



# Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Decline of Moral Authority

*Susanna Lee*

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## **Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Decline of Moral Authority** Susanna Lee

The cynical but kind-hearted detective is the soul of the classic hard-boiled story, that chronicle of world-weary urban pessimism. In *Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Decline of Moral Authority*, Susanna Lee argues that this fiction functions as a measure for individual responsibility in the modern world and that it demonstrates the enduring status of individual conscience across a variety of cultural crises. In this major rethinking of the hard-boiled genre, Lee suggests that, whether in Los Angeles, New York, or Paris, the hard-boiled detective is the guardian of individual moral authority and the embodiment of ideals in a corrupt environment.

Lee traces the history of the hard-boiled detective through the twentieth century and on both sides of the Atlantic (France and the United States), tying the idea of morality to the character model in nuanced, multifaceted ways. When the heroic model devolves, the very conceptual validity of individual moral authority can seem to devolve as well. *Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Decline of Moral Authority* charts the evolution of that character model of the hard-boiled hero, the mid-century deterioration of his exemplarity, and twenty-first-century endeavors to resuscitate the accountable hero. The history of hard-boiled crime fiction tells nothing less than the story of individual autonomy and accountability in modern Western culture.

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