

Account Sign-In

Email Address:

Password:

[Lost password? Click here!](#)

[Not yet a member?](#)
[Sign up now - it's free!](#)

More Book Reviews

[The Scarecrow Michael Connelly](#)

www.crimetime.co.uk

[Far Cry John Harvey](#)

www.crimetime.co.uk

[The Vanishing Of Katharina Linden Helen Grant](#)

www.independent.co.uk

[Free Agent Jeremy Duns](#)

www.crimetime.co.uk

[The Public Prosecutor Jef Geeraerts](#)

www.crimetime.co.uk

[Winged With Death John Baker](#)

www.crimetime.co.uk

[\[More Book Reviews\]](#)

[Home](#) > [Book Reviews](#) > Neon Noir: Contemporary American Crime Fiction

Neon Noir: Contemporary American Crime Fiction

[Eddie Duggan](#)

In Neon Noir, a fascinating companion volume to his earlier Pulp Culture, Woody Haut discusses the later work of such key hard-boiled American writers as Chester Himes, Jim Thompson, Ross McDonald, John D. Macdonald, et al. Haut's latest work makes frequent use of the term 'neon noir', even adopting this alliterative couplet for its title. In coining the term 'neon noir', Haut seeks to combine the image of mid-twentieth century North American urbanity invoked by the neon sign, together with the cheap and sleazy connotations that are conveyed by this ubiquitous electronic light. While the neon light came to symbolise American culture and values (and simultaneously, all that was 'wrong' with American culture: bright, brash, electronic, superficial), it did so from the 1930s. In James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), restaurateur Nick Papadakis invests in a neon sign for his diner. The neon sign is also a familiar image of sleaze as it flashes through countless windows of cheap hotels in American cinema of the 1940s and 50s. For Haut though, 'neon noir' fiction spans the period from the mid-1960s to the 1990s. Haut's 'neon noir' writers are the 'descendants of such hard-boiled culture writers as Jim Thompson, David Goodis, Charles Williams and Dorothy B. Hughes' (p. 4). For Haut, the 'neon-noir' protagonist is no longer the wise-cracking know-all of the hard-boiled era, but is now a psychologically damaged denizen of 'a morally ambiguous world in which people are capable of perpetrating any and every outrage'. Plus ?a change. Haut opens his survey with the claim that contemporary crime fiction blurs the line separating fiction and reality (p. 2). It's not clear, however, how this gambit squares with his later assertion that, in the pre-1970s era, Chester Himes' s Harlem was 'a product of [Himes's] imagination' and 'even Jim Thompson ... would never have suggested his work replicated reality' [my emphasis], particularly as Haut draws our attention to John D. Macdonald's *Lew Archer*, who reads the small ads in the LA Times because 'they sometimes tell you more about LA than the news' (p. 17). Himes' and Thompson's-in fact any-prose fiction is just as much a product of various ideological and economic forces as small ads-or, indeed, crime-and, as such, can be no less valid cultural barometers than small ads. Encyclopedic in scope, the work evaluates the novels of Charles Willeford, George V. Higgins, Lawrence Sanders, Sara Paretsky, Walter Moseley and George Pelecanos, as well Elmore Leonard, Andrew Vachss, James Ellroy, K. C. Constantine, and many others, in their cultural and economic context. Finishing with an eight-page filmography of neon noir, 'Screening Neon', a selection of recent (and not so recent) films-from *Point Blank* (1967) to *Jackie Brown* (1998)-with brief comments by Haut on each. Some minor niggles aside, Neon Noir is a solid work which will make an essential addition to the reference shelf of anyone who takes their American crime fiction seriously.

[Comments \[0\]](#) | [Email Story](#)

[del.icio.us](#) | [Digg This](#) | [Newsvine](#) | [NowPublic](#) | [Reddit](#) | [Facebook](#) | [StumbleUpon](#)

Search the news archive:

The National Task Force

Building Safer Communities Across the U.K.
www.nationaltaskforce.co.uk

Too Young To Die

An International Detective Thriller By David Snowdon

Ads by Google