



Pie in the Sky: Political Readings of Dashiell Hammett’s “Faith”

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Abstract. This essay examines “Faith,” a short story by Dashiell Hammett unpublished in his lifetime, exploring its relationship to detective fiction, proletarian fiction, and literary modernism. The story’s setting suggests a left-wing perspective yet resists easy political categorization, contributing to our understanding of Hammett’s evolving literary approach to detective fiction and complex relationship to left-wing politics and modernism.

Hard-boiled detective writer Dashiell Hammett is best known for his five novels, especially *Red Harvest* (1929) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), even though Hammett was a short-story writer for a longer period than he was a novelist. Peter Wolfe notes, “Hammett’s short stories remain the least read and least understood of the [Hammett] canon” (44), which remains true more than 40 years later. As Maysaas Jaber underlines, this contributes to a “critical over-emphasis on his novels,” and she stresses how examining Hammett’s short stories provides insights into his overall writing and hard-boiled fiction (84). Scholars have paid even less attention to Hammett’s unpublished stories and focus, for understandable reasons, on his published writings (see, for example, González López, 90-174; Jaber; Panek; Zumoff, “Politics”).

This article examines “Faith,” a short story by Hammett, likely written in 1926 and unpublished in Hammett’s lifetime. Found in Hammett’s papers at the University of Texas’s Harry Ransom Center, it is around 3,500 words in 12 typed manuscript pages. Although the story was clearly prepared to be sold for publication—the word count is noted on the first page beside Hammett’s address and the notation, “First American serial rights

Jacob A. Zumoff teaches at New Jersey City University. His research examines the intersection of left-wing politics and culture in the Americas in the interwar period. His publications include several articles on Dashiell Hammett, as well as *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929* (Brill, 2014) and *Red Thread: The Passaic Textile Strike* (Rutgers UP, 2021). He is currently researching the relationship between Hammett’s fiction and his evolving political views.