

# The maltese falcon essay

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



**Introduction:**

Perhaps one of the best known films of all time, *The Maltese Falcon* is definitely one of the classics of the early film noir age. The film has a lot going for it, especially where the underworld is concerned and where the criminal gangs seem to be going. Paul Coughlin argues that this is not essentially a noir film in the sense of the femme fatale who usually dominates such movies however the dark nature of the film and the sense of thrilling abeyance it conveys is certainly does make it a film noir in my opinion.

Humphrey Bogart's portrayal of the main role is masterly with his nuances and statements extremely well defined and subtle at the same time. Sam Spade is a mystical character well directed by John Huston who brings about the utter brilliance of Bogart in a different light. The scenes which involve guns and violence are also very powerful indeed showing an intensity which has rarely been equalled even in other Mafia films. The power of the interactions between characters is also a positive aspect of the film which expands very well as the story unfolds.

The sense of suspense and intensity created around the actual *Maltese Falcon* is surely something else. One has to admire first time director John Huston who truly brings out the horror of organized crime in a way where everything collapses into a maelstrom of nothingness and hate. So one has to argue that the blackness of the film as well as the black heart of the protagonists make it a film noir in every sense of the word.

Coughlin seems to think differently and bases his argument on one principal notion, the fact that there isn't a woman in the plot who is a sort of femme

fatale or *bête noir*. This thesis however does not hold much water since there are several dark aspects in the film, mostly in the one to one exchanges between the main characters. The low key lighting used in the film is also very much part and parcel of the whole film noire genre and this lends further credence to the theory that this is one of the best film noires of all time.

In fact the camera angles and shots are all conducive to the importance of the film in the noire genre. The subtle lighting techniques that are used demonstrate the darkness of certain scenes which also change whenever Spade comes into the equation. The fixation with the Maltese Falcon statue as a leitmotif is also extremely powerful and here once again Coughlin's thesis disappears into thin air. Women are not present in *The Maltese Falcon* but their influence is also never very far behind.

Huston is described as a moral and ethical director by Philippa Gates who is in turn quoted by Coughlin in his article. However the sense of empathy which is allegedly felt by Spade when he murders his associate is not necessarily different from any film noire. Huston's direction and Bogard's acting actually revolutionised the film noire genre in more ways than one and although Coughlin seems to think that this was only the precursor of the genre, a good viewing of the film will prove this to be otherwise.