



The Naked City: Urban Crime Fiction in the USA

Ralph Willett

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The "mean streets" of San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles and Chicago have dominated American crime fiction from Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett to Sara Paretsky and Ed McBain. Like Marlowe and V.I. Warshawski before him, Ralph Willett undertakes a lone investigation into the dangerous realms of urban American detective fiction, uncovering clues to their grip on the popular imagination, text by text and city by city. On the one hand, a menacing labyrinth or urban jungle; on the other, a bohemian and exotic space, the American city is the site of many distinctly modern anxieties associated with gender, race, affluence, poverty, urbanization and technology. "The opaque complexity of modern city life is represented by crime" (Raymond Williams) and the detective or investigating cop emerges as the figure who endeavours to solve the crime and, at the same time, explain the city. Through a close analysis of films as well as popular fiction, Ralph Willett explores the imaginative geography of the modern American city: a place of opportunity and desire as well as murder and lawlessness. Authors studied include Paul Auster, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Sarah Paretsky, Thomas Pynchon, Tom Wolfe, Andrew Vachss, Lisa Cody, Ed McBain, James Ellroy, Bret Easton Ellis and Chester Himes. Films include "The Naked City", "The French Connection", "Mean Streets", "Taxi Driver", "The Big Heat", "The Godfather", "Chinatown", "Bladerunner", "The Big Sleep", "Rear Window", "Metropolis" and "Point Blank".

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