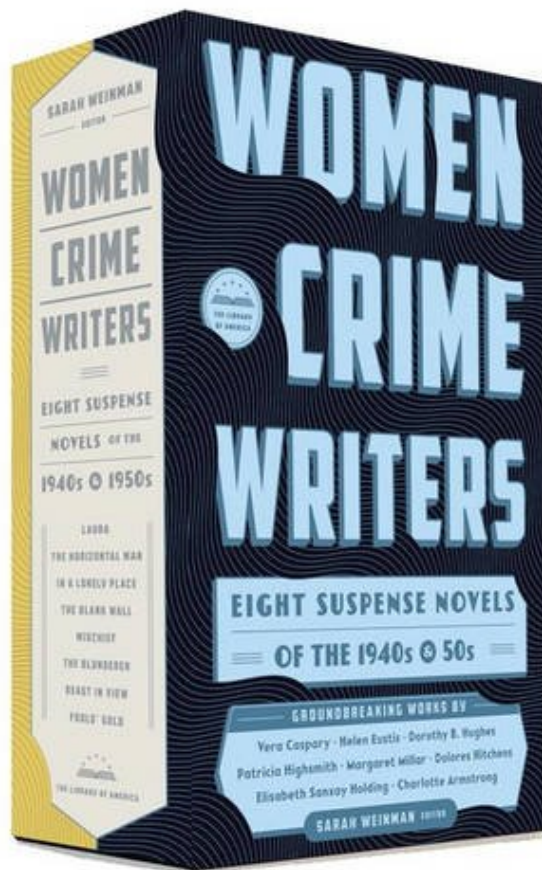
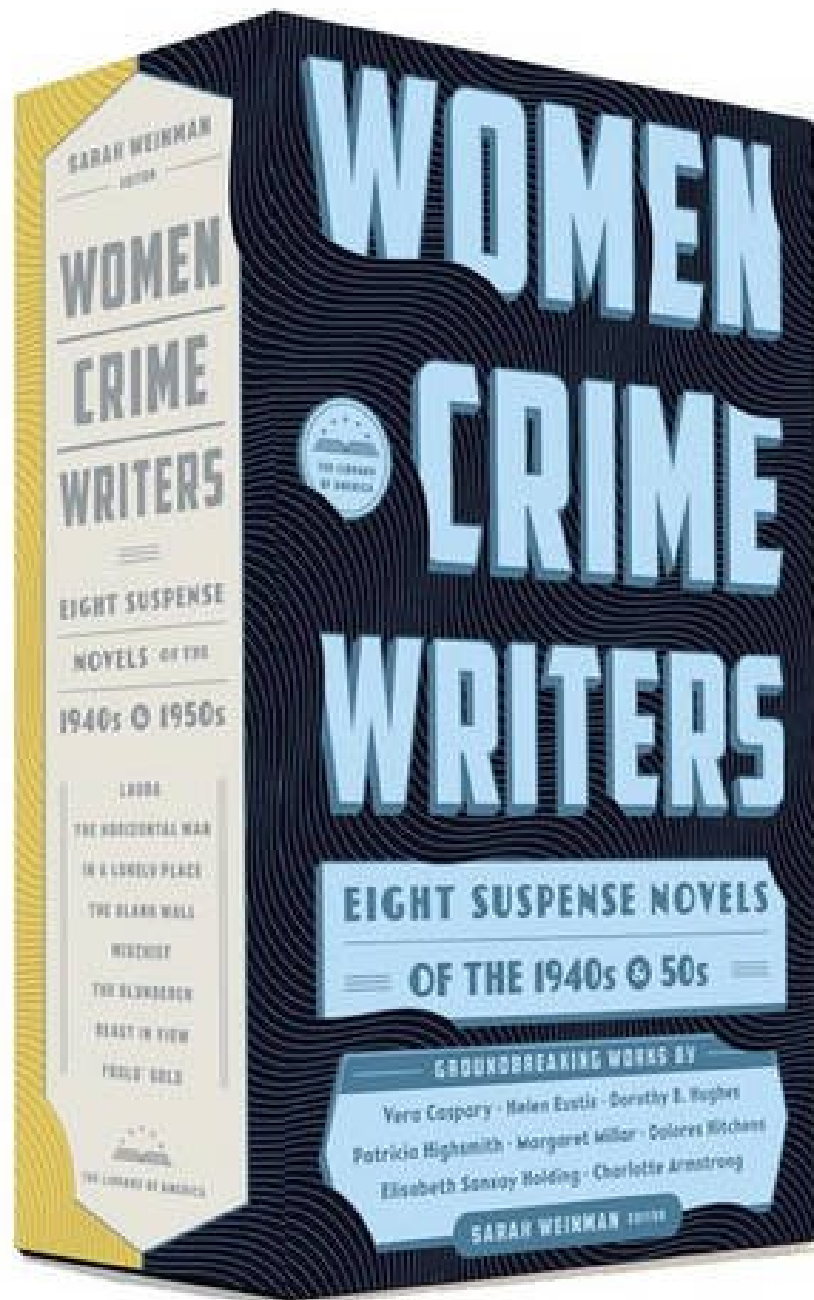


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Review

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The Library of America and editor Sarah Weinman redefine the classic era of American crime fiction with a landmark collection of eight brilliant novels by the female pioneers of the genre, the women who paved the way for Gillian Flynn, Tana French, and Lisa Scottoline.

Though women crime and suspense writers dominate today's best seller lists, the extraordinary creations of the mid-century female pioneers of the genre are largely unknown. Their work, influential in its day and still vibrant and extraordinarily riveting, is long overdue for rediscovery. Now The Library of America makes these classic books available in a deluxe two-volume collector's edition.

From the 1940s, here are Vera Caspary's famous career girl mystery *Laura*; Helen Eustis's intricate campus thriller *The Horizontal Man*; Dorothy B. Hughes's *In a Lonely Place*, the terrifyingly intimate portrait of a serial killer; and Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's *The Blank Wall*, in which a wife in wartime is forced to take extreme measures when her family is threatened.

The 1950s volume includes Charlotte Armstrong's *Mischief*, the nightmarish drama of a child entrusted to a psychotic babysitter; Patricia Highsmith's brilliant *The Blunderer*, which tracks the perverse parallel lives of two men driven toward murder; Margaret Millar's *Beast in View*, a relentless study in madness; and Dolores Hitchens's *Fools' Gold*, a hard-edged tale of robbery and redemption.

Boxed set contains:

Women Crime Writers: Four Suspense Novels of the 1940s (Library of America #268)

Women Crime Writers: Four Suspense Novels of the 1950s (Library of America #269)

Both volumes are available separately in print and e-book editions.

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Most helpful customer reviews

21 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

Women Crime Writers in the Library of America

By Robin Friedman

The Library of America has been expanding the canon of classic American literature by publishing the works of obscure writers and by publishing genre writing. This new LOA two-volume box set, "*Woman Crime Writers: Four Suspense Novels of the 1940's and 1950's*" expands the scope of American literature it deems worthy of preservation in both ways: it includes works by little-known authors which have gone out-of-print, and it includes genre writing in the form of crime fiction which critics at one time did not take seriously. The box set includes four suspense novels from the 1940s written by four different women authors and four suspense novels from the 1950s written by an additional four women. Sarah Weinman, an authority on women's crime fiction selected and edited both volumes. Weinman has edited an earlier volume of women's crime fiction, "*Troubled Daughters, Twisted Wives: Stories from the Trailblazers of Domestic Suspense*".

The eight novels in this anthology are enjoyable, suspenseful, and psychologically astute. They enhanced my appreciation of American writing and of crime fiction and introduced me to several authors I didn't know. The books in the anthology are crime fiction written by women, but beyond that fact, they resist easy generalization.

The first volume includes four novels from the 1940s, and they tend to focus on the United States in the WW II years and in the immediately following years. Perhaps the single most impressive work in both volumes is Dorothy Hughes' novel, "*In a Lonely Place*" which tells from the inside the story of a serial killer recently returned from service in WW II. The detective who ultimately brings him down also is a WW II veteran who had been a close friend of the killer. This is a chilling, insightful novel with portrayals of the killer, the detective, and two important women: the detective's wife and the would be lady friend of the killer. In 1950, "*In a Lonely Place*" was made into a film starring Humphrey Bogart, but the book and author have been largely forgotten.

Elisabeth Holding's novel, "*In a Blank Wall*" also shows the United States during the WW II years. The primary character is a housewife whose husband is away at war. The woman, who is devoted to her family and home, becomes involved in a world of killings, crime, and potential romance. She discovers that she has the internal resources to acquit herself in the situation.

The other two books in the volume also show American life in the 1940s but are less concerned with the war. Vera Caspary's novel "Laura" tells the story of an independent career woman who is also searching for love. The novel is told from three different perspectives. Caspary's book became a famous film directed by Otto Preminger and inspired an even more famous song. But the book has been little-read and deserves to be known in its own right. Helen Eustis' "The Horizontal Man" tells the story of the murder of a young professor at an exclusive women's college. Finding the killer is of less importance in enjoying the novel than the portrayal of college life and of character that the book offers.

The 1950's volume also includes four novels, and they tend to focus on American life after the war in the 50s. The volume includes a book by a well-known author, Patricia Highsmith, "The Blunderer". Highsmith's novel, "The Talented Mr. Ripley" is included in an earlier LOA collection of noir writing from the 1950s. "The Blunderer" is set in the complacent American suburbia of the early 1950s. The book involves a twinning similar to that of "The Talented Mr Ripley." A corporate lawyer trapped in an unhappy marriage sees a news article about a man who murdered his wife at a bus rest stop, and he is tempted to do the same. Highsmith's novel develops the relationship between the two men and the two apparent murders, as the deaths are pursued by a viciously brutal police detective.

The remaining three novels in the 1950s volume are by less well known authors with two of the books, "Beast in View" by Margaret Millar and "'Fools Gold" by Dolores Hitchens out of print at the time of the LOA volume's publication. Both of these books are finds and both are set in the Los Angeles area. Millar's novel tells the story of lonely, isolated people suffering from lack of purpose in the years following WW II. The primary character is a reclusive wealthy spinster, 30, who begins to receive threatening phone calls and the investment counselor and family friend who attempts to help her. This is a highly taut novel with strong character development and portrayals of the underside of city life.

Hitchen's "Fools Gold" is an even more obscure novel that focuses on a pair of juvenile delinquents and a young woman. The two young men see the possibility of easy money in burglarizing a home owned by an elderly woman. The young woman in the story is her ward and becomes a reluctant participant. Hard and seasoned older crooks, led by a ex-convict called Big Tom attempt to muscle in on the job. With the punks and the crooks working against each other, the heist unravels. In this book, as in the other books in the anthology, plot is secondary to character. This book became the basis of a 1964 film by Jean-Luc Goddard, "Band of Outsiders" but the book has been neglected.

The remaining book in the collection, "Mischief" by Charlotte Armstrong also is best-known for its film adaptation in 1952's "Don't Bother to Knock" starring Marilyn Monroe. The book shows in part the contrast between big city and small time life. An editor and his wife and nine year old daughter are in New York City for a convention. While in their hotel, they hire a babysitter unknown to them who proves to be psychotic and threatening to their child. The book show how people tend to be isolated from one another and reluctant to become responsible or involved with other people. The threat to the young girl works to bring people together and helps them to understand and appreciate their relationships to one another.

Sarah Weinman and the LOA deserve praise for this excellent box set. It collects and makes accessible books and authors worth reading and preserving. The set will enhance the reader's appreciation and understanding of American creativity and of the scope and diversity of the thought and writing our country has produced. The box set includes short biographies of each of the eight authors. Sarah Weinman's own discussion of the anthology and comments by other writers on each of the eight books are included on the LOA website. The Library of America kindly sent me a review copy of this box set.

Robin Friedman

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Lots of Great Fun in this Boxed Set

By David Crumm

I'm a long-time collector of Library of America editions, especially having followed their mystery/noir publications and volumes on historic eras of journalism and public documents. I have their entire Philip Roth series and also the special set of "books" from classic Broadway shows. I say that to underline the importance of this publishing effort over many years. I like the look and feel of these editions. They're convenient to carry and read and this new edition is more of the same -- a top-rate set of books.

In the mystery-noir genres, I've found myself reading twice through the earlier Crime Novels set (1883011493). And now I'm certain I may read these more than once over the years. I'm very familiar with some of these classics, Laura especially, and I'm discovering some new gems I haven't read before.

I'm writing this review to suggest a way to enjoy this set with a friend. In this case, I'm going through these with my wife, who also loves mysteries. We're reading each one and then we're also watching the classic films made of several of these. If you're thinking about investing in this set, that's a fun way to think about it -- challenge a spouse or a friend to read with you -- and then watch the films together.

Lots of fun!

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Great Stories not a great job of book printing.

By Steven Ferré

I've only read two of the 8 stories, but am loving the style and sophistication. People really were smarter thinkers before we willingly turned over our intelligence to the on-eyed ogre that is television. My one criticism is that the copy I received has a serious printing flaw: random pages are extremely faint...barely legible.

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