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Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media, Volume 49, Number 1, Spring  
2008, pp. 7-26 (Article)

Published by Wayne State University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/frm.0.0008>



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# The Three Sam Spades

## The Shifting Model of American Masculinity in the Three Films of *The Maltese Falcon*

Philippa Gates

Dashiell Hammett's 1930 novel *The Maltese Falcon*—starring the quintessential hard-boiled private detective, Sam Spade—was adapted for the screen not once, but three times: *The Maltese Falcon* (also known as *Dangerous Female*) directed by Roy Del Ruth (US, 1931); *Satan Met a Lady* directed by William Dieterle (US, 1936); and *The Maltese Falcon* directed by John Huston (US, 1941).<sup>1</sup> It is the last of these films, according to critics, that follows the novel most closely and is the version Hammett liked best, although he had no direct involvement with the production of any of the three films.<sup>2</sup> And it is the last of these films that is remembered best, in part due to Humphrey Bogart's iconic performance as the tough Sam Spade. The novel's adaptation to the screen twice in the 1930s, however, attests to the dominance and popularity of a different kind of detective-hero during the Depression. While Bogart's Spade, as the epitome of the hard-boiled detective, would become a model of American masculinity during World War II, Ricardo Cortez and Warren William's "Spades" in 1931 and 1936, respectively, embodied different traits—ones more in keeping with what we now regard as belonging to an English tradition of heroism and the American tradition of villainy.<sup>3</sup> The Spades of the Depression were more suave, cultured, self-serving, and more like the villains than the tough, working-class detective who would come to symbolize American manhood in the 1940s, and it is this shift in ideals of national masculinity that an analysis of the three film versions of Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* reveals.

*Framework* 49, No. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 7–26.

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Most critics and scholars have focused on Huston's film, and few even acknowledge that there was more than one film made of the story. As Joan McGettigan argues, there have been few serious scholarly attempts to look at all three films and, those that do, tend mainly to examine plot differences and evaluate the fidelity of the three films to the novel.<sup>4</sup> While these discussions do address aspects of narrative and/or film style, they do not explore the context of the three films and, more specifically, the differences in their representation of heroic (and villainous) masculinity and the shifting cultural ideals that those differences signify. Therefore, in this paper, I will explore how, despite their superficial similarities and their common source, the three film versions of *The Maltese Falcon* differ in terms of theme and representation regarding the masculinity of the hero and how these differences can be related back to the social, economic, and industrial factors of the time. These differences include a shift in the representation of the hero from a bourgeois gentleman/cad to a working-class tough guy; of the villains to highlight issues of national identity during World War II with an increased emphasis on their foreignness; and from offering a hero with questionable morals and motivations to one with clearer allegiances to social mores and the law. The traits that defined the Depression-era detective-hero in *Dangerous Female* and *Satan Met a Lady* were those associated with caddish and villainous behavior and, in Huston's 1941 *Maltese Falcon*, they were realigned with Spade's enemies rather than with Spade himself. Contemporary film audiences, and often critics, seem to regard classical Hollywood film as, thematically, a relatively homogenous body of work because of the assembly line system of production and the system of self-censorship (the Production Code) that governed content; however, cultural associations with certain types of representation altered over time and generic conventions and audience expectations were not uniform during the classical era—even across a single decade like the 1930s. From the depths of the Depression to the dawn of America's entry into World War II, the three film versions of *The Maltese Falcon* offer different heroes for different times.

### *Adapting the Falcon*

Hammett biographer Richard Layman notes that *Dangerous Female* was well received upon its release in 1931.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, a *New York Times* reviewer judged the film to be a "faithful" rendition of the original story.<sup>6</sup> The film was released a year after Hammett's novel was published and is firmly aligned with the source text: the credit sequence and the last shot of the film both display an image of Hammett's novel in the background. *Satan Met a Lady*, on the other hand, was described in a Warner Bros. memo as "a free adaptation" and makes no reference to *The Maltese Falcon*.<sup>7</sup> Instead, its credits foreground that the screenplay was penned by Brown Holmes, who also wrote the screenplay for *Dangerous Female*, and it is only in smaller print that it is noted

that the film is “Based on a novel by Dashiell Hammett.” It is only in retrospect with film noir’s redefinition of the Hollywood detective as hard-boiled and Bogart’s Spade overshadowing the ones that came before, that the earlier film versions of the story perhaps seem lacking or forgettable.<sup>8</sup> As Michael B. Drexman states, “Unfortunately, it’s difficult for one who has become familiar with Huston’s masterpiece to view [the 1931] effort with any degree of objectivity.”<sup>9</sup> The 1930s’ film versions of the story have seen their histories rewritten and successes ignored in the shadow of the predominance of the 1941 film, but Huston’s film was informed by the first two versions.

These three films should be regarded less as adaptations of Hammett’s novel and more as cultural products of a different time. Certainly, Huston’s 1941 film can be regarded as much a remake of the previous films as an adaptation of Hammett’s novel. As William K. Everson notes,

What is really remarkable is the fidelity with which Huston’s version follows the original, even allowing for the fact that both versions are faithful to the novel and thus must be faithful to each other. But in the choice of angle, and in the selection of dialogue, even in the opening dissolve from the credits into Spade’s office, both versions are virtually identical. The one element missing—the more gradual introduction of Wilmer, Spade spotting him in the hotel lobby, accompanying him to Gutman and disarming him first—*was* shot, exactly as in the Huston version (extant stills bear this out) and was presumably cut just to shorten the film.<sup>10</sup>

Huston’s screenplay and film did not go back to the source and retrieve material that was excised in the previous versions; in fact, he borrowed tropes from the 1931 and 1936 films that are not present in the novel—including specific shots and scenes that critics have regarded as significant, especially in establishing a visual style for film noir.<sup>11</sup> The cinematography with the contrast between light and shadow and use of low angles, the setting in the seedy underworld, and the characters with ambiguous morality are present in *Dangerous Female*. Even the jarring subjective close-ups that Huston is noted for using effectively for dramatic moments—for example, when Cairo pulls a gun on Spade in his office, when Spade realizes that Gutman has drugged him, and when Wilmer realizes that he is being made the fall guy—are used in the 1931 film. Similarly, the iconic image associated with Huston’s *Maltese Falcon* of “Spade and Archer” projected in shadow on the office floor from the writing on the window mirrors the same scene in *Satan Met a Lady* in which the “Ames Detective Agency” on the window is projected in shadow on the office wall behind the two detectives. This, of course, may have been the idea of Arthur Edeson who was the cinematographer for both films.

Discussions of film adaptations, until recently, have often centered on the debate of fidelity: namely, that a film should be faithful to the source text and/or that the best adaptations are those that are closest to the original source. Theorists such as Dudley Andrew, Linda Hutcheon, and Robert Stam

attempt to leave the fidelity debate behind and employ a model of analysis that is less judgmental (since fidelity implies a moral transgression) and consider, instead, the “transformation,” using Andrew’s term, of the story in a different medium.<sup>12</sup> As Stam suggests,

the mediocrity of some adaptations, and the partial persuasiveness of “fidelity,” should not lead us to endorse fidelity as a methodological principle. Indeed it is questionable whether strict fidelity is even *possible*. An adaptation is *automatically* different and original due to the change of medium.<sup>13</sup>

Instead Stam focuses on the notion of “intertextuality,” inviting an examination of “the endless permutation of textual traces rather than the ‘fidelity’ of a later text to an earlier one.”<sup>14</sup> The term was originally employed by Julia Kristeva and is rooted in Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism—that a text carries on a dialogue with the texts that preceded it and that original text is as much informed by the later one as *vice versa*. Likewise, I am not interested in investigating the closeness of any of the three films to Hammett’s novel, as critics have already analyzed the films in this respect, but in the conversation between the four texts, and that is why I refer to each film as a “version” of the story rather than as an adaptation of an original. As Hutcheon suggests, “to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be original or authoritative.”<sup>15</sup> Certainly, the history of *The Maltese Falcon* has borne this out as it is Huston’s—i.e., the last version of the story—that has trumped all of the previous versions (including the original source text). Indeed, how many fans of *The Maltese Falcon* remember Gutman’s daughter, Spade’s lawyer, or the fact that Wilmer is Cairo’s lover and not Gutman’s . . .

### *Classy/less Heroes*

The street-smart, working-class, tough guy of film noir—exemplified by Bogart’s Spade—may have become a model of American masculinity but he was not the hero that defined the popular detective stories, novels, and films of the 1930s. The Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the Depression that followed brought with them a sense of disillusionment, and Hollywood’s response was not an investigation of the impact of the socio-economic crisis on American masculinity, but rather its disavowal. The protagonists of classical Hollywood’s detective films were not hard-boiled, cynical, or defeated working-class private “dicks” but more suave, charming, “soft-boiled” gentlemen—even those in films based on hard-boiled stories. The term “hard-boiled” was supposedly coined because you could read one of these stories in the time it took to hard-boil an egg; however, the popular conception—at least these days—is that the term refers to the fact that the hero is as tough as the egg.<sup>16</sup> I refer to the Depression-era detective as “soft-boiled” because he was somewhat hardened by his experience of the big city—i.e., urban America as

a pot of boiling water rather than necessarily a melting pot—but he managed to retain his optimism and thrive in this world where his cynical film noir successor would struggle to survive. These soft-boiled detectives were played by stars who were English (e.g., George Sanders as *The Saint* and *The Falcon*), identifiable by their accent and polished appearance, or by Americans who “passed” as English (e.g., William Powell as Philo Vance and Nick Charles) because of their sophisticated dress and manner. Being an Englishman or an upper-class American were indistinguishable in Hollywood film, and this conflation was exacerbated by the Depression, when living well was regarded as the privilege of the few, and unemployment, displacement, and loss of respect was the plight of the many. For audiences affected by the Depression, the debonair detective afforded a glimpse of an Art Deco life of luxury and an escape from the harsh realities of living in the 1930s.

What Robert Parish and Don Stanke describe as the Hollywood “Debonair,” Drew Todd calls the “Art Deco dandy”: he was slim, well-dressed, witty, suave, and could handle the new woman of the modern age.<sup>17</sup> Todd notes that while the dandy of previous centuries carried homosexual overtones, that of the twentieth century used his somewhat feminized masculinity to charm women. The Deco dandy is a liminal figure: he is not European nor is he an average American Joe; he is not an aristocrat nor is he of the working class; he is not effeminate but nor is he the all-American tough guy. Similarly, the American soft-boiled detective rarely belongs to the aristocracy but achieves its lifestyle with money that he has earned through his professional skills as a detective (whether a private eye or lawyer). He is able to mix easily amongst the upper class as part of his case—due to his good manners, intelligent conversation, and immaculate appearance—however, he is more likely to make fun of the upper class than desire to be one of them. Despite his evocation of Englishness as debonair, the soft-boiled detective is a decidedly American hero as one who is socially mobile *without* requiring the necessary breeding, education, and connections to facilitate that upward mobility. In the decade when the American Dream had turned into a nightmare, the Depression-era soft-boiled detective—like the gangster—represented living the good life. And, not unlike the gangster, the soft-boiled detective embodied associations of law benders (if not breakers) because of the stars who played them.

### ***From Ladies’ Man to Man’s Man***

Ricardo Cortez was born Jacob Krantz in Austria and was renamed and refashioned by Hollywood because of his Latin-lover looks and his studio’s hopes to rival Rudolph Valentino during the silent era. In *Dangerous Female*, Cortez played Spade as more of a ladies’ man than a man’s man because he had a history of playing cads, lovers, and shyster lawyers and also went on to play other detectives in the 1930s, including Perry Mason (after Warren William abandoned the role). Similarly, William began his career playing the

cad, the shyster lawyer, and then the detective, including Philo Vance, Perry Mason, and the Lone Wolf. *Satan Met a Lady* was sold to audiences, not as an adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon*, but on its similarities to another adaptation of a Hammett novel—*The Thin Man* (W. S. Van Dyke, US, 1934). Like the popular films starring William Powell and Myrna Loy, so too did *Satan Met a Lady* promise a mystery to be solved with a romantic couple, witty banter, and more laughs than murders. As a poster for the film suggests, “No one can mix mirth, murder and mystery like the author of *The Thin Man*! And here he is . . . at the top of his form . . . in a riotous round after round of roaring guns and laughter!”<sup>18</sup> The film was intended as a star vehicle for Bette Davis and, thus, the film places an equal emphasis on the role of the *femme fatale*; however, the casting of Warren William as the detective also had an impact on the kind of story told because of his history, like Powell’s, of playing caddish and debonair villains and then heroes.

It is these associations with the English tradition of cad, lover, and sleuth that make the 1930s’ Spades markedly different from Bogart’s iconic hero. Both Cortez and William play Spade as a hero who transgresses social, and sometimes, legal laws as womanizers and self-serving men who want to get ahead; indeed, their motivations for getting involved in the hunt for the treasure (the falcon statuette or Roland’s horn, in the case of *Satan Met a Lady*) are dubious. That does not mean, however, that Cortez’s and William’s Spades are identical performances. Indeed, the Pre-Code hero is more cynical and lascivious than his more comic Code-Era counterpart.<sup>19</sup> In fact, according to some critics, the 1936 remake was the result of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA)<sup>20</sup>—the enforcers of the Production Code—denying Warner Bros. approval to re-release the 1931 film because of the films overt references to, and depictions of, sexuality. *Satan Met a Lady* then was a lighter comedy produced to capitalize on the popularity of the first film and the fact that Warner Bros. owned the rights to the Hammett story.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, William’s hero—here Ted Shayne rather than Sam Spade—greeted danger with a grin rather than a gun. As Richard T. Jameson suggests, “Perhaps no one better exemplified the *laissez-faire* morality of the period than Warren William.”<sup>22</sup>

What distinguishes *Dangerous Female* most from the other two films is the highlighting of Cortez’s Spade as a ladies’ man. The film offers evidence of sexual encounters between the hero and his partner’s wife, Iva (Thelma Todd) and spending the night with his client, Ruth Wonderly (Bebe Daniels). When, at the sight of Ruth in Spade’s apartment, Iva exclaims, “Who’s that dame wearing my kimona?” she confirms that she too has spent time undressed in Spade’s apartment.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the first several scenes of the film establish Spade as more concerned with investigating female sexuality than crime. The film opens with a shot of Spade embracing a woman in his office (shown in silhouette only) followed by a shot of the woman’s legs as she straightens her stockings before leaving. Immediately following the depar-

Before he was a man's man in the 1940s, Spade (Ricardo Cortez) was a ladies' man in Del Ruth's 1931 *The Maltese Falcon* (aka *Dangerous Female*). Ruth Wonderly (Bebe Daniels) spends the night in Spade's apartment. *Courtesy of Photofest.*



Like William Powell, Warren William had a history of playing villains. William as 'Spade' (here Shayne) in Dieterle's *Satan Met a Lady* (1936) was an attempt to repeat the success of Powell's role in another Hammett adaptation, *The Thin Man* (1934). *Courtesy of Photofest.*



ture of the unknown lover, Spade asks his secretary, Effie (Una Merkel), if he has “any more important engagements for this afternoon.” She replies, “Not that I know of,” as he kisses the back of her neck. As she walks away, Spade looks her up and down in an appreciative manner and exclaims, “Yes, sir!” He then returns to his private office to straighten up: cushions are scattered on the floor and the picture above the couch hangs crookedly—no doubt the result of recent lovemaking. In the next scene, Effie informs him that he has a potential client—a Miss Wonderly. Effie knows Spade all too well and explains, “You’ll see her anyway. She’s a knockout!” Spade shows his interest in Ruth and his lack thereof for Iva who calls him on the phone during his interview with Ruth. Within only a few minutes of the start of the film, Spade is firmly established as a man who pursues all attractive women: he consorts with one lover in his office (the unidentified woman), then flirts with his secretary who has most likely been a lover of his (Effie), and begins work on a new conquest (Ruth) while attempting to sever relations over the phone with another (Iva).

The first “Working Principle” of the Production Code states, “No picture should lower the moral standards of those who see it. This is done: a) When evil is made to appear *attractive*, and good is made to appear *unattractive*, b) When the *sympathy* of the audience is thrown on the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil, sin.”<sup>24</sup> According to the Code, adultery cannot be glamorized and must be punished. So while a sexual relationship between Iva and the hero is confirmed in *Dangerous Female*, it is only implied—and the adulterous element eliminated—in *Satan Met a Lady* because Shayne’s relationship with Astrid



(Winifred Shaw) predates her marriage to his partner, Ames (Porter Hall). Shayne is as attracted to the ladies as Cortez's Spade, and he pursues the *femme fatale*, Valerie (Bette Davis), before running off with his secretary, here called Murgatroyd (Marie Wilson); however, the film does not confirm sexual liaisons with either conquest. While it is true that the explicit demonstration of Spade's sexual proclivities of *Dangerous Female* would not be allowed under the Code, Huston's film does still imply the adulterous nature of Spade's relationship with Iva. By 1941, it is less important whether or not the hero has a "weakness" for women (for that is assumed in all three films) but that his penchant for women is regarded as a weakness. While the Code can be seen as responsible for the reduction in frequency and explicitness of Spade's love affairs, it cannot account for the more important thematic shift from seeing womanizing as part of Spade's charm, to an amusing joke, to a potentially fatal flaw. Rather than the Code, it would seem to be the war that saw the redefinition of the independent and sexual woman from a reality of the Depression in the 1930s to the downfall of masculinity in the 1940s. Certainly, Spade's adulterous desire for Iva (Gladys George) seems to plague him rather than bring him pleasure; Archer's (Jerome Cowan) desire for Brigid (Mary Astor) leads him to an untimely death; and Spade's desire for Brigid will undoubtedly lead to his incarceration or blackmail—or death. As William Luhr suggests, Bogart's

Spade does not happily juggle a plethora of women but is bitterly involved with only two—his partner's wife, whom he has grown to loathe, and Brigid O'Shaughnessy, whom he knows to be duplicitous and deadly. For him, sexuality is not carefree but dangerous and guilt-ridden.<sup>25</sup>

In the Code-era films, the heroes are more wary of Valerie and Brigid as *femmes fatales*: Brigid because she might bring about Spade's demise through death and Valerie because she wants to bring about the demise of Shayne's desire for "an awful lot of fun" through marriage. On the other hand, Ruth, in *Dangerous Female*, seems to represent a departure for Cortez's Spade rather than his demise: one cannot help but feel that Ruth might actually be Spade's equal and match if only she did not have to go to prison for murdering his partner. After all, we can assume that Spade has known of her guilt since the beginning. At the end of the film, it is revealed that the man in Chinatown told Spade that he saw Archer's murderer; why then does Spade engage in a relationship with Ruth? Consorting with Archer's murderer does not seem to trouble Spade; deciding whether to give her up to the police does. When he visits her in prison and tells her that he will wait for her to get out, one is tempted to believe him (he will undoubtedly entertain himself with other women in the meantime). As Everson suggests, with the Code not being enforced in 1931 and Hammett's novel not yet an iconographic text, the screenwriter and/or director could easily have concocted a happy ending

without arousing anyone's ire.<sup>26</sup> Maude Fulton (the screenwriter) and/or Del Ruth (the director) must have desired a hero that, despite his questionable motives and seeming self-serving nature, makes a sacrifice in order to see justice served—and, in this sense, all three films are similar. However, unlike Bogart's wartime Spade who is embittered by his involvement with women, Cortez and William's Depression-era Spades are allowed to enjoy their relations with many different women and do so without guilt or consequence.

The key question for the hero may be the motivation of the *femme fatale*; for the viewer, on the other hand, it is that of the hero. Is the detective involved in the hunt for the falcon for the money or to discover who is responsible for the death of his partner? In *Satan Met a Lady*, the answer is more obvious. Madame Barabbas (Alison Skipworth), the gang's leader, worries she cannot compete with Valerie and her youthful sexual appeal to win Shayne's loyalty. However, as Shayne suggests, "She hasn't got me anyway. You've got me. The only way that's possible to get me"—he means with money. Huston's film makes the most obvious attempt to have a hero driven by a desire for the truth and justice more than personal greed. Brigid accuses Spade of being motivated by money and suggests that if the falcon had been genuine and Spade had received his share of the bird's value then he would not give her up to the police. The viewer wonders this also, but Spade insists that he was always on the up-and-up: "Don't be too sure I'm as crooked as I'm supposed to be. That sort of reputation might be good business bringing high price jobs and making it easier to deal with the enemy." Indeed, Spade proves his loyalty to the law by handing Brigid over to the police. Unlike his predecessors, Bogart's Spade is interested in bringing his partner's murderer to justice—not necessarily because he cared for his partner but because he feels obligated to. As he explains to Brigid: "When a man's partner's killed, he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it." Like Cortez's, Bogart's Spade does fall in love with the *femme fatale*. Despite this and *because of it*, he tells her that he will not let her off the hook for Archer's murder, even though "all of [him] wants to, regardless of consequences." Instead, he chooses to stand by his partner in death—even if he did not in life—and sacrifice his personal happiness to see justice served. That a man's loyalty lies with his fellow man and not with his lover became a dominant message throughout Hollywood's wartime offerings and far from the glamorization of "every man for himself" that underpinned many Depression-era films.

### *Un-American Villains*

The hard-boiled detective story, created by American writers such as Hammett, had a greater emphasis on realism as a rebellion against the stylization of the classical detective story of British writers such as Sir Arthur Conan

Doyle. Similarly, film noir arose in a rebellion against the classical Hollywood mode of filmmaking and storytelling, with a darker look and critique of American society.<sup>27</sup> Unlike classical Hollywood films in general, which tended to take an optimistic view of American society, the noir detective film interrogated the myths that films like the classical detective films had propagated. Hollywood had largely avoided adapting hard-boiled fiction in the 1930s because of its vicarious treatment of sex and violence, which challenged the restrictions of the Production Code. Instead, Hollywood detective films focused on the exploits of a soft-boiled detective, toning down the implications of sexual relations and the level of violence, and often introducing an element of comedy. However, in the 1940s, beginning with Huston's *Maltese Falcon*, there were many adaptations of hard-boiled stories made in a hard-boiled mode as film noir. Frank Krutnik sees this shift as related to the popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis in American society: the psychoanalytic framework was used by filmmakers to circumvent some of the restrictions of the Code by "enabling a more elliptical and displaced mode of representation which could be 'decoded' by audiences familiar with the popularized psychoanalysis."<sup>28</sup> The rise of film noir, however, also coincided with a new need to Americanize the onscreen hero in a response to the changing international climate with America's entry into World War II. The traits associated with the soft-boiled hero—eloquence, elegance, egotism, and wealth—became firmly realigned with the villain as the war redefined the threat to American society as "other" and specifically European. It was not that charm and refinement came to be regarded as villainous by the 1940s, but that American heroes could no longer embody the traits that were aligned with "otherness." Ironically, the stars that played the hard-boiled detective-hero in the 1940s also had a history of playing villains; Edward G. Robinson and Bogart had played gangsters or "heavies" in the 1930s. While being rough, tough, and working-class was undervalued during the Depression, these were the traits that came to define American heroic masculinity in the 1940s.

Certainly, the villains of *The Maltese Falcon* undergo a noticeable transformation from 1931 to 1941 in an attempt to highlight Spade's more heroic qualities. The merry band of thieves (and, in some cases, murderers) include the leader of the gang (Gutman/Barabbas), the agent (Cairo/Travers), the "gunsel" (Wilmer/Kenneth), and the *femme fatale* (Ruth/Valerie/Brigid).<sup>29</sup> Evil, in all three films, is aligned with "otherness"—specifically class difference and "sex perversion" (the Code's term for homosexuality)—but in Huston's *Maltese Falcon* there is an increased emphasis on national identity. Film noir, according to Robert Corber, developed a distinctive iconography for depicting homosexual characters—an upper-class accent, effeminate mannerisms, and impeccable taste;<sup>30</sup> however, it would seem that the association of class with homosexuality and villainy was already established by the 1930s. In the 1931 film, Joel Cairo (Otto Matieson) is introduced to Spade (Cortez) by his

secretary as “a gorgeous new customer” and “a knockout!”—the same terms she used to describe the *femme fatale*—suggesting Cairo’s effeminacy. Spade also refers to the film’s gunsel—Wilmer (Dwight Frye)—as Gutman’s “boyfriend.” Made after the enforcement of the Code, *Satan Met a Lady* avoids censorship problems by eliminating suggestions of homosexuality altogether. Wilmer—here Kenneth (Maynard Holmes)—is far less threatening than in the other two films and is not presented as a homosexual, although still his boss’s lover, because of the alteration of the “Fat Man,” as he is referred to in Hammett’s novel, to a “Fat Woman.” Huston’s film does imply that Cairo and Wilmer are effeminate and/or homosexuals most likely because they are depicted as such in Hammett’s novel, but also because their “sex perversion” highlights Spade (Bogart) as a heterosexual man—i.e., hero. Cairo (Peter Lorre) is small, impeccably dressed, carries a silver-tipped umbrella and gardenia-scented business cards, and speaks with a foreign accent—all of which mark him, according to Hollywood convention—as a homosexual. Indeed, the characterization of Cairo as “a pansy” did not go unnoticed by Joseph Breen of the MPPDA who raised his objections in a letter to Jack Warner dated 27 May 1941.<sup>31</sup> Spade also calls Wilmer “a gunsel”—implying both a homosexual and a hired gun. The reason that Breen did not object to the term being employed, is that the original meaning (i.e., homosexual) was not common knowledge by the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> While homosexuality seems to have been regarded as a villainous trait in both the 1930s and 1940s, it is with the outbreak of World War II that villainy was redefined for American society as a specifically external and international threat.

In *Dangerous Female*, the gang leader, Gutman (Dudley Digges), is presented as an American, and the distinction made between him and Spade is based on class—not nationality. Gutman sports a stock with gold pin, a monocle, a flower in his buttonhole, and a pocket square while he consumes fine liquor and cigars and cools himself with a ladies’ fan. Gutman calls attention to the difference between them specifically through their choice of diction. As Dennis Broe notes,

The private detective was not directly of the working class (he does not punch a clock, has his own office and business, and works for multiple clients). Yet, he has multiple affinities in the directness of his language, especially when speaking to wealth and power.<sup>33</sup>

While Gutman refers to “the immense” and “immeasurable” wealth of the Order of St. John of Malta, Spade suggests that they were “pretty well-fixed” and that the Holy War was “a great racket!” It is in this sense that Spade is indeterminate in terms of class: his diction suggests a working-class past while his taste for finery suggests he has attained a comfortably bourgeois lifestyle (although not one purely of leisure since he still works for a living).

In *Satan Met a Lady*, Madame Barabbas is presented as sexually “perverse” (although not homosexual) because of her implied inappropriate relationship with her nephew, Kenneth. Barabbas (the equivalent of Gutman) and Travers (that of Cairo) are both presented as English; however, because both characters are so easily tricked and their threat neutralized by the hero, their being foreign appears less significant as a threat to American masculinity as it would be in Huston’s film—especially as neither represents the double threat of being foreign *and* homosexual. Rather than being humiliated by the villains as Bogart’s Spade is when Gutman drugs him and Wilmer kicks him in the face, Shayne refrains from drinking what he is offered by Madame Barabbas for the same reason she does not smoke the cigarette he gives her: both know that each is drugged. Although Shayne refers to Barabbas as “one of the really fine masters” and that her face “haunts” the many detectives who have failed to catch her, he is not in the least intimidated by her and humiliates her in their final showdown by taunting her with the treasure that is in his possession. Similarly, Travers (Arthur Treacher) apologizes to Shayne for making a mess of his apartment when he searched it. Shayne replies that he completely understands why the thief would attempt to retrieve the treasured item without having to part with money for its recovery: “That’s natural and, from your point of view, sensible.” Shayne then coerces Travers into revealing valuable information regarding the treasure. When he realizes he has been manipulated, Travers is upset at Shayne for not playing by the rules (suggesting that there is honor among thieves). As he explains, “You just inveigled me into telling you what it is. I say! That’s a pretty rotten trick, Old Boy. That’s not *cricket!*” In *Satan Met a Lady*, the foreign villain is not a real threat and is played merely for laughs.

In Huston’s film, Gutman (Sydney Greenstreet) is also differentiated from Spade by class: he is a well-dressed, well-spoken gentleman with a taste for the good life—as evinced by his fine clothes, apartment, and expansive waistline; however, this class distinction is linked specifically to national identity. In the Old World—at least according to Hollywood—the status that met with social approval was that into which one was born; in the New World, it was that which was earned. In the Depression’s *Dangerous Female*, Digges’s Gutman represents, as does Hollywood’s gangster, the self-made man who achieved the American Dream in seemingly impossible circumstances and is, thus, somewhat admirable. In the wartime *Maltese Falcon*, Greenstreet’s Gutman represents Old World corruption and greed and is, thus, contemptible. And, because the 1940s also aligned the foreign and aristocratic with other “indulgences,” Huston’s Gutman is also presented as a homosexual with Wilmer as *his* lover, not Cairo’s as in Hammett’s novel.

The need to regard all “otherness” as evil, as the 1941 film suggests, does not seem so essential in 1931. In *Dangerous Female*, like the book, Spade’s partner, Archer, is killed in Chinatown (a fact not highlighted in either Dieterle’s or Huston’s films). After talking to the police and upon leaving the scene of

Archer's murder, Spade is stopped by a Chinese man who speaks to him—but not in English. The remarkable thing is that Spade not only understands what is said but also replies in Chinese before walking away. What is said is not revealed to the audience until the end of the film when a front page story in the newspaper states,

Samuel Spade, private detective, caused a sensation at the trial when he produced Lee Fu Gow, Chinese merchant, the only eyewitness to the Archer killing, who positively identified Miss Wonderly as the murderess.

That Spade speaks Chinese is surprising, especially in the retrospective shadow of Huston's film that so firmly defines foreignness in opposition to American heroism; however, in the Depression-era film, knowledge of the "other" proves to be key to the hero's success.

### *Depressing Morality*

The one aspect in which all three films deviate markedly from Hammett's original story, is the omission of the story of Flitcraft, which Spade tells to Brigid as they await Cairo at his apartment. Critics have argued that the story functions as a parable—a way for Spade to express to Brigid his take on life. When he worked for a large detective agency in Seattle, Spade was hired to find a man, Flitcraft, who had been missing for a couple of years and who had left behind a wife, children, and a successful business. Spade tracks him down and hears the story of how, on the fateful day that he disappeared, Flitcraft walked past a building site on his way to lunch and a steel beam fell, only just missing him. As Hammett writes,

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 [ . . . ] 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 at haphazard like that, and lived only while blind chance spared them.<sup>34</sup>

The story of Flitcraft is one suited to the disillusionment of the Depression as it suggests that there is an arbitrary relationship between goodness and reward: hard work and good living did not guarantee a man happiness, success, or longevity. While Spade regards Flitcraft's actions as perfectly reasonable considering his brush with death, neither Flitcraft's first wife nor Brigid do. John T. Irwin suggests that Flitcraft's story provides Spade with a rationale wherein to do, as Brigid calls them, "such wild and unpredictable

things” but that Spade, himself, regards them as “reasonable.”<sup>35</sup> Flitcraft, however, does not remain wild or unpredictable. As Irwin notes, after wandering for a couple of years, Flitcraft returns to a “new” life that is almost a carbon copy of his original one: he sells cars instead of real estate, in Spokane instead of Seattle, with one child instead of two, and still manages to get away from the office by four to play golf.

Critics have lamented the absence of the Flitcraft story from Huston’s film. Robert Porfirio argues that it is “the film’s one unfortunate omission [. . .] this is our only chance to peep into Spade’s interior life,” and Steven Marcus seems to think it disservice to Hammett for Huston to ignore “the most important or central moment in the entire novel.”<sup>36</sup> So why is the Flitcraft story omitted from all three film versions of *The Maltese Falcon*? The most likely answer is that it is due to the constraints of time and the difficulty in presenting this story to the audience in an interesting way and one that does not confuse them further than the convoluted mystery already has. I would also argue, however, that it depends on one’s reading of the Flitcraft story. If one reads it as existential tale, as Irwin suggests that most critics have done, then it is not in keeping with Hollywood’s mores of the time. Despite offering a hero who resists paternal authority and a narrative that presents a critique of wartime (and later postwar) America, few noir films offered an outright rejection of dominant social values (even if it was only through somewhat tacked on “happy” endings). In Code-era Hollywood, there is little room for a hero that believes there is no value in following the path of good and right. Bogart’s Spade may be “wild and unpredictable” to Brigid, Gutman, and even the police but his seemingly random actions are part of a plan to lead him to the truth—at least that is what Spade would have us believe. Spade does avoid *his* falling beam—Brigid—and chooses to side with the law in the end: his reward is to evade punishment for any of his social, legal, or sexual transgressions. And it is Spade’s growth as a protagonist that is, perhaps, the greatest deviation in tone and theme from Hammett’s novel.

In Hammett’s novel, it would seem that Spade learned nothing from Flitcraft’s story. Like Flitcraft, he may have avoided his falling beam and lived unpredictably for a short while but, in the end, Spade, like Flitcraft, falls back into the same old life. Rather than ending with Brigid’s being taken away as all three films do, the novel offers one more scene in which Spade returns to the office. Effie is upset with Spade: “You did that, Sam, to her?” Effie cannot believe that Spade would betray Brigid, and one has the sense that Spade questions his decision too. When Effie informs him that “Iva is here,” and he replies, “Well, send her in,” Spade returns to his familiar life pattern and relationships.<sup>37</sup> As Ilsa J. Bick suggests, Hammett’s story—like Flitcraft’s—is about the circularity, or “compulsive repetition,” of living life: the villains want to continue to chase the falcon, and Spade ends up where he started.<sup>38</sup> In keeping with hard-boiled fiction’s drive toward realism, Hammett seems more critical of human nature and his hero than Hollywood; the ending of his *Mal-*

*tese Falcon* would suggest that people do not ever really change, whereas Hollywood—even in film noir—assures us heroes do . . . and for the better.

### ***All's Well That Ends Well***

Cortez's Spade was sexualized and smart and William's Shayne was charming and amusing, but it is only with Bogart's Spade that Hammett's hero comes to the screen as truly hard-boiled. Despite being the film noir of the three films and, thus supposedly, the potentially most subversive, Huston's *Maltese Falcon* is the most conservative with a hero that is, in the end, morally realigned with social expectation and the law. While the soft-boiled detective could flirt with women and the law with no punishment for his transgressions, the hard-boiled detective had to firmly reject the seductions of women and the criminal world in order to survive wartime's seedy, urban America—at least on the big screen. *Satan Met a Lady* ends with Shayne watching the police take Valerie away; he admits that he is "crazy about" her but "just won't be the fourth guy to die for [her]." His only potential punishment, at least according to Valerie, is that one day a smart woman will trap him into marrying her.<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, however, he leaves with his featherbrained secretary with whom he plans only to "have an awful lot of fun." *Dangerous Female* concludes with Cortez's Spade not only going unpunished for his criminal and moral misdemeanors but also advanced professionally: he is promoted to Chief Investigator for the District Attorney's office. It is not that Spade necessarily wants to see justice served but that the D.A.'s office means more success, money, and power. In film noir, there is a critique of faith in institutions like the D.A.'s office, and it would have been more likely that Bogart's Spade would have left a law enforcement agency to strike out on his own rather than give up his independence as a self-made man to work for "the man." Indeed, in Hammett's story, Spade worked for a large detective agency in Seattle before joining Archer in business in San Francisco. Like the western hero, the hard-boiled detective—as his twentieth-century incarnation—must be unfettered by the rules and regulations that tie the hands of official law enforcers and make them impotent in the face of the evil that threatens to overrun urban America. During the Depression, however, the hero takes whatever breaks come his way and does not have to worry about the moral or legal consequences.

Depression-era Hollywood films offered audiences humor, nostalgia, and escape with a window onto the lost highlife of the Roaring Twenties. Cortez's Spade enjoys life to the fullest in bleak times—including lounging about his art-deco apartment in a silk robe and having sexual relations with as many beautiful women as possible. Certainly the Production Code brought an end to showing *that* kind of behavior but, in a different way, *Satan Met a Lady* offered a similar kind of escape through a light-hearted and comic take on Hammett's hard-boiled story. However, by the time America joined the



war, film noir, beginning with Huston's *Maltese Falcon*, offered a darker image of urban life—one in which the hero had to be independent, tough, and street-wise to outwit the villains and escape the web spun by the *femme fatale*. For Bogart's Spade there is question of ethics—i.e., he should seek vengeance for his partner's murder—and cost—i.e., if he chooses love or money instead of seeing justice served. For Cortez and William's heroes, however, there is the joy of living fast and well and seemingly without consequence for social, legal, and sexual transgressions in the 1930s. Bogart's hard-boiled Spade may be the one that is remembered as an icon of wartime American masculinity, but Spade's soft-boiled incarnations during the Depression were just as representative of the ideals of masculinity of their time as Bogart's was of his. From debonair sleuth to streetwise dick, Hammett's Sam Spade is a model of American masculinity.

### *Acknowledgments*

The author gratefully acknowledges that financial support for this research was received from a grant partly funded by Wilfrid Laurier University operating funds and partly by the SSHRC Institutional Grant awarded to WLU. The author would also like to thank Jenny Romero at the Margaret Herrick Library and Heidi Rubenstein in Special Collections at Georgetown University for their assistance. Lastly, a thanks to Warner Bros. for making both *Dangerous Female* and *Satan Met a Lady* available to film fans as extras on the "3-Disc Special Edition" (2007) of Huston's *The Maltese Falcon*.

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### *Notes*

1. Initially the first version of the film was denied re-release in 1936 because of its transgression of the Production Code; however, restrictions were lifted from showing this film in the late 1960s and the film was retitled as *Dangerous Female* for U.S. television in order to avoid confusion with the better known 1941 version. For the purposes of this discussion, I will refer to the 1931 film by its TV title to avoid confusion.
2. In 1953, in a letter to his daughter, Josephine, Hammett wrote:  
Last week they ran the Humphrey Bogart version of the *Maltese Falcon* at the school and I sat through it again since I had promised to talk a little while afterwards. I liked it this time and wondered why I found it a little boring last time

till I remembered that I'd seen it then at the Warner Bros.' studio in Burbank after looking at the two previous versions—both horrible jobs—during a lawsuit and while Maggie [Kober] was dying over at Cedars of Lebanon hospital, so I guess I would have found practically anything tiresome to sit through.

Letter reproduced in Richard Layman, ed. *Discovering The Maltese Falcon and Sam Spade: The Evolution of Dashiell Hammett's Masterpiece, Including John Huston's Movie with Humphrey Bogart* (San Francisco: Vince Emery Productions, 2005), 270.

3. I refer to all three heroes as "Spade" even though in *Satan Met a Lady* Spade is transformed into Ted Shayne, just as all the characters undergo a name change.
4. Joan McGettigan, *Sam Spade in Hollywood: Character Interpretations in the Movies and in the Courts* (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1994), 7. The articles to which McGettigan refers include Jacques Segond in *Positif* 171/172 (1975) and reprinted in the Luhr collection, Marc Vernet in *MANA* 7 (1987), and Virginia Wright Wexman in *Library Quarterly* 45 (1975). There are also some articles in the Luhr and Layman edited volumes; however, other than McGettigan's dissertation, there have been few serious critical studies that look beyond the similarities in plot and scene choice.
5. Richard Layman, "There's Only One Maltese Falcon." *January Magazine*, February 2005, <http://januarymagazine.com/features/hammettlayman.html> (accessed January 29, 2007).
6. A.D.S., "Mystery Galore," review of *The Maltese Falcon* (Roy Del Ruth, US, 1931), *New York Times*, May 29, 1931.
7. The memo was from Walter McEwan to Roy Obringer dated December 5, 1935. Reproduced in Layman, *Discovering The Maltese Falcon and Sam Spade*, 286.
8. Of the three films, it is the 1936 film which is least respected by critics; however, as Jean-Loup Bourget notes, some of the elements regarded by critics as the most ridiculous of the film are actually from Hammett's original text and are merely absent from the other two adaptations, including having Effie/Murgatroyd's historian cousin/uncle verify the story of the treasured object. Indeed few critical analyses even mention the other two films, but when they do, it is usually in less than flattering terms (especially *Satan Met a Lady*). One of the few critics to appreciate both films is Bourget. In fact, while other critics argue the 1936 film was trying unsuccessfully to follow in the footsteps of *The Thin Man* series, Bourget argues that *Satan Met a Lady* is "superior" to the William Powell vehicle. Jean-Loup Bourget (as Jacques Segond), "On the Trail of Dashiell Hammett (The Three Versions of *The Maltese Falcon*)," in *The Maltese Falcon: John Huston, Director*, ed. William Luhr (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1996), 177–78.
9. Michael B. Drexman, *Make It Again, Sam* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1975), 115.
10. William K. Everson, "*The Maltese Falcon*," *Program Notes*, New School (March 2, 1973). Emphasis in the original.
11. In fact, according to Huston and writer Allen Rivkin, Huston merely handed Hammett's book to their secretary and told her to recopy the text but break it down into script format—i.e., scenes with shot descriptions. See Rudy Behlmer, "The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of," in *The Maltese Falcon: John Huston, Director*, ed. William Luhr (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1996), 112–23. This may, however, only be a popular myth. If it were true, then the material excised from the novel for the first film would have been reintroduced in this version, including the Flitcraft story, Gutman's daughter, and the fact that Cairo and Wilmer are

- lovers and not Gutman and Wilmer. The most glaring omission seems to be the Flitcraft story, which critics argue offers insight into Spade's world view, and the missing final scene from the book, which seems to refer back to the Flitcraft story.
12. Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," in *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*, ed. Tim Corrigan (New York: Prentice Hall, 1999), 262.
  13. Robert Stam, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 3–4. Emphasis in the original.
  14. *Ibid.*, 4.
  15. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xiii.
  16. Wendy Haslem, "Romance and Paranoia in *The Big Sleep* (1946)," *Australian Screen Education* 29 (Winter 2002): 164.
  17. James Robert Parish and Don E. Stanke, *The Debonairs* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1975); Drew Todd, "Decadent Heroes: Dandyism and Masculinity in Art Deco Hollywood," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 168–81. For a more in-depth discussion of the soft-boiled detective, see Philippa Gates, "Soft-boiled Heroes: Investigating Englishness in the Classical Hollywood Detective Film," in *Heroines and Heroes: Embodiment, Symbolism, Narratives & Identity*, ed. Chris Hart (Kingswinford, England: IISE and Midrash, forthcoming).
  18. This poster was included in the Warner Bros. press book for the film. Viewed at the Margaret Herrick Library (June 23, 2005).
  19. The Production Code was a system of self-censorship that had been introduced in 1930 but not fully enforced until 1934. Pre-Code refers to sound films made prior to the Code's strict enforcement in July 1934 and Code-era to those made after 1934.
  20. The MPPDA would later be renamed the Motion Picture Association of America, or the MPAA. The SRC (the Studio Relations Committee) was the department of the MPPDA responsible for implementing the Production Code; in 1934, the SRC was replaced by the PCA (the Production Code Administration), which was much stricter in enforcing the Code under the leadership of Joseph Breen.
  21. A reason for distancing *Satan Met a Lady* from Hammett's novel and Del Ruth's film, according to George Turner, was most likely due to an issue of rights ownership. While Warner Bros. owned the rights to the novel *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett retained the rights to the character of Sam Spade who also starred in three other Hammett short stories. Thus Hal B. Wallis decided that a new version of the story would be filmed but without Spade or any other Hammett characters. This issue related to copyright, however, may not be the whole reason behind the recasting of the story and characters into *Satan Met a Lady*, as Joan McGettigan's research suggests. In 1948 Warner Bros. filed suit against CBS radio for copyright infringement and unfair competition in the broadcast of the weekly series *The Adventures of Sam Spade*. In the course of the suit, Warners attempted to prove the close relationship between the character of Sam Spade and the story *The Maltese Falcon*, meaning that the studio's ownership of the rights to the novel implied the rights to the character. The Court's perspective was that since Warners had not complained about Hammett's use of the character in stories produced after the studio had acquired the rights to *The Maltese Falcon*, they were not justified in complaining when other parties also used the character.

- Turner seems to be the only critic to cite copyright issues as the reason for the changes with the 1936 film. After all, Warners was the one who filed suit against CBS radio and not Hammett against either CBS for the 1948 radio show or Warners for the 1941 film. Whatever the reason, however, Warners did distance the 1936 film from Hammett's novel (although not Hammett). See George Turner, "The *Maltese Falcon*: A Tale Thrice Filmed," *American Cinematographer* 78 (April 1997): 101–06.
22. Richard T. Jameson, "Life with TNT," *Film Comment* 25, no. 4 (July 1989): 35.
  23. Other scenes that would have not passed the censors a few years later, include Ruth naked in Spade's bathtub and strip-searched in his kitchen (although the search does take place off screen).
  24. Reproduced in Mark A. Vieira, *Sin in Soft Focus: Pre-Code Hollywood* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 214.
  25. William Luhr, "The *Maltese Falcon*, the Detective Genre, and *Film Noir*," in *The Maltese Falcon: John Huston, Director*, ed. William Luhr (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1996), 7.
  26. William K. Everson, *The Detective in Film: A Pictorial Treasury of the Screen Sleuth from 1903 to the Present* (Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 1980), 41.
  27. The classical Hollywood period is often referred to as the Studio Era. The period tends to be defined as beginning with the birth of the studio system in the 1910s or early '20s and concluding with the demise of the studio system in the late 1950s. Film noir is argued by most critics to be a film style or movement defined by darker themes, characters, and visual style beginning with Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* in 1941 and ending with Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* in 1958, with its heyday around 1944.
  28. Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1991), xii.
  29. In the novel and Huston's film, Ruth Wonderly tells Spade that her real name is Brigid O'Shaunessy.
  30. Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 10.
  31. Letter reproduced in Layman, *Discovering the Maltese Falcon and Sam Spade*, 292.
  32. For the etymology of "gunsel" see Hugh Rawson, *Wicked Words: A Treasury of Curses, Insults, Put-Downs, and Other Formerly Unprintable Terms from Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present* (Toronto: Crown Publishing, 1989), 184.
  33. Dennis Broe, "Class, Labor, and the Home-Front Detective: Hammett, Chandler, Woolrich, and the Dissident Lawman (and Woman) in 1940s Hollywood and Beyond," *Social Justice* 32, no. 2 (2005): 167–85.
  34. Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, 1930 (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 63–64.
  35. John T. Irwin, *Unless the Threat of Death Is behind Them: Hard-Boiled Fiction and Film Noir* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 5, 7.
  36. Robert G. Porfirio, "No Way Out: Existential Motifs in Film Noir," in *Perspectives on Film Noir*, ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 120; Steven Marcus, "Dashiell Hammett and the Continental Op," 1974, in *The Critical Response to Dashiell Hammett*, ed. Christopher Metress (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 194.
  37. Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, 216–17.

38. Ilsa J. Bick, "The Beam That Fell and Other Crises in *The Maltese Falcon*," in *The Maltese Falcon: John Huston, Director*, ed. William Luhr (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1996), 182.

39. Valerie calls after Shayne as the police take her away:

No, but for me you will go through something that'll be worse than death. Because you'll always remember me—the one woman you couldn't take for both love and money. The one woman who handed you double-cross for double-cross right up to the end. 'Cause now you've found a woman can be as smart as you are. Someday you'll find one who'll be smarter—she'll marry you!