



# **Criminal Femmes Fatales in American Hardboiled Crime Fiction (Crime Files)**

*Maysaa Husam Jaber*

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This book challenges the traditional view of the 'femme fatale' as merely a dangerous and ravenous sexual predator who leads men into ruination. It proposes alternative ways of viewing the femme fatale by showing how she can also serve as a figure for imagining female agency. Focusing on a particular character type that is distinct from the general archetype of the femme fatale, the 'criminal femme fatale' uses her sexual appeal and irresistible wiles both to manipulate men and to commit criminal acts, usually murder, in order to advance her goals with deliberate intent and culpability. This study reveals and explains the agency of the criminal femmes fatales in American Hardboiled crime fiction both pre and post World War II in the works of a number of prominent crime writers including Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, David Goodis and Mickey Spillane. The book situates this body of literature alongside legal and medical discourses on female criminality and argues that the literary female criminal breaks the 'mad-bad' woman dichotomy and invites a space to uncover the full transgressive potential of women's roles in this genre.

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