



Sara Paretsky: Detective fiction as trauma literature (Contemporary American and Canadian Writers MUP)

Cynthia S. Hamilton

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This is the first book-length study of Sara Paretsky's detective fiction. Paretsky is known for her influential V.I. Warshawski series, which transformed the masculine hard-boiled detective formula into a vehicle for feminist values. But Paretsky does more than this. She uses contemporary instances of corporate malfeasance and political corruption to indict the indifference, inadequacy, and betrayals of institutions charged with promoting the public good. Her novels also illustrate the extent to which detective fiction acts as a literature of trauma, allowing Paretsky to address the politics of agency in ways that go beyond the personal, for trauma always has a social and a political dimension. She not only uses her detective to examine the dynamics and impact of coercive power, but also to explore potential strategies for resistance.

Paretsky's work exploits the way detective fiction mirrors the writing of history. Here, Paretsky uses the form to expose the partiality of historical accounts-whether they be personal, institutional, or national-that authorise the 'forgetting' of a particularly insidious kind. Significantly, all these issues are explored within the framework of the traditional hard-boiled detective novel. As a result, Paretsky's achievement forces us to acknowledge the deeply subversive potential of detective fiction.

Paretsky has already been recognised as an important figure in the development of the hard-boiled tradition, but not, as this indicates, for all the right reasons. The book is essential reading for students and critics of detective fiction.

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