



Nice and Noir: Contemporary American Crime Fiction

Richard B. Schwartz

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Owners of mystery bookshops will tell you that there are several sorts of buyers: those who purchase on impulse or whim; genre addicts who buy paperbacks by the week and by the armful; and those who have caught up on canonical texts and regularly buy new novels by select authors in hardcover. Richard B. Schwartz belongs in the last group, with his own list of approximately seventy favorite writers.

Nice and Noir: Contemporary American Crime Fiction explores the work of these writers, building upon a reading of almost seven hundred novels from the 1980s and 1990s. By looking at recurring themes in these mysteries, Schwartz offers readers new ways to approach the works in relation to contemporary cultural concerns.

With sensitivity to a culture consisting of frontiers and borders, Schwartz examines the position of the vigilante in art and society, racial bridges and divides, the absence of divine presence and compensating narrative strategies, the unresolved nature of the crime plot and its roots in chivalric romance. The special importance of setting and the growing importance of grotesque humor in the fiction studied here are addressed by the author, as is the journalistic/instructional dimension of the field and the importance of crossover narratives.

This book is not only a study and appreciation of an important subgenre and its contemporary practitioners; it also utilizes both literary history and theoretical material. Information has been drawn from fanzines, from discussions with writers, booksellers, agents, and editors, and from the author's own extensive knowledge of literature and American culture.

Nice and Noir is wide-ranging but neither ponderous nor lugubrious. Its language is accessible but not simplistic. The book will have a broad appeal—both to academics and to general readers with some interest in American studies and popular culture.

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