



Reading Early Hammett: A Critical Study of the Fiction Prior to the Maltese Falcon

LeRoy Lad Panek

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Dashiell Hammett, like most successful writers, honed his skills in the trenches. Long before *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Thin Man* made him a household name, Hammett developed his technique writing satirical magazine pieces, then moved on to churn out tales of sex, crime and adventure for pulp magazines. Characters like Sam Spade and Nick and Nora Charles made him famous, but Hammett perfected his style - and created the first hard-boiled detective fiction - writing stories and novels about an anonymous, middle-aged detective, known as the Continental Op. This detailed examination of the early works of Dashiell Hammett takes a new look at one of the 20th century's most influential crime writers and his creation of the hard-boiled detective story. Each chapter covers an element of Hammett's early writing career - his magazine fiction; the Continental Op's development as a character; the Continental Op novels; and the last Continental Op stories. A concluding chapter provides afterthoughts on Hammett's career, style and place in the history of detective fiction. A chronology of works cited, a bibliography and an index supplement the text.

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