



Selected Letters of Dashiell Hammett

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A literary event: the letters, both private and professional, of Dashiell Hammett, creator of Sam Spade and father of the hardboiled crime novel. . In his five great crime novels, all of them written in a magnificent burst of creativity between 1927 and 1935, Dashiell Hammett gave America a cast of immortal characters- Sam Spade, the Continental Op, and Nick and Nora Charles, mold-breaking, red-blooded alternatives to Sherlock Holmes and Lord Peter Wimsey. In the words of Raymond Chandler, Hammett "gave murder back to the kind of people who commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not with hand-wrought dueling pistols. " A popular writer from the start, he aspired to a higher goal. As he was working on his classic *The Maltese Falcon*, he wrote a letter to his publisher about the potential of the detective-story form: "Someday somebody's going to make 'literature' out of it...and I'm selfish enough to have my hopes. "Though Hammett's work is admired by millions, the man himself has always been an enigma. Now, at last, comes a volume of his letters, revealing not only the private man but also the hard-working-and hard-living-professional. Yes, he was part cynical tough guy, like Sam Spade; he was part sophisticated inebriate, like Nick Charles. But the character of Dashiell Hammett was too complex to be easily categorized. His letters to his family, lovers, and colleagues show his personal warmth, his political commitment, his wide-ranging intellectual curiosity. With wit, intelligence, and style, these letters further confirm Hammett's extraordinary talent as writer and observer.

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