

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction  
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November 2, 2023. Hammett (I).

## midterm preview

- ▶ closed book
- ▶ short answer, mostly passage identification/discussion
- ▶ material discussed in class
- ▶ James through Hammett

## review: Sayers: Lord Peter's method

- ▶ genre-internal
  - ▶ the ratchet mechanism: "I grovel, my name is Watson"
- ▶ contextual (the Great War)
  - ▶ "Sergeant Bunter"
- ▶ ideological
  - ▶ *credo quia impossibile*: faith vs. amoral materialism
  - ▶ authority and reaction

## review: contradiction

“Why did he call him a Sheeny?” (108/195)

“It isn’t the girl Freke would bother about—it’s having his aristocratic nose put out of joint by a little Jewish nobody.” (113/204)

“But so sad about poor Sir Reuben. I must write a few lines to Lady Levy; I used to know her quite well, you know, dear....Christine Ford, she was then, and I remember so well the dreadful trouble there was about her marrying a Jew....He was very handsome, then, you know, dear, in a foreign-looking way, but he hadn’t any means, and the Fords didn’t like his religion. Of course we’re all Jews nowadays.” (27/56)

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“No, Bunter, I pay you £200 a year to keep your thoughts to yourself. Tell me, Bunter, in these democratic days, don’t you think that’s unfair?”

“No, my lord.” (25/10–11)

## stylistics

- ▶ How does Hammett write? Describe a chosen paragraph as carefully as possible. Remember your commonplace-book entries.

## narrative

The tappity-tap-tap and the thin bell and muffled whir of Effie Perine's typewriting **came** through the closed door. Somewhere in a neighboring office a power-driven machine **vibrated** dully. On Spade's desk a limp cigarette **smoldered** in a brass tray filled with the remains of limp cigarettes. Ragged grey flakes of cigarette-ash **dotted** the yellow top of the desk and the green blotter and the papers that were there. A buff-curtained window, eight or ten inches open, **let in** from the court a current of air faintly scented with ammonia. The ashes on the desk **twitched and crawled** in the current. (4)

action!

Spade's thick fingers made a cigarette with deliberate care, sifting a measured quantity of tan flakes down into curved paper, spreading the flakes so that they lay equal at the ends with a slight depression in the middle, thumbs rolling the paper's inner edge down and up under the outer edge as forefingers pressed it over, thumbs and fingers sliding to the paper cylinder's ends to hold it even while tongue licked the flap, left forefinger and thumb pinching their end while right forefinger and thumb smoothed the damp seam, right forefinger and thumb twisting their end and lifting the other to Spade's mouth. (11–12, qtd. by “Chloe Dineen”)



## dialogue

“She’s so young and his bringing her here from New York is such a serious- Mightn’t he – mightn’t he do – something to her” (8, qtd. by “sim”)

“It’s tough, him getting it like that. Miles had his faults same as the rest of us, but I guess he must’ve had some good points too.”

“I guess so,” Spade agreed in a tone that was utterly meaningless. (16)

method (I)

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Besides the wallet and its contents there were three gaily colored silk handkerchiefs fragrant of *chypre*; a platinum Longines watch on a platinum and red gold chain, attached at the other end to a small pear-shaped pendant of some white metal; a handful of United States, British, French, and Chinese coins; a ring holding half a dozen keys; a silver and onyx fountain-pen; a metal comb in a leatherette case; a nail-file in a leatherette case; a small street-guide to San Francisco; a Southern Pacific baggage-check; a half-filled package of violet pastilles; a Shanghai insurance-broker's business-card; and four sheets of Hotel Belvedere writing paper, one on of which was written in small precise letters Samuel Spade's name and the addresses of his office and his apartment.

(47)

## method (2)

Spade's elbow dropped as Spade spun to the right. Cairo's face jerked back not far enough: Spade's right heel on the patent-leathered toes anchored the smaller man in the elbow's path. The elbow struck him beneath the cheek-bone, staggering him so that he must have fallen had he not been held by Spade's foot on his foot. Spade's elbow went on past the astonished dark face and straightened when Spade's hand struck down at the pistol. Cairo let the pistol go the instant that Spade's fingers touched it. The pistol was small in Spade's hand. ...

Fist, wrist, forearm, crooked elbow, and upper arm seemed all one rigid piece, with only the limber shoulder giving them motion. The fist struck Cairo's face, covering for a moment one side of his chin, a corner of his mouth, and most of his cheek between cheek-bone and jaw-bone. (46)

## laaaaadies

She was a lanky sunburned girl whose tan dress of thin woolen stuff clung to her with an effect of dampness. Her eyes were brown and playful in a shiny boyish face. (3)

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 from under her blue hat was darkly red, her full lips more brightly red. White teeth glistened in the crescent her timid smile made. (4)

She was a blonde woman of a few more years than thirty. Her facial prettiness was perhaps five years past its best moment. Her body for all its sturdiness was finely modeled and exquisite. She wore black clothes from hat to shoes. (24, qtd. by “Burreem”)

next

- ▶ full speed ahead, finish the novel
- ▶ read five pages from McCann, *Gumshoe America* (Canvas)
- ▶ optional: Chandler, “Simple Art of Murder”
- ▶ commonplacing, group B: morality?!?!?!?