

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
e20fic21.blogs.rutgers.edu

Prof. Andrew Goldstone (andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)
Office hours: Monday 2 p.m., or by appointment

March 25, 2021. Hammett (2).

review: transforming the genre

- ▶ whodunit? or who cares?
- ▶ from cognition to action
- ▶ conserved elements: sidekicks, clues, disguises...
- ▶ style: how it's done

“he adjusted himself to beams falling”

- ▶ What is Sam Spade like inside?

“he adjusted himself to beams falling”

▶ What is Sam Spade like inside?

His face while he smoked was, except for the occasional slight and aimless movement of his lower lip, so still and reflective that it seemed stupid, but when Cairo presently moaned and fluttered his eyelids Spade's face became bland, and he put the beginning of a friendly smile into his eyes and mouth. (48)

routines

routines

“You aren’t,” he asked as he sat down, “exactly the sort of person you pretend to be, are you?”

“That’s what I mean,” he said. You told me that this afternoon in the same words, same tone. It’s a speech you’ve practiced.” (55)

routines

“You aren’t,” he asked as he sat down, “exactly the sort of person you pretend to be, are you?”

“That’s what I mean,” he said. You told me that this afternoon in the same words, same tone. It’s a speech you’ve practiced.” (55)

“Now what can I do for you, Mr. Cairo?” The amiable negligence of his tone, his motion in the chair, were precisely as they had been when he had addressed the same question to Brigid O’Shaughnessy on the previous day. (43)

Post Street was empty when Spade issued into it. He walked east a block, crossed the street, walked west two blocks on the other side, recrossed it, and returned to his building without having seen anyone except two mechanics working on a car in a garage....

“He’s still there,” Spade said. (85)

laboring in the field

Hammett, "The Crime Wave," *New York Evening Post*, June 7 and July 5, 1930.

When you are knocked unconscious you do not feel the blow that does it. (915)

Chandler: detective story as art

Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder,” *Atlantic Monthly*, November, 1944.

Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons. (58)

The Maltese Falcon may or may not be a work of genius, but an art which is capable of it is not ‘by hypothesis’ incapable of anything. (58)

He [Hammett] had a literary style, but his audience didn’t know it, because it was in a language not supposed to be capable of such refinements. (58)

heroism?

But all this (and Hammett too) is for me not quite enough....

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. (59)

Discussion: moral code

- ▶ In what ways does Sam Spade meet or fail to meet the Chandler standard? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? How can you tell?

who can say?

“Mrs. Spade didn’t raise any children dippy enough to make guesses in front of a district attorney, an assistant district attorney, and a stenographer.” (145)

who can say?

“Mrs. Spade didn’t raise any children dippy enough to make guesses in front of a district attorney, an assistant district attorney, and a stenographer.” (145)

“When a man’s partner is killed he’s supposed to do something about it. It doesn’t make any difference what you thought of him.... Then it happens we were in the detective business. Well, when one of your organization gets killed it’s bad for business to let the killer get away. It’s bad all around—bad for that one organization, bad for every detective everywhere.” (213–14; qtd. by AH)

there's me

[Gutman:] “You could say, then, that the question is which one of them [Cairo or Brigid] you’ll represent?”

“You could put it that way.”

“It will be one or the other?”

“I didn’t say that.”

The fat man’s eyes glistened. His voice sank to a throaty whisper.
“Who else is there?”

Spade pointed his cigar at his own chest. “There’s me,” he said. (106)

- ▶ the following slides represent extra material not discussed in class

romance

“You didn’t—care at all? You didn’t—don’t—I-love me?”

“I think I do,” Spade said. “What of it?” The muscles holding his smile in place stood out like wales. “I’m not Thursby. I’m not Jacobi. I won’t play the sap for you.” (212)

“I won’t play the sap for you.”

She put her mouth to his, slowly, her arms around him, and came into his arms. (215)

romance?

The boy spoke two words, the first a short guttural verb, the second “you.” (94)

“Another thing,” Spade repeated, glaring up at the boy: “Keep that gungel away from me while you’re making up your mind.” (110)

gungel, n. 1. A (naïve) youth; a tramp’s young companion, male lover; a homosexual youth. (OED)

romance?

The boy spoke two words, the first a short guttural verb, the second “you.” (94)

“Another thing,” Spade repeated, glaring up at the boy: “Keep that gungel away from me while you’re making up your mind.” (110)

gungel, n. 1. A (naïve) youth; a tramp’s young companion, male lover; a homosexual youth. (OED)

Cairo moved over and whispered in the boy’s [Wilmer’s] ear. The boy, keeping his cold hazel eyes on Gutman’s face, sat down on the sofa again. The Levantine sat down beside him. (194)

romance??

“You’re a damned good man, sister.” (160)

the bird

- ▶ Why is there a Maltese falcon at all?

whodunit?

“We all know that the Holy Wars to them, as to the Templars, were largely a matter of loot.” (125)

“It was the Russian! I should have known!” (202)

“You got your dingus.” (203)

When he had finished the girl shut her notebook and raised a flushed smiling face to him. “Oh, isn’t this thrilling?” she said. “It’s—”

“Yes, or ridiculous....Is it possible—even barely possible? Or is it the bunk?” (134)

next

- ▶ Toomer, *Cane*, pt. I (1–67).
 - ▶ some very challenging content (and challenging writing)
- ▶ Commonplacing: group B. A passage that teaches us about Toomer's form.