



It Didn't Mean Anything: A Psychoanalytic Reading of American Detective Fiction

Alexander N. Howe

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This critical study of American detective fiction examines the history and development of the detective genre through the lens of psychoanalysis. Applying the ideas of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the author identifies and categorizes popular works according to the fictional protagonist's hysteria, obsessive neurosis, perversion, or psychosis.

The first chapter identifies several instances of hysteria within the fiction of two of the genre's pioneers, Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle. Chapter Two traces the development of the hard-boiled detective's code of honor through the works of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Mickey Spillane, identifying the often-paradoxical nature of this code and its origins in obsessive neurosis. Chapter Three analyzes the anti-detective fiction of Philip K. Dick in terms of paranoid psychosis, and the final chapter returns to the question of hysteria, taking up the female hard-boiled detectives of author Marcia Muller.

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