US novelist. After serving seven years in prison for armed robbery, he published his first novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), a powerful depiction of racist victimization set in a Californian shipyard. He later wrote in the crime thriller genre, most notably in *The Real Cool Killers* (1958), *Rage in Harlem* (1965), and *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1965). He also published two volumes of autobiography, *The Quality of Hurt* (1972) and *My Life of Absurdity* (1976).
suggestion that he contribute a hard-boiled detective novel for his Série Noire label. The first novel, *For Love of Imabelle* (1958), won Himes the Grand Prix de Littérature Policière and made him an instant celebrity in France – Himes would eventually complete nine novels for Duhamel, collectively known as the Harlem Domestic Cycle. In the early installments of the cycle- *The Crazy Kill* (1959a), *The Big Gold Dream* (1960b), and *All Shot Up* (1960a) – Himes’s pair of black, antiheroic police detectives, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger Jones, stride through Harlem like capricious gods, outsized Harlem folk heroes who sow havoc and reap awe and ambiguous justice from white and black populations alike. As Rudolph Fisher did before him, Himes rewired a genre implicated in the racist policing of black bodies by disrupting its overly rationalist vision, and insisting upon its blindness; forensic evidence yields no solutions here to crimes that spread out across a social order. In the final installments of the cycle, the growing structural and thematic marginalization of his detectives reflects the intensification of race conflict in 1960s America. In *Blind Man With a Pistol* (1969), which ends elliptically with Harlem’s violent uprising against the city’s white police and demolition crews, Coffin Ed and Digger are often absent from the narrative. When present, they appear as anachronistic “ghosts” to a Harlem mobilized by Black Power and Civil Rights movements. Their former structural centrality as folk heroes to Himes’s Harlem is replaced by multiple, splintered points of view and textual fragments that seem to elicit black Harlem as the collective subject and object of its own – potentially apocalyptic – story in the making.

With his health declining in the 1970s, Himes completed his second volume of autobiography, *My Life of Absurdity* (1976), but little else. Himes ranked the Harlem Cycle as his most important literary achievement and critics have tended to agree, viewing them as major landmarks in black crime fiction. Largely neglected in America during his lifetime, Himes has gained much attention since his death in 1984. His strange, profoundly violent, genre-imploding novels have animated a generation of scholars trained in poststructuralist and neo-Marxist cultural theory. Meanwhile, his aesthetic influence remains palpable everywhere from Ishmael Reed and Clarence Major to Walter Mosley and Quentin Tarantino.

**SEE ALSO:** The City in Fiction (AF); Ethnicity and Fiction (AF); The Harlem Renaissance (AF); Noir Fiction (AF); Politics and the Novel (BIF); Social-Realist Fiction (AF); WPA and Popular Front Fiction (AF)

**REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS**


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