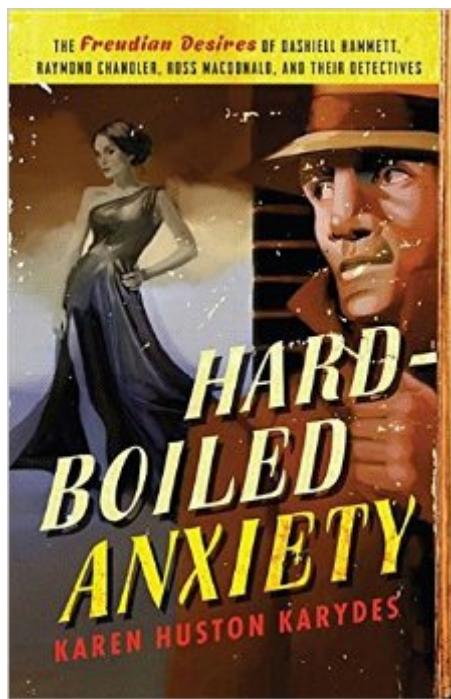


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Hard-Boiled Anxiety



Synopsis

'Curl up on the analyst's couch with all your favorite mystery scribes, as Karen Huston Karydes sleuths out the neurotic, personal threads that make up the warp and the weft of their greatest fictions. A dark, yet illuminating read.' - Kim Cooper, author of *The Raymond Chandler Map of Los Angeles* and *The Kept Girl* For close to fifty years, three masters of the hard-boiled detective novel dispatched intrepid gumshoes into upper-crust homes and seedy back alleys, peeling back and exposing all the pretexts of polite society. Or did they? Were there even closer, darker secrets they never quite copped to? In *Hard-Boiled Anxiety*, Karen Huston Karydes offers a new and unsettling reading of the classic pairings: Dashiell Hammett and his successive shamuses, the Continental Op, Sam Spade, and Nick Charles; Raymond Chandler and his brooding knight errant, Philip Marlowe; and Ross Macdonald and his 1960s sleuth, Lew Archer. Each novelist, though celebrated in the American pantheon, harbored ghosts, injuries, and a guilty backstory of his own. Their fictional detectives served as doubles, in ways both flamboyant and subtle, as the authors wrestled inner demons and labored, in Karydes's words, to "write themselves well." Included are remarkable observations from a memoir kept by Ross Macdonald as he underwent psychotherapy in the 1950s, never divulged at this length until the publication of this volume. Sigmund Freud, welcome to Sunset Boulevard.

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Customer Reviews

There is no doubt that Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald, and their detectives

provide plenty of grist for psychological study. There is also no doubt that the author of Hard-Boiled Anxiety has read the books closely and thought deeply about the stories and their relations to their authors' lives. I do have some doubt about the appropriateness of a Freudian analysis. It leads to paragraphs like this: "Macdonald is choosing a welter of sexually tinged metaphors to describe the process of writing fiction: 'dangerously hot materials'; 'feeding [both] the writer [and] other people'; 'problems, memories--whatever else makes up one's own psychic life; wrestling with your own angels.' These all speak to the guilty anxieties of childhood." I have to strain to see any sexual tinge to those metaphors. I guess "hot" has a sexual sense, and some sexual activities are like "wrestling," but it takes a Freudian to see a "welter" of obvious sexual references. It certainly takes a Freudian to consider "the guilty anxieties of childhood" to be synonymous with "sex". There is a moderate amount of this kind of thing. Another Freudian tendency is to assert parallels that seem either coincidental or purely verbal to ordinary mortals. If you take that Freudian stuff seriously, or if you're willing to overlook it, there's plenty of detailed information and incisive analysis that does not depend on outmoded mystical theories. The links between these three seminal writers are illuminated, and also the extent to which their art imitated their lives. The Freudian approach works best with Macdonald, who underwent Freudian analysis and explicitly adopted some Freudian ideas.

This review originally published in [...] What did it take to become a genre-setting author of noir detective fiction? Judging by Karen Huston Karydes' book, Hard-Boiled Anxiety, the answer comes down to 'personal demons.' Karydes clearly has a love of the noir-detective genre and has done a great deal of research into the personal lives of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross MacDonald and shares with the reader the seamy, dark side of their personal lives. From alcoholism, to Oedipal issues, each man has a personal history that they'd likely prefer to stay personal. I am not well versed in my detective fiction, but I do enjoy critical studies and biographies, and writers have often been my favorite subjects. I found the narrative on Dashiell Hammett's life, and its effects on his fiction to be most persuasive. Karydes writes: Hammett's plots have a curious trajectory, wherein violence and sex both ramp up as the detective/hero loses control. Over and over in Hammett's fiction, there turns out to be mortal danger in a man's letting down his guard, particularly in the presence of his wife. These women don't enjoy sex. They have it for other, dangerous-to-men reasons. The sole exception is Nora Charles, who is a member of the most demoralizing hard-boiled sorority of all: wives with money. This paragraph alone has me wanting to hurry to my library and check out every Hammett book possible. Domineering women

seem to be part of the landscape for these men, which, upon reflection, is perhaps not so surprising.

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