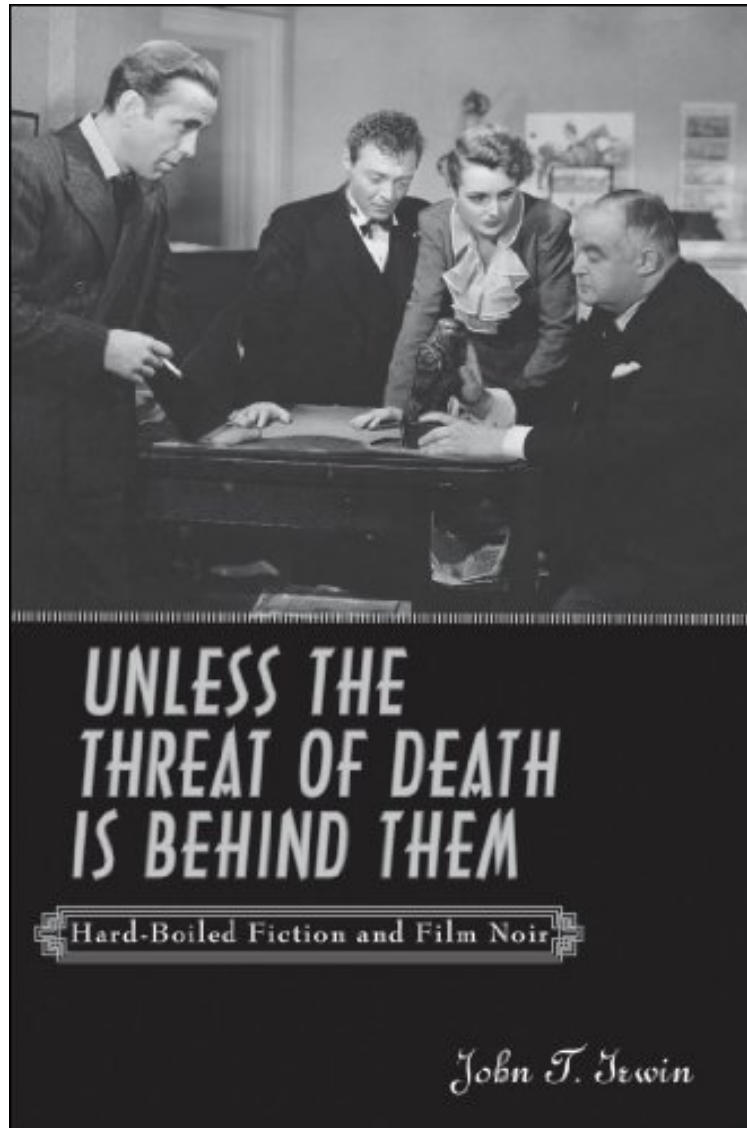


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Unless the Threat of Death Is Behind Them

John T. Irwin

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Fiction and Film Noir, John T. Irwin provides once more a study on the detective fiction genre with a bright insight. The only reproach I could formulate is the author's tendency to over-quote the original texts, even in cases when it is not absolutely necessary (which tends to make his summary of the novels he is studying rather lengthy.) However, the finesse of his theories easily makes up for this slight problem.

Early in the twentieth century a new character type emerged in the crime novels of American writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler: the "hard-boiled" detective, most famously exemplified by Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*. Unlike the analytical detectives of nineteenth-century fiction, such as Edgar Allan Poe's Inspector Dupin, the new detectives encountered cases not as intricate logical puzzles but as stark challenges of manhood. In the stories of these characters and their criminal opposites, John T. Irwin explores the tension within ideas of American masculinity between subordination and independence and, for the man who becomes "his own boss," the conflict between professional codes and personal desires. He shows how, within different works of hard-boiled fiction, the professional either overcomes the personal or is overcome by it, ending in ruinous relationships or in solitary integrity, and how within the genre all notions of manly independence are ultimately revealed to be illusions subordinate to fate itself.

"Irwin succeeds in presenting his topic with the intellectual cachet it deserves." (Choice)"Irwin gracefully and successfully accomplishes the critic's most worthy task to return us happily to the scene of the crime." (Patrick O'Donnell *Modernism/Modernity*)"Stimulating... Irwin's psychoanalytic criticism offers subtle readings of the novels, their adaptations, and of the relations between these texts and their authors' lives." (Brian Diemert *Journal of Popular Culture*)"Persuasively locates the development of noir out of the quintessentially American genre of hard-boiled detective fiction." (Thomas Hibbs *Books and Culture*)"John Irwin is a great original as an American poet-critic. Each new book by him whether poetry or prose delights and surprises me, in the mode of a Borgesian essay-fiction or a Kafkaesque parable, but expanded into the exegetical sublime. Hard-boiled fiction and film noir have found their most illuminating critic in Irwin." (Harold Bloom)"Irwin's analysis of five American crime novels from the Thirties and Forties and his insightful discussion of the 'noir' films based on them cast new light on the qualities of these 'hard-boiled' classics. The surprising affinities he uncovers that link these works with other examples of American 'main-line' fiction will surely increase the reader's perception of the inherent seriousness at the heart of these genre entertainments." (Donald A. Yates, editor and translator of *Latin Blood: The Best Crime Stories from Spanish America*)From the Back CoverEarly in the twentieth century a new character type emerged in the crime novels of American writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler: the "hard-boiled" detective, most famously exemplified by Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*. Unlike the analytical detectives of nineteenth-century fiction, such as Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin, the new detectives encountered cases not as intricate logical puzzles but as stark challenges to manhood. In the stories of these characters and their criminal opposites, John T. Irwin explores the tension within ideas of American masculinity between subordination and independence and, for the man who becomes "his own boss," the conflict between professional codes and personal desires."Irwin succeeds in presenting his topic with the intellectual cachet it deserves." Choice"Irwin gracefully and successfully accomplishes the critic's most worthy task to return us happily to the scene of the crime." *Modernism/Modernity*"Stimulating... Irwin's psychoanalytic criticism offers subtle readings of the novels, their adaptations, and of the relations between these texts and their authors' lives." *Journal of Popular Culture*"Persuasively locates the development of noir out of the quintessentially American genre of hard-boiled detective fiction." *Books and Culture*John T. Irwin is the Decker Professor in the Humanities at the Johns Hopkins University, where he formerly served as chair of the Writing Seminars. His previous books include *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story*, recipient of the Modern Language Association's Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies and Phi Beta Kappa's Christian Gauss Prize.About the AuthorJohn T. Irwin is the Decker Professor in the Humanities at the Johns Hopkins University, where he formerly served as chair of the Writing Seminars. His previous books include *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story*, recipient of the Modern Language Association's Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies and Phi Beta Kappa's Christian Gauss Prize.