

Hard-Boiled Anxiety: The Freudian Desires of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald, and Their Detectives

Karen Huston Karydes

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The investigators become the investigated in this illuminating examination of the inner lives of three beloved detective-fiction writers.

An illuminating glimpse into the psyches of three prominent American detective novelists, *Hard-Boiled Anxiety* by Karen Huston Karydes offers snippets of intimate details, inviting further reading and research.

Employing Freudian psychoanalysis, excerpts of journals and letters, and the work of other scholars, Karydes examines the minds of Ross Macdonald, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler, three of the most well-known American writers of hard-boiled detective fiction. She seeks to link their experiences with families and lovers to their detective stories, specifically to their most iconic invented protagonists.

The book makes an argument that Lew Archer, the Op, Sam Spade, and Philip Marlowe are reflections of their creators and their worldviews, whether the writers were conscious of such connections or not. The text does not shy away from pieces of each man's life that might cause discomfort or verge on the offensive. Rather, it sketches sympathetic pictures that enhance readings of these authors' works.

Chapters are divided into three sections, each pertaining to either Macdonald, Hammett, or Chandler, but there are only a few pages dedicated to each of the authors' various relationships. The Freudian analysis is light, as well. Ultimately, Karydes seems to choose Freud as a vehicle because Macdonald himself underwent Freudian psychoanalysis later in his life. Regardless of agreement or disagreement with Freud's ideas and methods, Karydes opens up each writer in intriguing ways.

As an introductory text, the book functions admirably, providing enough of a tease to invite a perusal of the extensive endnotes and bibliography. For the uninitiated, the work succinctly and clearly introduces each author and his work, so that while familiarity with their canons would be enriching, it is not necessary.

Karydes writes in a fluid, warm style that carries well through the chapters, making her thesis easily accessible to laypeople and scholars alike. This, coupled with wonderful cover art that perfectly captures the essence of the hard-boiled detective fiction genre, creates a pleasing and informative reading experience. A few pages of old photographs lend faces not only to the authors themselves, but also to their families and the women in their lives.

Hard-Boiled Anxiety stirs the surface of its topic with skill, and beckons those interested in detective fiction, psychology, and the act of creative writing to dip more than a toe into the sometimes-dark inner oceans of Macdonald, Hammett, and Chandler.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (May 12, 2016)

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