

Violence and Gender in Dashiell Hammett's Short Stories

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Abstract

This paper is interested in interrogating how Dashiell Hammett's (1894 – 1961) use of the short story is interconnected with the gender scheme in his work on the one hand, and the representation of violence, on the other. It argues that although Hammett is known as the author of *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) *The Glass Key* (1931), his short stories show best his themes of gangsterism, the urbanization of the American city, and more importantly his interest in female criminals who work on a par with the male detectives. The paper aims to demonstrate that Hammett consistently relied on the short story to create his hardboiled world where the gender dynamics, encapsulated in detectives threatened by the dangerous sexuality of female characters, is intrinsically tied to the violence that pervades his texts. This paper also argues that Hammett utilized the characteristics of the short story (for example, brevity, and economy of the description) to deconstruct the formula of the classical detective story to create a "hardboiled" formula which establishes an underworld of violence and lawlessness, and proffers a character study of the criminal himself or herself. Hammett's short fiction can thus be considered as a thread that leads to see his writing as a platform that portrays the complex intertwined discourses of criminality, power, and gender roles.

Keywords: Dashiell Hammett, short story, crime fiction, violence, gender