



Crime Stories and Other Writings

Dashiell Hammett, Steven Marcus (Selected by)

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In scores of stories written for Black Mask and other pulp magazines in the 1920s and 1930s, Dashiell Hammett used the vernacular adventure tale to register the jarring textures and revved-up cadences of modern America. His stories opened up crime fiction to the realities of American streets and American speech. Now The Library of America collects the finest of them: 24 in all, along with some revealing essays and an early version of his novel *The Thin Man*. The texts, reprinted here for the first time, are those that appeared originally in the pulps, without the cuts and revisions introduced by later editors. Hammett's years of experience as a Pinkerton detective give even his most outlandishly plotted mysteries a gritty credibility. Mixing melodramatic panache and poker-faced comedy, his stories are hard-edged entertainment for an era of headlong change and extravagant violence, tracking the devious, nearly nihilistic exploits of con men and blackmailers, slumming socialites and deadpan assassins. As guide through this underworld he created the Continental Op, the nameless and deliberately unheroic detective separated from the brutality and corruption around him only by his professionalism.

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Orrin Grey says

After reading The Thin Man and The Maltese Falcon, I decided to check this out and I ended up devouring the whole thing in every spare moment I had between reading slush and the billion or so other things I was working on at the time. Consider me a Hammett fan.

Bill says

What a wonderful set of stories! Hammett is without a doubt the master and the American private eye/noir genre in both short and long form.

Robert Muller says

A great collection, but it would be better if it had the complete set of stories Hammett wrote. A complete list of those stories is a missing piece as well--we don't know what we don't know :).

Rita Brinkerhoff says

THE CONTINENTAL OP is so rad. Even maybe radder than Sam Spade, because the Continental Op is NAMELESS and short and stout and "unattractive", whereas Samuel Spade is all suave and a ladykiller.

Belinda says

It's nearly impossible to give this series anything but a perfect score. Other than the small print which is needed to compile so much into a small, neat package, I can really never find complaints over the Library of America series. I adore Dashiell Hammett, so I was pretty certain I would enjoy this book. Some of the material was a re-read for me, but that is never a problem. Once you drop into Hammett's world it's pretty hard to want to leave. The Continental Op pieces are generally my favorite--I am a huge fan of the Op, partially due to his realism and partly due to his humor. It feels like Hammett enjoyed writing that particular series. I often take a year or more to read books from this series----I like to take my time with them and also tend to intersperse other books while reading them (something I find that I pretty much always do when reading long books or series). This one is a library title so I had to read it straight from the go to make sure I finished it. I had to re-check it out but I did it! This book is of course complete as all get out and has everything from novels to an unfinished manuscript of the first draft of The Thin Man. Two of the pieces are small but very interesting- a list of tips for those writing detective fiction and little pieces of info from "Memoirs of a Private Detective". These were both fun and interesting and for me gave a hint of Hammett's personality. The notes in the back of the book contain almost a dictionary of the slang scattered throughout

(some of which is quite dense but part of what makes the stories entertaining) and I have to say, despite my decent knowledge of noir books and film I did not know a lot of it. My favorite story was Woman in the Dark--not really typical of Hammett's work in it's layout but so entertaining and tense. Highly recommend.

Vikram Katju says

This is a fine collection of Hammett stories. The most notable (and most enjoyable) of these stories feature a bull dog of a detective called 'The Continental Op'. One particular issue pertaining to this collection of Hammett stories needs to be highlighted, and that is that the story 'This King Business' has been inadvertently mutilated by the publishers of this book. For more on this see:

<http://www.donherron.com/hammett-the-...>

New editions of this book may have had this issue fixed; for more on this, see:

<http://www.donherron.com/hammett-this...>

Ed [Redacted] says

A great collection of short stories. I am a fan of Hammett's novels and his short fiction is nearly as good. I liked most of the stories but anything featuring the Continental Op is going to be at the top of the list.

Rishindra says

I didn't finish this collection of short stories so I won't give it a rating, since it would be unfair to rate a book without knowing how good what I didn't read was. I read 7 out of 24 stories and they weren't bad but they were just okay. I didn't want to read 17 more stories if they were just going to be okay. And I'll admit I usually don't finish short story collections and I made it farther in this one than with most of the others I've tried to read. For most of the short story collections I've tried to read, I only read the first two or three stories before I abandoned them.

Anyway, I gave ratings to the 7 stories that I did read right after I finished each of them:

Arson Plus: 3/5

Slippery Fingers: 3/5

Crooked Souls: 4/5

The Tenth Clew: 3/5

Zigzags of Treachery: 4/5

The House in Turk Street: 3/5

The Girl with the Silver Eyes: 3/5

Maybe I'll come back to this book someday, though.

Keith says

I'm not a detective story aficionado. Over the course of my life, I've read most of Hammett's novels, and one or two Chandler novels. This is a pretty narrow set.

I haven't yet read all the stories in this collection. They are good. Duly entertaining and gripping. Like any mystery series, there are the sudden revelations by the Continental Op out of nowhere (The Golden Horseshoe) and many fortuitous escapes (The House on Turk Street).

I was worried when I started the stories. I figured out the first two mysteries myself: the girl's faked kidnapping (Crooked Souls) and the brother and sister were actually a couple (The Tenth Clew). But the stories got a little weirder with more unusual twists as I read.

There is some unfortunate Chinese stereotyping, and plenty of odd names: O'Gar, Gantvoort, Quarre, Pangburn. But the stories achieve their goal: some fun adventure writing.

Brett says

So about 900 pages later I feel pretty confident I have a handle on Hammett, and for purposes of this blurb I'm going to compare him to the other titan of classic crime fiction, Raymond Chandler. Hammett is a lot less flowery and a lot less romantic than Chandler. He certainly has a good smart-assed tone and some great lines in that idiom, but Chandler beats him for sheer poetry and inspiration. However, Hammett excels in the nature of the mysteries themselves: the riddles to be solved and the way his wiseacre Continental Op goes about taking care of business. There's little emotion involved, and no dames that our hero's gonna pine after, even once they've been hanged, just a lot of bullets leftover to bite down on.

Patrick says

I learned a lot about writing in these 900 plus pages. The short seems to suit Dashiell more than the novel and it only caught myself feeling over saturated with these stories once or twice. I think I liked the stories where he steps away from San Francisco and the Continental Op more, if only for the novelty. This includes stories like nightmare town and women in the dark. However the house on Turk street, a Continental Op story is great good example of how to play with form even in a traditional framework. All told, a great collection and as close as you can get to all Dashiell's published shorts.

On a more general note, I'm really appreciating the completist approach to fiction writers. It seems the only way to tease out the nuance of their style and major themes. Only reading a representative story or their canonical text seems to be a bad compromise. Unfortunately I don't know how this could play out in a school.

Tweiss says

Danielle Hammett's writing holds up almost 100 years later. His crisp, clean, lean prose was decades ahead of his time. He deserves as much credit as Hemingway for bringing the writing canon into the 20th century. Well worth reading. He could write a good short story, and not many can - which unfortunately doesn't stop them from trying.

I

Darryl Walker says

There's not a Mt. Rushmore of American private eyes but Hammett's Continental Op wouldn't be one of the faces on it if there was. That's because he's a modest, faceless everyman though he's hardly anonymous or devoid of personality. I prefer the Op over Hammett's more infamous creation Sam Spade. That probably puts me in the minority, but I don't mind. Spade is not a particularly nice guy, on the other hand the Op is a regular Jack-the-lad, his voice like that of an old friend's to the reader. Even though he's a Roaring Twenties lawman who breaks heads and takes names he turns a blind eye to Prohibition, as eager to go into a speakeasy as the next man. It's worth mentioning there's a lot more Continental Op material than there is about Spade too, about six times as much. Fully two thirds of Hammett's crime fiction starred our man from the Continental Detective Agency instead of falcon statuettes, glass keys and thin men.

DASHIELL HAMMETT: CRIME STORIES AND OTHER WRITINGS collects two dozen of the 36 stories Hammett published about the Continental Op, most of them novelettes. And distinguished, authoritative writing it is. The novels RED HARVEST and THE DAIN CURSE initially consisted of four Op novelettes apiece. I personally have never seen any of those eight segments published home or abroad in their original standalone form (and I've looked). That leaves only four other stories to collect if you want them all on your shelf. Three are easy to source. That fourth and elusive final Op caper, available nowhere but THE RETURN OF THE CONTINENTAL OP (1945), cost me as much as I paid for this volume! 'Death and Company' is, ultimately and unfortunately, for only the most diehard of collectors, a disappointing seven-page vignette. Beyond a shadow of a doubt the weakest entry in the Op's otherwise superlative casebook, it's unsurprising it's uncollected with the others. With the exception of 'This King Business' all 36 stories first appeared in Black Mask, the most feted extinct pulp magazine this side of the equally defunct Weird Tales. THE MALTESE FALCON also debuted in the Mask's pages before Knopf brought it out in hardcover; they'd already published HARVEST and DAIN.

If you're reading this you probably appreciate the exploits of the Op, one of the pioneering first person hardboiled American private dicks, but not the first. Carroll John Daly's 'Three Gun Terry' sneaked onto Black Mask's table of contents months ahead of the Op. Terry Mack is Daly's pilot fish for his enormously popular Race Williams character, a homicidal maniac who rationalizes his shooting sprees as private detecting. The name of one of the stories in DASHIELL HAMMETT: CRIME STORIES AND OTHER WRITINGS is 'Bodies Piled Up,' a title as gruesome as Daly's 'The False Burton Combs' is clever for its misdirection. I shan't give away its secret to the few who've not read it. Cap Shaw didn't suffer journalistic fools lightly and even though he hated Daly's stuff he published it anyway because a Race Williams yarn touted on the Mask's cover boosted sales by 10,000 issues. Daly's stories are ridiculous enough to be farces, glutted with a toughness as counterfeit as a schoolboy's playground bluster. In his lifetime Daly enjoyed more glory in Black Mask than Hammett, but in the long run the Hammett legacy enjoys more success and

respect, not that that ever does deceased authors any good. This is not to say Daly's writing sucks, it often makes for entertaining lightweight reading, but it's all hat and no cattle. The Op's romps in the Mask are steeped in a realism still resonant and relevant. If I may borrow a phrase from Hollywood Detective Dan Turner, the Op's adventures are as serious as `a rodney probing [one's] sacroiliac.'

Hammett's strengths as a storyteller and prose stylist as well as his background with Pinkerton's enabled his work to endure. On a side note, Lillian Hellman claimed Hammett didn't work for the agency for as long as he often alluded to. His own publisher Knopf hailed him as better than Hemingway, a conceit, of course, but one I happen to agree with. I'll take Hammett's drunken private eyes and femme fatales over Hemingway's drunken sportsmen and forlorn expatriates anytime. Not to rip on Papa, but why read something to depress yourself? Hemingway's characters don't liberate and lift the spirit the way Hammett's do. To this day Hammett's influence on mystery novelists remains immense, justifying the mythic proportions of his literary reputation.

Every Op story in DASHIELL HAMMETT: CRIME STORIES AND OTHER WRITINGS is good, if not great. In the product department the consumer gets his money's worth, excellent fiction on nice paper expensively bound. Library of America puts together handsome well-constructed editions designed to be read often and resist as much manhandling as an old medical desk reference printed in the forties. The quality of Library of America's books cannot be overemphasized; I own other collections from this same house, their books are built to last and can handle wear and tear. And they don't have those godawful Deckle edges.

Martin says

I loved absolutely every single short story collected in this book. Most of them (20 of the 24) feature Hammett's nameless Continental Op character, one of my favourite characters ever. The remaining 4 stories are all one-offs, with different characters in different locales. By far the most complete collection of Hammett short stories out there (especially the Continental Op stories). The retail price may be a bit steep, so I highly recommend buying it online.

Also included (I guess that's where the 'Other Writings' part of the book's title comes in) is 'an early typescript' version of The Thin Man. This is not *The Thin Man* you know & love. The version included here is [1] *very* different and [2] unfinished. Not wanting to confuse the final and unfinished versions (down the road, I mean - memory can be a tricky thing), and also not wanting to tarnish the luster of *The Thin Man* as I know it, I decided *not* to read this version. But that doesn't affect my rating of the book in the least; I got it for the crime stories, anyway!

If you've only ever read a few of Hammett's short stories, this is a great book for you. And if you haven't read any Hammett yet, well... what are you waiting for?

Highly recommended for fans of crime fiction, mysteries, or 1920's detective stories.

Lydia Wednesday says

Hammett's writings are classic for a reason. If you like crime and thriller, he's an author to read. Take into

account when these stories and books were written because the slurs in here are, you know, woof.
