned her about the randomness in life but she didn't listen. In the end of the film Huston adds the line that the Falcon is the stuff of dreams that is spoken by Spade the dream man. Fitting, but why didn't Hammett think of that line? He damn near thought of every other line that was appropriate.

Then there is the urban aspect to *The Maltese Falcon* story that is enriched by geographic interpretation. The buildings, restaurants, the downtown movie theater where Iva Archer whiles away the evening her husband gets murdered are all urban representations. Miles was murdered in an alley and tumbled to his death at the foot of a rock that abuts a tunnel that leads into an ethnic district known as Chinatown. The topography is uniquely urban and not suburban or new urban with its contrived chichi alleys. Geography helps to highlight the realistic urban realities obvious and hidden just beneath the surface. Spade walks away from the crime scene to an all-night drug store and makes a call. There is a here and now to urban living.

There's also certain claustrophobia from the buildings — their shadows and entry ways that Spade ducks into when he is trying to shake Wilmer who shadows him. A random push of an outside buzzer in an entry way lets him in. He exits into a back alley — this wasn't a personal visit. Steam comes up the grates on the sidewalk and flashing lights project anonymous images. There's a frantic pace to city living; a swirling movement when Spade tries to make sense of all the loose ends. The pace quickens when Brigid goes missing — cab rides, piecing together yesterday's news to make sense of today's, a

hurried dinner, a cup of coffee and a smoke. Psychoanalysis became popular in the 1920s as people escaped rural living for a different kind of hell; probing deeper into the human mind to find ugly suppressed thoughts that explains bizarre behavior.

Space, time, and place are compressed. *The Maltese Falcon* takes place over some five days that can be chronicled, mapped out, in geographic time. There are theater mar-quees, newspapers place names, and uncanny references to gangsters, philosophers, and hidden meanings. Some are purposeful, some accidental. Brigid leaves a forwarding address of the Ambassador hotel in Los Angeles. In 1968, a Presidential candidate was later murdered in the kitchen pantry at the Ambassador. Gutman compresses five hundred years of accurate history to Spade in a couple of pages in Chapter 13. Hammett's novel compresses the largeness of Casper Gutman's character by giving him the name of The Fat Man, and suppresses the meaning of gungel to slip one by Hollywood censors. Huston compresses Gutman in film by bottom-to-top close-up camera shots, and downplays deviance and dalliances of a sexual nature. And quite distinctly, the novel and the film have different geographies. Huston frames all of the characters in one tight shot around the table in Spade's apartment. All but Spade hover over the small but lead-stout object that Spade refers to as the dingus. Hammett frames the scene with words and not pictures. People take what someplace special offers, and maybe even seek out something special like the landscapes arrayed before them in *The Maltese Falcon*, if the opportunity avails itself to them. In the end geography is about mental images of physical place of humans acting out their lives in a daily round much as did Dashiell Hammett and others before him, and other to follow.

## APPENDIX I

## DEFINING FILM NOIR

There is a debate over the definition of film noir. For me to completely ignore it would be an oversight, since the idea for this thesis came from the film class taught by geography professors Paul Starrs and Gary Hausladen. These two cultural geographers have written extensively on geography in film (among other geographical topics) and they have encouraged their students to seek out meaningful ways to connect the two. I share a special affection for film noir with Hausladen and Starrs, although my interest is more with the noir genre in writing than in film. The use of *The Maltese Falcon* as my thesis topic was a logical development since *The Falcon* is a story that epitomizes noir.

That any agreement in concept can be considered “logical” is a testament to the broad reaches of cultural geography, and the ways in which professors Hausladen and Starrs glean ideas from their students. This is especially applies to classifying *The Maltese Falcon* as noir, because it is elusive as to style and even type. Noir is a French word meaning black (or dark), and the French used the word as a way to enhance the meaning of French film by comparing it to the qualities in American film (Naremore 1995-1996, 15). Noir is rooted in German Expressionism, which makes any attempt at a clear definition like taking a shot at a moving target in a dark room that once was illuminated: One knows what it is when it is seen, but you don’t know quite where it is.

One way of looking at film noir is to think of it in terms of classic detective fiction that emerged early in the twentieth century. The English tradition of detective fiction, demonstrated in the stories told by Conan Doyle, reaffirmed “the fundamental

soundness of social order” where crime “happens but is not fundamental or endemic to society” (Cawelti 2004, 286). In the 1920s, classic detective fiction gave way to a more pessimistic view of society, usually portrayed in an urban setting, “where the corrupt outnumber innocent” and “even in the most pessimistic view . . . it is still possible for the detective to accomplish a significant act of justice or vengeance” (Cawelti 2004, 286). Using this dichotomy, noir can be described as the act of justice where society is returned to normal, but the quality of the story under which the return to normalcy takes place is a “reversal of conventional norms” that “result from the disruption of order” (Naremore 1995-96, 19.). It is this disruption of order that is at the heart of noir.

The emphasis on the hard-boiled as an expression of noir is not a disguised attempt to exclude other forms of artistic expression. A general definition of noir that is used in the film class is conceptual more than concrete: noir “belongs to the history of ideas as much to the history of cinema” (Naremore 1995-96, 14). In the matter of *The Maltese Falcon*, cinema is a logical fit. The term noir is associated with five Hollywood features that were made either in the run-up to, or actually during, World War II: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) *Double Indemnity* (1944); *Laura* (1944); *Murder, My Sweet* (1944); and *The Lost Weekend* (1945) (Naremore 1995-96, 15).

The inclusion of John Huston’s film version of *The Maltese Falcon* on a list that has essentially remained intact is a testament to its enduring quality (*The Lost Weekend* “disappears from most subsequent writings” about film noir, avers Naremore (1995-96, 15)). It is especially the case that some of the traditional elements of noir are missing, such as first person narration. In its place, there is dialogue, an almost incessant patter, in which detective Sam Spade speaks not just through his own voice, but in a cacophony of

voices that include Brigid, Cairo, Gutman, Wilmer, even Detective-Sergeant Polhaus. These voices seem to represent fragments of Spade's conscious self as he tries to connect the dots of the dizzying details in order to make sense of a story that seems out of place for a detective in an urban setting, where it might be expected for a plot to unroll with some orderliness.

Also absent from the traditional notion of noir is a sense of city living, that is replaced by the claustrophobic space of Spade's apartment, along with Gutman's (and to a lesser extent Brigid's) hotel room where the characters converge, if not collide in time and space. Activity in the film generally revolves around people and not moving objects; except for Spade's cab ride to the San Francisco peninsula (Spade doesn't own a car). Even the scene in which the ship *La Paloma* is on fire is about the movement of people and Spade trying to get details over the sound of a loud siren. It's the movement and activity of people in confined space that gives an element of noir to *The Maltese Falcon*.

The noir in *The Maltese Falcon* is also in the dialogue that occurs among the characters in cinematic space. Tight space is representative of Hammett's terse, sparse prose. Every drop is squeezed from a scene. The murder of Miles Archer, Spade's partner, is an example of this element in the film that deviates from Hammett's novel. In the book, Spade takes a call as a tiny alarm clock "held its hands at five minutes past two." There is a dull moaning of the Alcatraz foghorn in the background. The existential quality of Hammett's prose converts to noir in Huston's film where a much different scene plays out. There is a close up of Miles taking one "through the pump." The only image portrayed on screen is Miles against a dark backdrop of night the moment he is shot. Cinematic time is portrayed in cinematic space. In the novel, Spade learns how Miles

bought it from Sergeant Polhaus upon his arrival at the crime scene. “Fifteen minutes” after taking the call and Spade arrives at the spot “where Bush Street roofed Stockton before slipping downhill to Chinatown.” The scene is not filmed on location, but the way in which Huston’s images of Miles dominate the scene—it could have been filmed anywhere. Spade leaves the crime scene as a lonely figure, one that lends a sense of alienation to the noir environment.

Over and over, Huston takes chapters from Hammett’s novel and weaves them into film noir. Huston did this in 1941, before “significant writings on American noir began to appear in French film journals in August 1946” (Naremore 1995-96, 15). The term was coined in by French film critic Nino Frank (Rich 2005; Naremore 1996-95). However, a clear definition of the term remains elusive.

## APPENDIX II:

## PROFILE OF SAM SPADE: MADE UP FROM LIKELY &amp; UNLIKELY SOURCES

*[In Selected Letters Raymond Chandler corresponded with D.J. Ibberson, a fan who expressed “an interest in the facts of Phillip Marlowe’s life” (Brucoli and Layman 1989, 32-36). Marlowe was the fictional detective created by Chandler; as a creation of American noir, he followed Spade in Black Mask. Chandler was a fervent admirer of Hammett’s. Both men left copious numbers of letters for scholars to debate, but there the similarity ends. Chandler’s letters were open and revealing, Hammett’s letters seemed to minimize his personal affairs. Other than his introduction in The Modern Library edition to The Maltese Falcon (1934) Hammett gave little biographical information about Sam Spade. This is a profile assembled from reading between Hammett’s lines and some added supposition.]*

Samuel Spade is thirty-five years old; he came West after a state-side hitch in The Great War having served as an ambulance driver for returning dough boys. Spade received an honorable discharge; he never saw action and should not be considered a hero, but he certainly fits the profile as a patriot and is not un-American.

He graduated from high school in the East where he did a lot of reading but failed to distinguish himself in any of a multitude of post-high school jobs that he attempted. These ranged from brokerage to watchman. Spade was known to be a voracious reader and had diverse interests that included history, folklore, philosophy, and science. He is the self-taught man without academic burdens. Spade read the essays of Frederick Jackson Turner along with the likes of Melville, Cooper, and Twain. Spade also enjoyed the classics, especially Greek drama, and probably read Henry James and James Joyce.

Spade developed a keen interest in sleuthing from the classic detective story (Poe/Doyle/Collins) and from crime annals (Thomas Duke); he read the exploits of Allan Pinkerton and the memoirs of French criminal Vidocq and Jonathan Wild who was



known as the *Thief Taker General of Britain and Ireland*. He was especially fond of Dostoyevsky.

Spade was raised as a Catholic at the insistence of his mother who was of mixed European descent whom he favored over his father, who was a man of high aspirations but low achievement except when it came to pleasures of the flesh. Spade had one sister of whom he was fond, and a brother for whom he had little use. Spade lapsed as a Catholic but did marry his army nurse Jose in Saint Mary's Church in San Francisco in the 1920s after he came West.

Spade could be summed up as an individualist with anti-authority bent: one who bores easily. He borders on skeptic in his everyday outlook, due in part to the experience of World War that failed to fulfill its promise. In sum, Spade's mettle is that of a frontiersman with a "restless nervous energy" — that "dominant individualism" a "buoyancy and exuberance which comes from freedom" along with a "coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness" (Turner 1962 [1893], viii).

These rough-hewn traits combine with an outward appearance that can be described as dapper, but not dandy. Spade has wide shoulders that sit atop his a lanky frame; he is long-legged with a bit of a gait. A crop of wavy blond hair show signs of graying that gives his narrow face with a slightly protruding forehead a distinguished look that is highlighted by a neatly trimmed mustache. There is a wolfish quality to Spade, but not demonic; he looks rather like a pleasant looking blond Satan that accounts to his appeal with the ladies, despite slightly enlarged nostrils. Spade is usually nattily attired, looks comfortable in tweeds and on occasion will use a walking stick. He uses tobacco, prefers to roll his own cigarettes, and consumes prodigious quantities of alcohol,

but often regrets the consequences. Spade loves games of chance and treats money and material possessions with reckless abandon.

A modern day version of Spade could easily be portrayed by a middle-aged Val Kilmer who played Leslie Charteris' *Saint* in American film. Spade would not be displeased at the popularity attached to his character by the role played by Humphrey Bogart in the 1941 film, but is quick to add that the original film version of *The Maltese Falcon* (1931) with Bebe Daniels and Ricardo Cortez is quite good and worth seeing. This film shows early signs of *noir* but does not get the credit because of all of the acclaim associated with the 1941 film directed by Huston.

Spade had a keen interest in the exploits of Allan Pinkerton, the Scottish immigrant who became the Nation's first private eye. Pinkerton pioneered advances in criminal detection that includes a rogue gallery, fingerprinting, undercover and surveillance work, and intelligence gathering for the Union forces in the Civil War. Spade was raised along the Mason-Dixon Line and should not be considered either a Union or Confederate sympathizer. He finds all war distasteful and generally is non-violent in persuasion; but will not back down. He owns no guns, but is comfortable in handling them.

Spade's interest in the American West was piqued by Pinkerton's accounts of the 1870s when he provided security for the railroads that lead to encounters with the infamous James gang termed America's Robin Hood by Theodore Roosevelt (Mackay 1996, 209). Spade came West in the 1920s and took a job with the Pinkerton's where he learned all facets of crime detection. By that time the Pinkerton's were deeply involved in the American Labor movement.

Many considered the Pinkerton men as anti-labor; their agents served as strike busters and infiltrated a group of coal miners in the East known as the Mollies, and also quelled labor unrest in Butte Montana where union organizer Franker Little was hung. Spade is anything but anti-labor and ascribes to Marxist ideals in his thinking. This philosophical difference probably accounts for Spade's departure from the ranks of the Pinkertons when he started his own agency in San Francisco in the 1920s. Spade had befriended the likes of neophyte San Francisco labor organizer Harry Bridges who rose to fame in the 1930s. Spade started his agency out small and took on work that suited his background and interests. This included shadowing spouses expected of infidelity, jewelry heists, and private investigations for insurance agencies related to recovery of stolen goods.

On occasion Spade located missing persons and worked on a famous case of Mr. Flitcraft who was a wealthy man from the Pacific Northwest who pulled a Mandrake after beams fell from a construction site where all but one of the casualties were accounted for. Flitcraft took on a new identity under the name of Albert Samuels and settled in to what appeared an altogether different but similar lifestyle. The case received the attention of the national press, and it bemused Spade profusely because he found Flitcraft, who had settled into a groove not unlike that which he escaped even though he didn't quite understand the random nature of it all, nor did he understand that he re-ordered his life into essentially the same order from which he had earlier escaped.

Spade met Miles Archer when he was working on an insurance case for the recovery of stolen gold coins on an Australian ship the *James Wright* that sailed to San Francisco with the precious cargo missing that appeared to be lost at sea. Spade was

working for The Continental Insurance Agency insurance company, and Archer was in the employ of the San Francisco Police as a detective under the respected Lieutenant Dundy. Initially Spade and Archer had quite a bit in common, went to prize fights, and enjoyed the company of women. Archer was married and Spade a resolute bachelor. Archer's career was going nowhere as he was junior to other detectives that included Detective Sergeant Tom Polhaus who was in line for a promotion. Archer decided to throw in with Spade around 1927 and they opened an office in downtown San Francisco, bought some used furniture and hired a quick witted office assistant named Effie who attended Munson's Business School where she had a year of secretarial training. Effie lived with her aged mother in the Avenues near Golden Gate Park and was a perfect fit for the office.

In 1928 the office of Spade and Archer as it was now known got a big break when a dame named Brigid O'Shaughnessy walked into the agency to hire their services on a McGuffin, or red herring that lead to their involvement in a case that had international repercussions and unfortunately drew Miles to his death because he let his guard down with the nefarious yet beautiful Miss O'Shaughnessy who took many a man down the same primrose path. Initially Spade had no interest in the case and was preoccupied with his rendezvous latter that evening with Mrs. Archer to talk about her planned separation from her husband Miles. Spade was also contemplating a termination of the partnership arrangement with Miles that was approaching its one-year trial; he was planning to go his separate way, with or without Mrs. Archer by his side.

Spade's plans turned on an event in December in 1928 on a damp and foggy San Francisco night when he took a call at five minutes past two in the morning that informed him his partner Miles was gunned down.

The events of that night put into motion a dizzying set of circumstances that led Spade back to Miss O'Shaughnessy and a couple of charters she threw in with. The characters had some strange names such as The Fat Man, Levantine, and Gunsel and an even stranger interest in an ornament that was a black bird that was called The Maltese Falcon that came out of the medieval ages in the era of the Crusades.

Spade's interest was to solve the murder of his partner partly because he became a suspect and partly because of the code he carries around about being a detective and squaring things, especially since Miles was his partner. Spade didn't count on a couple of things, especially when Miss O'Shaughnessy turned up her irresistible charm, and backed that up with exquisite feminine features that proved an impossible burden for Spade to resist. He fell like Adam in the Garden of Eden; it was a graceful if predictable fall from grace. Spade also got the squeeze from Iva Archer who expected to marry him, especially with Miles untidily out of the way. Iva and Brigid each thought she had Spade right where she wanted him.

The murder of Miles got solved, Spade cleared his name, and this *dingus* that everyone was steamed up about turned out to be a fake. Spade had no special belief in The Falcon; he just played along and let greed set in so the others could betray themselves. This included the nefarious yet beautiful Miss O'Shaughnessy who Spade sent over for the murder of his partner Miles Archer. She was quite angry at the outcome and counted on Spade letting her go, especially since they spent some steamy nights together.

Spade worked a few more cases after he cracked *The Falcon*, and ran the agency with him and Effie. One day he tired of it all and pulled a *Flitcraft*. Spade took off with Effie to somewhere north of the boarder. Effie became a playwright and forwarded her work via the mail to Detective Sergeant Polhaus who became her literary agent after he retired from the San Francisco police department. Spade tried his hand at writing, but pretty much let Effie handle the writing chores, though he was not above taking the credit for her brilliant plays. Effie's family left her a pile of dough, and Spade turned to handling her finances and cracking a case here and there when the mood suited him.

The End

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