

# A femme fatale in the film "gender and noir"

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Not knowing what is a lie and what is the truth. Thinking of noir films, in Bronfen's *Gender and Noir*, the femme fatale supports Bronfen's claims of how the *Maltese Falcon* sets a generic tone regarding the sacrifice of a woman who knows how to tap into the detective's desire by an act of seduction or using money or jewelry. A femme fatale is a seductive woman who then tries to get the detective to fall in her transgression. They do whatever they must in order to get what they want.

For example, Miss O'Shaughnessy wanted protection from Sam Spade, but in return, he wanted money or something valuable from her. In the *Maltese Falcon*, Sam quotes, "You'll have to hock them", meaning she had to give up her jewelry to Sam. In Cooper's article, "Sex/Knowledge/Power in the Detective Genre", the femme fatale eyes proves to be an obstacle blocking the way for the detective to find the knowledge and power. An example would be when Miss O'Shaughnessy was giving that innocent look with her eyes when she was talking to Sam to protect her. Then, Sam could not fully protect Brigid if she did not give him the full information on his partner's murder.

In the *Maltese Falcon*, the femme fatale tries to get the detective to fall in love with her to the point where he cannot sustain himself. This is where the detective tries to split himself between knowing what is bad for him and giving in to this fatal desire. The seductress is never really what she seems to be and her voice seems to be a threat which is predictable or manageable. "Not knowing what is a lie and what is the truth." Miss O'Shaughnessy uttered. She vocalized this when she did not know the

difference between a lie nor the truth because throughout her life, she's been lying the whole film.

In the scene where Sam shows up to Brigid's apartment, she spoke of not being innocent and also the same scene, she went as Miss Wonderly when her real name was Miss O'Shaughnessy. With this, both detective and femme fatale are both trying to use one another for one's benefits. If the femme fatale was able to receive protection from the detective, she would be off the hook of not going to jail or taking the fall in other words. In addition, the love between the femme fatale and the detective is reasonable. In Bronfen's article once again, she states how Brigid proffers her love to Sam. However, the femme fatale is either telling the truth or yet playing another role.

One of the femme fatale's schemes were that in order for the detective to offer protection for her, that meant he has to go against the law which he was very loyal to. This is where the Maltese Falcon has a gender issue at the heart of this genre. Both femme fatale and detective shows interest of loving one another, yet both of them do not have a fantasy in common. For example, in the last part of the scene, Brigid wants to believe that Sam loves her and he is quite confused by it as well. He states, " If they let you out after twenty years, I'll be waiting." The love between these can either be fake or genuine because who knows if Sam will love her by the time she gets out or whenever she does get out, she plans to kill Sam for having her take the fall.

The femme fatale is then found out that she is putting on an act, yet she still continues to play the part because she insists that her dangerous secret is

one she cannot yet disclose. Sam notices this and still goes along with it because he wants to let the femme fatale know how good he is at his job. We see it again in the last scene of the *Maltese Falcon* where Sam and Brigid are waiting for the police to show and they are speaking of what's going to happen to her. "When your partner dies, you're supposed to do something about it", Sam states. At this moment, Sam knew what was going to happen to Brigid because he knew that it was her that murdered Miles once she confessed about it. Brigid is never really found out till she tells Spade about her and then he starts to get suspicious. Furthermore, the siren in such films like as *Out of the Past* uses her sexual attractiveness to control men in order to gain independence, money, and power. She rejects the traditional roles of wife and mother, and like the men of film noir, she looks for sexual fulfillment outside of marriage.

Brigid uses Floyd Thursby and attempts to use Sam Spade as protection against Gutman and Cairo, apparently with the intention of discarding them when they have served their purpose. Sex is her only weapon, and she uses it often and very effectively. Brigid is defeated in the end, however in a clear departure from film noir; she is defeated in such a way that her power is neutralized and order is restored. In film noir, the plot is generally resolved when the femme fatale is killed, but she is almost never captured. The femme fatale is a self-professed liar, but Sam cannot help falling for her, abruptly kissing her when she refuses to give him any information about her situation.

In addition to possessing a seductive allure, Brigid has a great deal of information that would benefit Sam's ability to solve the case. She has the power to reveal information about Gutman's identity, about the nature of the Maltese Falcon, and, most dramatically, about the death of Sam's partner Miles. However, she withholds this information, all the while encouraging Sam to love and trust her. Thus, we see that the "confidence" that Sam so longs for from Brigid is both a desire for the information to which she has access, as well as a desire to be able to trust her, and by extension, love her without reservation. If Brigid would only tell Sam about what she's running from or what's going on in her life, he would trust her enough to help her, but he cannot.

The quality which makes Sam stay and continue to give her a chance is Brigid's beauty and his undeniable attraction to her; that is, sex. In a rather complicated moment, Sam kisses Brigid, just after asking her what she can offer him besides money, perhaps in hopes that sex will entice her to be more forthcoming with him. Sex, in the world of film noir, is a currency and a form of power, which can be withheld and used strategically, just like information. The femme fatale was trying her best to have someone take the blame for her murder. In the end of the Maltese Falcon, her evil schemes were coming to a close.