Interdisciplinary Humanities

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Front Cover Image: Steven Yu, www.cargocollective.com/stevenyu

Out of the Past and Into the Night:
The *Noir* Vision in American Culture

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Out of the Past and Into the Night:
The *Noir* Vision in American Culture

Contents

Editor's Introduction: The Infinite Night

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> *These* "noir" *films no longer have any common ground with run-of-the-mill police dramas . . . There is nothing remarkable in the fact that today's viewers are more responsive to this stamp of verisimilitude, of "true to life," and, why not, to the kind of gross cruelties which actually exist and the past concealment of which has served no purpose: the struggle to survive is not a new story.[1]*
> ~Nino Frank "A New Kind of Police Drama: The Criminal Adventure" (1946)

When American movies made their way across the Atlantic after World War II, the French couldn't help but notice their dark and emotionally bankrupt quality, dubbing them *noir*. The hard-boiled texts by authors like Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain offered the inspiration for a brand of film that featured moody, morally desolate characters whose anguish was reflected in the big, dark, city as neon despair winked against rain-slicked pavement. These alienated, angst-ridden antiheroes struggled against inner demons echoed by the strains of a solitary jazz trumpet as it floated from an anonymous apartment window or a crowded jazz club. These were films where femme fatales lured naïve tough guys into impossible situations and everyone killed with class.

Classic noir, those dark films created in Hollywood from the 1930s to the late 1950s, reflected the anxiety found in American homes and society during and immediately following World War II. With classic noir, Hollywood produced a film that was dark, moody, claustrophobic, and paranoid. Contemporary moviegoers recognized the dreary reflection of American culture, a style Hollywood dubbed "red meat crime cycles."[2] Contrary to what many would believe, these films took advantage of censorship and access barriers while being made within wartime governmental film budgets—yes, for film noir barriers acted as catalysts for some of the best films ever produced in Hollywood. Studios saved money by turning down the lights and creating those shadows where criminals lurked. The Hollywood illusion factory and its

high-cost sets were either recycled or done away with by moving outdoors as semi-documentary styles used light-weight cameras (many developed during the war) in the real crime-ridden urban areas of San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. B movies were often ignored by studio executives leaving filmmakers free to experiment, and experiment they did.

One source of inspiration for directors was the big-budget film *Citizen Kane* (1941). Orson Welles' techniques were easily transferable to the B picture, including a morally-bankrupt protagonist, voice-over narration, deep focus shots featuring the mise-en-scene, fractured time via flashbacks, and low angle shots with claustrophobic ceilings. These were all methods borrowed to stay in line with low-budgets while working as a blueprint for the look of the new crime dramas. B films were assigned to unknown and new-to-Hollywood directors, such as the wave of émigré auteurs coming from war-torn Europe: Billy Wilder, Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak, Otto Preminger and Alfred Hitchcock. These émigrés brought their German Expressionist souls across the Atlantic favoring the gritty new drama with its low-key lighting, canted angles, and chiaroscuro light and shadow and were given virtual autonomy over these low-budget, second-feature films.

Nickel and dime budgets also inhibited actor salaries and filming schedules. Limited shooting time served to motivate innovative directors such as Edgar Ulmer who reportedly filmed *Detour* (1945) in six days; his tight scheduled forced him to shoot many scenes at night which were perfect for the standard noir aesthetic. Actors and actresses starred in these B-list films as they were rising up through the Hollywood machinery, like Ava Gardner whose first major role was in *The Killers* (1946) and the "Queen of the Bs," and Marie Windsor, whose first memorable role was in *Force of Evil* (1948). Intermediate films also benefitted from actors who were on their way down including John Garfield, who was a target of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and, therefore a Hollywood pariah. Garfield's last pictures were all films noir: *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), *Force of Evil* (1948), and *He Ran All the Way* (1951).

Noir films not only flourished with skinny wallets, but they also employed editing methods and off-screen allusion to outmaneuver censorship by the Hays Office. The glimmer of an anklet in *Double Indemnity* (1944), coy looks over a lunch counter in *Fallen Angel* (1945), a lipstick rolling across the floor in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), and most especially, the lighting and smoking of cigarettes found in every film noir title ever produced, can convey a subtle and not-so subtle sensuality while adhering to the production code. Violence is suggested by the tightening of a scarf as in *99 River Street* (1953), the hail of bullets followed by a hand sliding down a bed post as shot in *The Killers* (1946), or delivered by pushing a wheel-chair bound old lady down a flight of stairs in *Kiss of Death* (1947). Each gruesome scene was carefully cut to avoid any real glimpse of violence, just a laugh, a scream, the back of the chair, and a thud, to keep the audiences and studios happy.

War-time and post-war-time audiences appreciated the incorporation of the psychological theories (even if unaware) of Sigmund Freud and the philosophical theories popularized by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Robert Porfirio in "No Way Out: Existentialist Motifs in Film *Noir*" describes the existentialist viewpoint found in film noir as "an outlook which begins with a disoriented individual facing a confused world where there are no transcendental values or moral absolutes, a world devoid of any meaning but the one man creates himself."[3] Sounds like the milieu of almost every noir film, a milieu readily discovered by a scan through a noir title catalog: *"Cornered. One Way Street. No Way Out. Caged. The Dark Corner. In a Lonely Place."*[4]

After World War II, classic film noir changed alongside audiences and society in response to the disillusionment of soldiers returning from the war in a post-industrial age, and the experiences of women, who more autonomous during the war but who were being relegated back to home and kitchen. Post-war film noir existed in a different world, a world contending with the rise of unions targeted by HUAC to the chagrin of job seeking soldiers. The civil rights movement burgeoned as people became conscious of the interests of minorities. After all, African-American soldiers had battled and won against German and Japanese racist ideologies only to come home and face segregation policies in a country where jobs were scarce. The baby boom led to a rise in youth culture which created a huge market for children's fare, lessening the desire for films noir. Finally, the arrival of the cold war, involving world powers obsessed with the space race and the nuclear bomb created a society-wide apprehension about world-wide annihilation. Movies and movie protagonists changed, from the classic flawed knight of the *Maltese Falcon* (1941) to the amoral tough guy of Mike Hammer fame to the outright corrupt authority in *Touch of Evil* (1958). Anxiety over police corruption and incompetence, and the "other" found lurking along the borders of society is reflected in *Border Incident* (1949) and *Touch of Evil* (1958), while the paranoia over the atomic bomb is radiated in *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955).

Defining noir is as hard as trying to see around a darkened corner in a foggy city. Aficionados and scholars debate whether film noir is a genre, style, or movement. There is the shared iconography and mythology of the pulp-fiction genre led by émigré directors. There is a noir style that shares elements of cinematic techniques and methods including lighting, acting and settings. There is a noir movement of films produced by Hollywood from the 1930s to the late 1950s. In addition, there are those who would consider great noir films produced outside Hollywood: films such as Jean-Pierre Melville's homage to New York neon, *Two Men in Manhattan* (*Deux hommes dans Manhattan* France 1959) and the censored as un-American film, *The Wages of Fear* (*La Salaire de la Peur* France 1953) or Akira Kurosawa's *Stray Dog* (*Nora inu* Japan 1949) as well as the blacklisted director, Jules Dassin's *Rififi* (*Du rififi chez les hommes* France 1955) and his British *Night and the City* (1950). The meaning of film noir leaves an argument brewing in every diner or dive reflecting the dissonance so often found in the moral murk of its protagonists and settings.

During the 1970s, scholars began taking another look at the dark side of American filmmaking with neo-noir films such as Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974)*,* a movie that displays the look, feel, and sensibilities of classic noir. Retro-noir is self-aware and sentimentalizes noir by harkening back to the *good old days* of World War II and its immediate aftermath.[5] Tech-noir spawned *Blade Runner* (1982), a film set in the near future where a gloomy dystopia reflects an environmentally corrupt aesthetic mirrored in the characters' personalities as they question the essence of human nature. Today noir is also making its way into other mediums including comic books, with works such as Ed Brubaker's *Fatale* (2012-2014) and music videos like Bob Dylan's *The Night We Called It A Day* (2015). Hard-boiled fiction is still alive and well with works such as Walter Mosley's colorful and classically-set series featuring the hard-boiled Easy Rawlins, James Ellroy's classic noir narrative nonfiction, and Michael Connelly's archetype noir detective Hieronymus "Harry" Bosch, a man seemingly out of time.

From classic noir to neo-noir, this issue of *Interdisciplinary Humanities* examines the history, roots, issues, and theories of the noir vision in American culture as exemplified by literary and mass cultural fiction (films, texts, pulps, novels, art, comics) across time and through various literary lenses. These essays examine noir's interactions with historical, social, political, psychological and literary-cinematic contexts beginning with its existential and expressionistic roots to its postmodern evolution. The authors examine specific films and how they intertwine through the social fabric of its day as well as how audiences reinterpret, reinvent, or reread these texts. The writers in this edition show that noir is messy, hard to define, and dissonant while warning that trying to label it is as hard as grasping the cigarette smoke floating across every darkened movie screen.

William Burns looks at noir's roots in his essay "Scream to Screen: The Philosophical and Aesthetic Origins of Film Noir" asserting that the pioneering filmmakers of post-World War I Germany looked to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as the artistry of Edvard Munch who channeled Nietzsche's ideas through his own angst-filled artwork, as creative foundations for film noir. Young Germans inspired by these ideas formed artistic communities that struggled to survive in Weimar Germany's feeble economy leading some to the film trade, one of the few thriving industries. The confluence of existentialism and expressionism met on celluloid in Robert Wiene's 1920 masterpiece *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* to germinate the noir aesthetic.

The doppelgänger motif serves as the unconscious transition from noir's beginnings to the present day as explored by Ed Cameron in "The Film Noir Doppelgänger: Alienation, Separation, Anxiety." In classical film noir, the doppelgänger motif remained mostly concealed through the figurative use of shadows, mirrors, voice-overs, framed shots, and the femme fatale. During the revisionist period of the 1960s and 1970s, what remained latent in the classical films is made explicit, making the revisionist films noir themselves

doppelgängers of the original. In the neo-noir films from the 1980s and 1990s, the noir doppelgänger has grown large enough to become an actualized external character within the film's diegetic space. In these three periods film noir demarcates the doppelgänger as a figure of alienation in the classical film noir, separation in revisionist noir, and anxiety in neo noir.

Anxiety is also reflected in noir's shadowy settings and their destruction. Brian Hollins examines the rough and gritty urban streets in "The Role of Locations in Film Noir Movies" offering a photographic essay exploring how the increased use of outdoor locations during the classic film noir era enriched and shaped the genre by offering up new opportunities for directors to enhance their craft. Locations were cleverly used to set the mood or psychologically manipulate viewers and even hint at the verboten. They add familiarity, making viewers feel part of the action, effectively blurring the demarcation between the real and the imagined. Today's viewers embark on a nostalgic reaction to the cultural and physical changes of any given location highlighting images of evolving fashions, beloved places now demolished and disappearing neighborhoods. Nostalgia allows readers pause to ponder these changes and how they are influencing our lives.

Sheri Chinen Biesen, Ph.D. looks at changes in society through the lens of the classic noir filmmaker, "Joseph H. Lewis and the Changing Noir Vision of American Culture: From Gothic Heroines to Cold War Gangsters." Lewis' noir films reveal changes in Hollywood's classic noir crime cycle as America's culture, film, industry, and gender roles evolved over the postwar era. Lewis' noir cinema elevated low-budget filmmaking to an art form. Lewis directed an array of low-budget noir films—*My Name is Julia Ross* (1945), *So Dark the Night* (1946), *The Undercover Man* (1949), *Gun Crazy* (1950), *A Lady Without a Passport* (1950), *Cry of the Hunted* (1953) and *The Big Combo* (1955)—at many different studios as independent production flourished in Hollywood. Lewis' stylish noir gangster films provide a unique perspective on shifting cultural and industrial considerations as noir films evolved from earlier 1940s's female-centered *roman noir* gothic thrillers to more masculine postwar terrain as a growing Cold War climate arose.

Eddie Muller, the Czar of Noir, and creator of the Noir City Film Festivals offers his insights into film noir. The author of numerous books and the host of TCM's "Heart of Darkness" summer noir film festival, believes noir's "most compelling stories involve desperate characters on a course of self-destruction and what is most emblematic of 'true' noir is that these tales are told in the first person—the audience is meant to empathize with the doomed protagonist, generally someone who knows what they are doing is wrong, perhaps even fatal, *and they do it anyway*. That is the crucial factor in great noir. Let's call it 'empathy with the damned.'" Muller's Film Noir Foundation works to restore film noir and is currently interested in Poverty Row studio pics and good examples of foreign films having just completed the 2015 restoration of *Los Tallos Amargos* (Argentina 1956). He's written numerous books including *Dark City Dames* about those "women that every man secretly desires, but

never actually meets" and *Gun Crazy*, an examination of Lewis' classic. In the end Muller believes "no matter how far behind the curtain you go, studying [noir] film, tracing its origins, reading all the scholarship—it still manages to hit you on a purely visceral, emotional level. It plugs right into you in a way you can't think yourself out of."

Kevin Henderson, Ph.D. takes a look under the fedora at the classic noir detective in "'Why Do You Make Me Do This?': Spectator Empathy, Self-Loathing Lawmen and Nicholas Ray's Noir Vision in *On Dangerous Ground*." His article highlights the radical shift from the Chandler tradition of stoic detectives to the emotionally volatile lawmen of early 1950s film noir. Self-loathing protagonists like Ray's Officer Wilson both intensify and complicate viewers' sympathetic and meta-emotional responses. Shifts in Ray's cinematic approach to the disorienting tones of Bernard Herrmann's score also serve to disrupt viewers' affective engagement with noir's most common trope: the world-weary yet right-minded investigator. Ray's influence is still seen today across a wide spectrum of neo-noirs, particularly in Curtis Hansen's 1997 adaption of James Ellroy's *L.A. Confidential.*

A study of film noir would not be complete without looking at the works of Orson Welles. "*The Lady from Shanghai*: A Reworking of the *Noir* Standard" by Austin Pidgeon traces the many creative ways Orson Welles inverts *noir* standards to produce a new, self-reflexive, and optimistic interpretation of the genre in the 1947 film. Pidgeon asserts that the film drew largely on noir conventions to render anew the intentional sense of malaise and disruptions film *noirs* sought to produce. Welles turned those tropes on themselves, repositioning them in an ironic light that brought a freshly disturbing touch to a then-familiar genre by using open and outdoor settings, deceptive chiaroscuro, and manipulations of the actor/actress reputations in its characters. Its narrative challenges the typically deterministic world view of the *noir* genre and offers an optimistic existential understanding of one's fate in the natural world.

A study of what is arguably the last classic noir film, Geoffrey Green's "Choosing 'between the morality of the law and the morality of simple justice': The Intersections of Culture, Justice, and National Identity in Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958)" looks at Welles's film masterpiece as a tableau of intersection—not only of mind, body, time, and space, but also of the constructs of national identity, borders, and the dangers of vigilantism. From the tour de force continuous opening shot (wherein a "ticking noise inside" Zita's head is revealed as an exterior bomb that shatters the cultural constructs of the border between the United States and Mexico) to the end of the film (in which the corrupt and debased Detective Quinlan is revealed as having violated the codes of humanistic justice), Welles has created a probing and profound vision of cultural intersection that was years ahead of its time. Welles described his film as epitomizing the "traditions of classical humanism" reflecting his commitment to social justice at time when those ideals were often seen as annoying or inconvenient. These intersections still challenge us in

a world of conflicting ideals, ethics, and values making *Touch of Evil* as compellingly relevant today as when it was first released in 1958.

Ezekiel Crago examines both of Welles' masterpieces, *The Lady from Shanghai* and *Touch of Evil* in his essay "Advocating Incredulity: Orson Welles, Film Noir, and the Suspension of Belief" and argues that the films' use of frames and the act of framing performs a critique of American Cold-War hegemony that rationalizes racism, xenophobia, and the exploitation of the working class. Welles's storytelling techniques enable the viewer to think about the frame of the narrative itself, while the films depict the danger of believing stories and the power of storytelling.

Leaving classic noir in the rear view mirror, "*Black Widow,* Gender Criticism, and the Narrative Agency of the Femme Fatale," Larry Shillock looks at Bob Rafelson's 1987 film to discover how the femme fatale exercises a narrative agency both violent and self-affirming as she asserts her will in the world. The film focuses on two women—a serial killer and an investigator—and the ways they advance their interest while negotiating gender identity. In keeping with the noir tradition, the film asserts the femme fatale's command of time and movement; it extends the emphasis on women's agency by turning to an FBI agent who, working independently, investigates the femme fatale by plotting in ways that are no less determinative. Taken together, the two characters mark their distance from the hardboiled tradition while underscoring the possibilities of new stories and different kinds of critical agency for women.

Kenneth Lota brings this group of essays into the 21st century by studying how contemporary authors Megan Abbott and Gillian Flynn reinvent the *noir* trope of the *femme fatale*. Lota looks beyond the 1940s and 1950s *femme fatale*, a powerful, enduring, disturbing image of femininity, and one that persists in popular culture today to Abbot and Flynn's works as they re-imagine this well-known archetype in order to critique gender norms of both *noir's* original historical context and our own moment. Lota examines Abbott's *Die A Little* and analyzes the way in which she deconstructs the familiar *femme fatale*/good girl binary through the book's female protagonists. In Flynn's *Gone Girl,* Lota looks at how the main character subverts reader expectations of a *femme fatale* in order to comment on contemporary gender relations.

Another look at the 21ˢᵗ century noir aesthetic is highlighted in "Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* Trilogy as a Noir View of American Social Tensions" as Patrick Russell examines how Hollywood at the beginning of the twenty-first century has turned to noir aesthetics to index and expose widespread American anxieties about the state's reduced role within global neoliberalism. *The Dark Knight* trilogy demonstrates that social tensions cannot be eliminated by only a strong rule of law because the neoliberalism that dictates the state's role in combating crime is the cause of the crime. When Batman restores order, he restores the underlying social tensions that led to disorder. As a noir view, *The Dark Knight* trilogy's interrogation of American social and political order reveals underlying tensions Batman cannot overcome.

What a great trip down the shadowy alleys of film noir where squealing tires announce a heist, signal pursuit or a get-away and sirens may or may not deliver justice on those dark, rain-slicked streets—where the infinite night conjures up hard-boiled disillusionment. I want to thank Geoffrey Green who reminded me of the films that I loved to watch on my black-and-white television in a different century and whose seminar in noir helped title this edition. As a noir fan, I was always intrigued by the women; those dames knew how to dress, how to drink, how to smoke, how to kill, how to kiss, how to love, but mostly, how to live—even if they had to die for it.

Notes

[1] Nino Frank, "A New Kind of Police Drama: The Criminal Adventure," *Film Noir Reader 2,* ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions), 2003: 18.
[2] Stanley, Fred, "Hollywood Crime and Romance; Hollywood Round-Up," *The New York Times*, Nov. 14, 1944.
[3] Robert G. Porfirio, "No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the *Film Noir*," *Film Noir Reader,* ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions), 2006: 81.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Green, Geoffrey. Email. Nov. 21, 2014.

Scream to Screen: The Philosophical and Aesthetic Origins of Film Noir

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Discussion about the origins and legacy of film noir can have an almost biblical quality. Noir traces from Hollywood back to its expressionist roots in post-World War I Germany where groundbreaking films and influential filmmakers flourished. This analysis often leads to one film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). However, to understand how the noir aesthetic developed, it is important to realize the exploration and examination of noir should not stop at *Caligari.* The innovation behind the "noir look" drew their inspiration from the expressionist artists who created amid the despair of Weimar Germany, but the lineage does not end there. The aesthetic links extends to the expressionist brush strokes of Edvard Munch and to the existentialist philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Existentialism is as much a part of expressionism as shadows are a part of noir film. Expressionism arose at a tumultuous time in the world. In the late 19th century, new advances in science, technology and philosophy had a wide-ranging impact. It was the time of Edison, Darwin and Nietzsche, each a revolutionary in his own right.[1] The world changed forever when the work of these men became a part of the culture and the discourse; the artistic community would react. In Germany, the expressionist filmmakers embraced existentialism resulting in the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.*

The seeds of noir were sown with *Caligari* and its creative team, director Robert Wiene, writer Carl Mayer, producer Erich Pommer and art directors Hermann Warm, Walter Reimann and Walter Rohrig.[2] They would go on to write, produce, or design the sets for films crafted by artists who would become noir legends. *Caligari's* shadow touched films directed by F.W. Murnau[3] and Fritz Lang,[4] as well as, films written, shot or staged by Edgar Ulmer[5] and Karl Freund.[6] To the noir fan, these names conjure images from *Nosferatu* (1922), *Metropolis* (1927), *M* (1931), *Detour* (1945), *Key Largo* (1948) and many more.

Linking Nietzsche to film noir is not a new phenomenon. Author Mark T. Conrad has written about the Nietzsche's impact on noir, however, he places emphasis on Nietzsche's effect on the narrative rather than the aesthetic. Conrad notes the philosopher's influence on pulp detective novels of the 1930s stating, "it's through hard boiled literature that noir films get their existential, pessimistic outlook."[7] Conrad, echoing the belief of Robert Porfirio, also writes:

> What makes a film a film noir is a particular mood, tone or sensibility, a particular outlook on life. This is clear because it's that tone and sensibility that. . . links the literature and the films. Thus, the narrative elements (storytelling conventions) and the filmmaking techniques (oblique camera angels, deep focus, low-key lighting, etc.) are. . . secondary to the mood or sensibility. They are used to communicate that mood or sensibility, but it's the latter that makes film noir.[8]

Conrad is correct that subject matter helps define noir and that there is an existentialist connection to the aloof, callous anti-hero of pulp novels. However, the existential aesthetic should not be considered a secondary element when both the narrative and aesthetic originate with Nietzsche. Discussions of noir often inspire debate. For example, scholars and critics are strongly divided on the question of whether or not noir is a genre. Therefore, exploring the origins of the noir aesthetics may be a worthy endeavor.

Friedrich Nietzsche believed the meaning of an object lies in its origins.[9] His book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872), fundamentally changed the concepts of how people should view the cultural, social and religious institutions governing their world and their lives. Nietzsche believed people should question their existence and place in the world; in addition, he challenged how one's mind should interpret art. Though his focus is 5th century B.C.E. drama and not late 19th-century painting or cinema, his writings have guided critics and scholars for over 150 years.[10] Nietzsche notes that since all Greek drama and tragedy shared the same origins as music, many think they should share the same emotional response; yet he believed this was not the case. The Greeks viewed tragedy through a moral lens rather than an emotional one. Emphasis was placed on the flaws of a character, which led to his tragic demise, rather than the emotional reaction that his tragic fall would solicit. Nietzsche felt that both morality and emotion should be in balance.[11] To that end, he developed a methodology based on interconnected Greek archetypes.

Nietzsche labeled these two sides of the Janus Face the "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" after the Greek gods whose traits are characterized in drama and tragedy:

> The Apollonian…stresses the gentle reign of reason and intellect, pushing life to a somewhat unnatural ordering. The Dionysian is its exact opposite–it is governed by emotions and particularly passions, sometimes whipped to a self-destructive frenzy of excess.[12]

Since these two concepts are at odds, tension arises. Nietzsche called the Apollonian and Dionysian "art forces of nature."[13] Much like tectonic plates that push and drive against one another, there can be seismic, earth shattering movement. In this case, the tensions are artistic energies, which burst forth. Reason cannot stand without emotion: these two very human characteristics necessitate balance in nature. It is their oppositional force that allows creativity to materialize.

The impact of a God or Gods on all aspects of human history cannot be easily explained, so "God's Death" by Nietzsche's hand is a truly earth-shattering notion. Civilization, castes, behavior, law and beauty have been defined through the filter of religion. God's death means the moral confines of the church or a society are no longer in place. The death of God creates a vacuum which must be filled. Nietzsche believed the individual should fill the void:

> With the "death of God," that is, with the increasing irrelevance of the idea of the Judeo-Christian God, the "free" spirits (Nietzsche's true individuals) are challenged to assume divine prerogatives. Among the most important is the creating of life-affirming moral and life-enhancing aesthetic values.[14]

With this thought, many beliefs were now open for new interpretations, including the notions of beauty. Essentially, Nietzsche is saying that, "Art is to supplant religion,"[15] and man is to be empowered.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885), Nietzsche writes of the "superman." In hindsight, scholars believe this may have been an error in translating the original German text to English. When he writes Übermensch, it means "overman," not superman—a possible reference to Nietzsche's belief that man must have a "self-overcoming" ability.[16] Replacing God is a weighty responsibility to put on humankind. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he writes in Part I, Section 3, "Dead are all gods: now we want the overman to live—on that great noon, let this be our last will."[17] The idea that the Church, along with government and other social and cultural institutions are corrupt, meant to Nietzsche that they have abdicated their right to exert control over the people's lives. By questioning these entities, which are the real gods in our lives, Nietzsche is forcing people to wonder if much of what they have been told is in fact false, leading people to question what they believe. This results in individuals who question everything, including their existence. It is here where Nietzsche believes the empowered person, the Übermensch, can give meaning

to his or her own existence. Humankind, without the weight of the church or other institutions, has the duty to move humanity forward. This progression can be done in many ways: one is through art. Nietzsche himself stated, "Art is essentially the affirmation, the blessing, and the deification of existence."[18]

In his *Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche referred to the world as an "aesthetic phenomenon." Creating art, because it is based on choice, is the quintessence of existence; it puts us "in an active or artistic relation even to reality."[19] Without God to judge, or a society to act in God's name, the expressive nature of art can be explored. Existentialism helps the artist view the world with more clarity and with no constraints. As a result, "Nietzsche's epistemology had radical consequences for the concept of art and the nature of artistic activity. If there were no objective reality for the artists to "imitate," then the role of art was individual expression or creation."[20] To the artist, these ideas free the soul and open up the creative possibilities, leading to a reevaluation of aesthetic convention. For example, "classical realist art assumed the existence of a fixed and stable external 'reality' which art was to picture or mirror. But if this 'reality' dissolved in a flux of individual perceptions, then the artist was freed from the constraints of any fixed notion of art and reality."[21] These concepts were emancipating. Before Nietzsche, people judged their existence by their ability to think; now they could validate that existence by creating works of art. Art created in an existentialist world would not be bound by societal concepts of beauty, religious doctrine, or the traditional "rules" which had previously governed artists.

Nietzsche's revolution in thought caused many to question the purpose of their lives.[22] It also allowed some to come to the realization that political, religious and governmental institutions, which had shaped their lives, were corrupt. This led to the belief that much of what people accepted as truth was, in fact, false. This philosophy had a significant impact on many artists such as Norwegian Edvard Munch who, enabled by Nietzsche, turned his angst into expressionist art.[23] Munch would stoke the expressionist flame and inspire artists around the world. The fire would most notably take hold in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. Young German artists formed creative groups where they would push expressionism forward. Members of these groups included artistic innovators, such as Vasily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Mark Franz and Alfred Kubin.[24] These groups also included artists who would paint *Caligari's* world. Their work would be the foundation of expressionist film; their legacy would be the aesthetics of film noir.

The manifestation of existentialism in art is expressionism; the impact of this thought process was far reaching and nearly all aspects of creativity were touched by it. In some ways, Nietzsche provided the means for artists to see their subjects for the first time:

> Nietzsche's ideas were "in the air" and helped create the intellectual atmosphere in which expressionism emerged…Nietzsche's visionary, rhapsodic prose…provided

a liberating sense that the artist could create and express anything."[25]

Nietzsche's thoughts would create a cascading effect on creativity which was far-reaching in its impact on drama, literature, painting and film. The concept of aesthetic beauty no longer had to be a reproduction of reality as it had been. Beauty can be a representation of a thought that, according to the existentialists, the artist is obliged to express. Faces and objects had mirrored the subjects that inspired them. Instead, now they could be distorted and imprecise to represent the world they inhabit. The existentialist philosophy provided a figurative blank canvas, allowing an uninhibited creativity that could be the essence of the movement. The artist, with brush in hand, could create a version of his or her reality and, regardless of experiences, could connect with a viewer. The reason may be the autonomy that is associated with the choices an artist makes; "Since artistic practice is one of the prime examples of free human activity, it is therefore also one of the privileged modes of revealing what the world is about."[26]

Not a new artistic notion, "the deliberate attempt to elicit an emotional response in the viewer. . . expressionism. . . {was} a characteristic of Hellenistic art."[27] The ancient Greeks, who Nietzsche heralded as the originators of drama and tragedy through Apollo and Dionysus, seemed to understand art and the artist's role in the society. In the same way the Existentialist thinkers challenged the norms of traditional philosophy, the expressionist artist challenged the conventions of the artistic community to create works that "override(s) fidelity to the actual appearance of things."[28] When Nietzsche describes this evolution in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he does so in almost violent terms:

> Thus the Apolline tears us away from the Dionysiac generality and causes us to take delight in individuals; it attaches the compassion which has been awakened in us to these individuals; through them it satisfies the sense of beauty which thirsts after great and sublime forms; it parades images of life before our eyes and stimulates us to comprehend in thought the core of life contained within them.[29]

To Nietzsche, the art that can be created through existentialism is stimulating, enticing and boundless. It is the essence of freedom and responsibility and the most human of endeavors.

These beliefs resonated with Edvard Munch and they must have been at the forefront of his mind when he was painting Nietzsche's portrait, more than five years after the philosopher's death. (See Fig. 1) The portrait was a commissioned work and would be more than just a painting to Munch. It would be another way for him to connect with the philosopher: "There were similarities between the spiritual journeys of Munch and Nietzsche with their

curiosity about the unconscious layers of perception and illusion."[30] Munch was seldom without a copy of a Nietzsche's work and it was Nietzsche's philosophy that influenced his approach to painting. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche wrote that behind the physical world is an "idea" that is part of the phenomenal, or unknown world. Munch would create works he called "soul paintings," which would convey a prototypical "idea." Partly for this reason, he would paint the same motifs over and over through the course of many years.[31] Nietzsche's influence on Munch is not unique; in fact, by 1906 the philosopher's impact was commonplace. The bold colors and swirling background were a common to Munch and his contemporaries. These elements would have been shocking a generation earlier. The departure from the accepted and preferred aesthetics of the art community had begun with whimsy, but was cultivated in earnest by the beliefs of Nietzsche.

Munch had already been exhibiting his work in Berlin and Vienna. In some places, his name was being mentioned in the same breath as Gauguin and Van Gogh. However, it was an exhibit in Prague that inspired the creation of young expressionists in Dresden, Germany known as Die Brücke.[32] They took their name, which means "The Bridge," from a passage in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, that made reference to modern day humanity's potential to be an "evolutionary bridge to a more perfect being in the future."[33] The group set its sights on society; they had contempt for the modern world that they felt imprisoned the masses. They viewed their social hierarchy and government as ignorant of art and intellect. A favorite of Die Brücke was Munch; in fact, many in Germany were enamored with the Norwegian: "Munch's reputation was established earlier in Germany than elsewhere in the world."[34] The world would eventually come to see what the Germans did in those early days of Munch's career.

To Die Brücke, Munch's type of expressionism was almost religious. These artists, banded together by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, were faced with the same changing world as Munch. It was "an age jostling to find some accommodation between God and Darwin, it was Nietzsche who carried Munch through to positive belief."[35] It was Munch who did the same for Die Brücke. Other artists were in Germany searching for a creative response to the world in which they were living and other groups formed. One, Der Blaue Reiter, gave many the outlets for which they were searching. This group, working in Munich Germany, had members from around Europe. Founded by Russian Vasily Kandinsky and German Mark Franz, the group included other notable artists such as August Mack, Alexei von Jawlenski, Marianne von Werefkin, Albert Bloch, Alfred Kubin and Paul Klee.[36] It was Kandinsky's work *The Blue Rider* (1903), which gave the group its name. Though often grouped together, Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter were very different at their core. Museum Curator Armin Zweite writes that the groups were frequently in opposition in their underlying principles. He notes:

> The sensuality of Die Brücke, their passion, worldliness and sense of the here and now, all conflicted with Der Blaue Reiter's intellectualism, their spirituality and their belief in an ideal future age. While Die Brücke were inspired by Nietzsche's life-affirming, vitalist philosophy, Der Blaue Reiter drew on various mystical, Romantic and symbolist sources.[37]

Austrian Alfred Kubin was a founder of Der Blaue Reiter and, like his peers in the group, he would create works that were controversial. During his life, Kubin wrote, drew and painted. His ghastly illustrations are his legacy. Grotesquely shaped figures are everywhere. In his 1901 work *Lady on a Horse,* an elongated hobbyhorse with razor blade like runners is being ridden by a thin woman in a top hat who seems unconcerned about the figures being chopped by the rocking horse. (See Fig. 2) Severed heads and monsters are also prevalent in his work—regardless of the subject. Kubin would contrast his drawings with deep contrasts of dark and light. He displays many of the traits associated with the disaffected artist of his time. He was emotionally in turmoil, suicidal at times and brooding. He dealt with his pain the way an artist should: "He [Kubin] had to formulate his thoughts in language and then translate the formulation into visual images."[38]

Kubin was influenced by Munch and some of his works echo the Norwegian's morbid subject matter and ability to convey emotion. It is apparent why Kubin's art was shaped by Munch and, in turn, his thoughts shaped by Nietzsche. He "saw the individual as a being of sovereignty who partook of both logical and the mysterious facets of existence."[39] The strong link to Nietzschian philosophy is evident. Kubin is advocating for the Übermensch and believed the Apollonian and Dionysian must both be present in a person for them to truly exist.

Kubin developed a strong friendship with writer Franz Kafka. In fact Kubin, who is remembered today more as a book illustrator, drew the images for Kafka's short story "The Country Doctor." In a 1977 article entitled "Two Fantastic Visions: Franz Kafka and Alfred Kubin," author Phillip Rhein draws a number of parallels between the two. He also makes a crucial point as to how these artists, be they part of a group or if they work in isolation, are all connected, and it is what connects them that is important. It is how a German philosopher, Norwegian painter, Austrian illustrator and a filmmaker, who may have never met can all be talked about as being part of a larger movement. It is how existentialism connects with expressionism. Rhein wrote,

> Ideologically, these two men belong to a generation of artists, who at the beginning of the twentieth century had to build anew the essential framework of the world. It is specifically in this building of the framework, or of providing a form for the

chaotic world of this time, that their art meets and that the point of comparison is established.[40]

This framework would be the truss that would support generations of artists to follow and is implanted in the bedrock of Nietzscheism.

With art in Germany thriving, a new publication was on hand to capture the energy and passion of the expressionists. Published in Berlin by Herwarth Walden, *Der Sturm*, which means "The Assault," was filled with criticism, accolades and pure excitement about the new wave of art in the early twentieth century. First published in 1910, the magazine was cheap in price, modern in format, and deliberately provocative in content; the weekly was designed to goad Berlin's conservative and complacent citizenry into an awareness of the modern.[41] Die Brücke and eventually Der Blaue Reiter were natural fits to be featured in a magazine that celebrated the avant-garde. Many credit *Der Sturm* with popularizing the term "expressionism." Walden would write, "'We call the art of this century expressionism, in order to distinguish itself from what is not art. We are thoroughly familiar with the fact that artists of previous centuries also sought expressionism. Only they did not know how to formulate it.'"[42]

Der Blaue Reiter was a casualty of World War I. The group died with one of its founders, Franz Marc, who fell on the battlefield in Verdun in 1916.[43] The war affected other Der Blaue Reiter artists. Russians Kandinsky, Jawlensky and Werefkin were forced to leave Germany, and August Macke also lost his life in combat.[44] The war had a profound impact on the art world beyond the deaths of Marc and Macke. Many struggled with the economic crisis and social upheaval that followed. Artists struggle financially in even the best times; the economy in Germany was weak and inflation ran wild. Disposable income that was once used by the wealthy to buy art was now used to buy fresh eggs, milk and meat. Faced with this reality, the remaining members of Der Blaue Reiter found employment where they could. For some, the fledgling film industry was a natural fit. Hermann Warm, Walter Rienman and Walter Rohrig, who were affiliated with *Der Sturm*, were not only able to leap from the canvases to the screen; they would use their talents to leave a crucial mark on cinema working on the expressionist film which laid the foundation for noir.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari took place in a world that was new to the film going audience, but was very familiar to the expressionist artist who created the painted backdrops and scenery. Much has been written about this film, especially its innovative mise-en-scene. From almost its debut, the film was called "expressionist," just like the art of the day. A 1921 *New York Times* review noted the film's "bizarre expressionist form…in a cubist world of intense relief and depth."[45] It is impossible to separate the form of the film from the content; in fact, some believe *Caligari* ushered in filmmaking where the form became the content, the style of a film meant more than the story. It is at this juncture where the influence of Nietzsche's existentialism and Munch's expressionism come together in the angular and distorted sets of *Caligari,* crafted by Warm, Reimann and Rohrig.[46] This group of art directors,

"recalled director Robert Wiene's initial objections to their ideas of a set reflecting the art of Alfred Kubin and other leading artists of expressionist cityscapes."[47] In fact, it was suggested that Kubin himself should be the art director for the film.[48] Again and again, Kubin's name is discussed as it related to his influence on cinematic set design. A review of a late 2008 exhibit of Kubin's work in the Neue Galerie in New York notes how "it's intriguing to recall that these drawings and illustrations were broadly disseminated and became, within a few years of their appearance, part of the 'mental furniture' of Berlin's pioneer filmmakers."[49] However, *Caligari's* Executive Producer, Erich Pommer was hesitant to go along with such a radical approach. He was convinced when told it would trim the cost of the production by reducing the amount of electricity needed to illuminate the set. Electricity was a rationed luxury in Weimar Germany.[50] Wiene was originally opposed to the idea of stylizing the set. One of the film's producers, Rudolf Meinert, gave the script to the art directors. The men "spent the whole day and part of the night reading through this very curious script." Hermann Warm would write, "'We realized that a subject like this needed something out of the ordinary in the way of sets. Reimann, whose painting in those days had expressionist tendencies, suggested doing the sets expressionistically. We immediately set to work roughing up designs in that style.'"[51] Wiene was convinced and agreed. Meinert, who was hesitant at first, told the three emphatically to, "'Do these sets as eccentrically as you can.'"[52] Wiene told his art team that the film must be crazy in every way and nothing must be normal.[53]

With very few right angles in the film, the sets are odd, yet engaging. (See Fig. 3) German filmmaker Jean Oser believed, decades later, the sets are still powerful: "They are still fantastic, they are painted sets and you forget completely that it was painted on the set. And you really accepted it as it is. It was expressionism." He would continue, "Expressionism was in opposition to Impressionism…it was the mind of the artist who saw certain things in a certain way. In impressionism you talk, in expressionism, you howled."[54] The expressionist approach to *Caligari* did more than make audiences howl; it made them cower in fear. Strokes of black paint on a large canvas did as much to terrorize people as any villain, monster or creature found in modern films. (See Fig. 4)

The minds of Rohrig, Reimann and Warm were also howling when they put brush to canvas. "'Films must be drawing brought to life,'"[55] Warm once said. The Germans were not the first to paint their film sets. French filmmakers like Méliès and companies like Pathé and Gaumont worked with painted scenery. These efforts, however, simply resembled theatrical sets.[56] The Germans elevated their work to a higher level. From the outset, the film looks the way Wiene intended, "crazy." The sets created by the three artists are themselves works of art within a work of art. The characters interact with one another and move about the set unaware that they are in a world that is abnormal to the audience. The actors move deliberately in a somber manner; this is on purpose as it allows the audience to absorb the sets. In his book *From*

Caligari to Hitler, Siegfried Kraucer writes "*Caligari* mobilizes light…these efforts were designed to bathe all scenery in an unearthly illumination marking it as scenery of the soul."[57] The choice of words is interesting when one recalls Munch's "Soul" paintings and their connection to Nietzsche.

Many of Munch's works can be referenced when deconstructing the sets of Rohrig, Reimann and Warm in *Caligari.* The film, like the paintings, captures emotion and the feelings conjured are essential to the message. Much of how this is done is through allusion, as well as, illusion. In 1892, Munch's painting began to capture the sadness and pain he was feeling. That year he painted *Despair* and *Evening on Johan Karl Street.* (See Fig. 5) The blank faces of the people in the latter work seem to be lifeless, much like some of the inhabitants of the insane asylum in *Caligari.* In 1893, he created *By the Deathbed (Fever), Death in the Sickroom, Moonlight* and his most famous work, *The Scream.* (See Fig. 6) More paintings would follow in 1893, including *Anxiety.* (See Fig. 7) This piece seems to combine a group of lost souls, similar to those found in *Evening on Johan Karl Street*, and the expressive sky of *The Scream.* In 1894, Munch painted*, Ashes, Eye in Eye* and *Girl and Death.* In subsequent years, he created other works such as *The Death Chamber* (1896) and *Flower of Pain* (1897). From 1898-1900 he painted, *Red Virginia Creeper* (See Fig. 8), as well as, *Dead Mother* (1898-1900) and completed *Red Creeper* in 1900. All these works have traits that are visible in the art design of *Dr. Caligari.* Whether it is the crooked rooftop's sharp angles or the eeriness that is evoked, the influence of Munch is evident. Munch's influence can also be seen in the eyes of his subjects. Many seem unfeeling, like Cesare the somnambulist. The sets conjure emotional responses ranging from fear to curiosity, as well as, a sense of uneasiness that is similar to viewing a Munch painting. These expressionist works were not the only paintings created by Munch; he also painted portraits, landscapes and festive scenes. However, these works, some a part of his "Soul Paintings" series, are pure expressionist and, therefore, are the ones that influenced Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter and in turn Rohrig, Reimann and Warm.

There are some specific paintings created before *Caligari* was filmed that are worthy of closer examination for their influence on the three art directors. In the film, as Caligari (See Fig. 9) and Cesare roam through the streets (See Fig. 10) the sharp angles of the scenery are reminiscent of Munch's 1901 *Murderer.* (See Fig. 11) The killer in this painting is staring at the viewer. His face is green with two dark eyes but is essentially featureless. Dressed in black with a brown hat, he is walking up a country road. He is either coming from or about to commit a murder. Much like Cesare, we do not know the motives of Munch's killer or his origins. In this work, the colorful background is a contrast to the dark figure. Nature seems to reject the man by opening up with color to underscore that he is an aberration. The rocks and trees that frame the man are sharply shaped and, as in *Caligari*, there are few straight lines. The background frames the killer in much the same way as the scenery frames the mysterious Dr. Caligari as he makes his way down the twisted alleyway in the film.

The theme of killing reoccurs in Munch's 1919 work *Murderer in the Lane*. (See Fig. 12) This time, the murderer's work is clearly visible as a dark pile of humanity lying in the middle of a country road. Clearly visible to the viewer, the Murderer's face is in the foreground. However, the addition of the killer seems like an afterthought. The paint on his right eye is dripping and his face has the exact same complexion as the road on which he is walking. Again, the killer is dressed in black. Oddly, the killer is in fact a self-portrait. These works, part of Munch's "Murder Series," were rooted in the pain he felt after the murder of his dear friend Dagney Przbyszewski.[58] The branches of the trees in the painting look very much like the trees that surround Cesare as he carries his victim away from the village. (See Fig. 13)

Another, more striking comparison with the film is Munch's *A Night in Saint Cloud (*1890). Dr. Caligari tends to his somnambulist in a small room that is distorted and angular with an oddly shaped window. The eight panes are not equal in size and the window frame, though four sided, seems almost triangular. Cesare is sitting up in his cabinet, which is on the floor on the right side of the room. Caligari is wearing a top hat and both are dressed in black. (See Fig. 14) The window, though smaller, is in the exact same position in the painting. Also in the painting, which is rather dark, there is a bench in the same location as the cabinet. By the window, a shadowy figure sits, almost unseen except for his silhouetted top hat. (See Fig. 15)

Cesare's movements are deliberate and often staccato. Observers have said he looks as if he is part of the scenery as well.[59] His black costume and face are similar to Munch's figure in *Melancholy* (1892). The eerie nature of Cesare's persona is seemingly present in 1895s *Jealously*, *Man and Woman Kissing* (1905) and *Cupid and Psyche* (1907). The latter two are unique because they lack bold color. In both works, the men are either black or dark and the woman red or orange. *In Man and Woman Kissing*, the two subjects, especially the man, have heavy dark shadows around their eyes. (See Fig. 16) This was a necessity in filmmaking; otherwise, the light needed to expose a shot would wash out a number of facial features, especially the eyes. (See Fig. 17) The darkening of the eye region is a technique not necessary in painting—but this is a wood-cut, and the carved out negative space is needed in the same way, providing emphasis. The face of the man is not visible in *Cupid and Psyche,* but the nude female figure seems sad and the paint seems streaked with tears. The male seems to exude a sense of dread, much in the same way the presence of Cesare changed the town he was terrorizing.

This connection to art was not lost on critics. In 1921, when the film was eventually shown the United States, the headline in the *New York Times* referred to it as "A Cubist Shocker." The article was written ahead of the film's premiere in New York and the writer reprints reviews from others who had seen the film in Germany. The film's "bizarre expressionist form" is called "a cubist world of intense relief and depth."[60] It reads more like a review of an art gallery exhibition than a film review. The work of Rohrig, Reimann and Warm is "notable" in the review:

> The sets are a little mad. Everything is awry somewhere: and because it's almost impossible to lay your fingers on the place, the sets add to the atmosphere of mystery and terror which permeates the picture. . . the sets in the picture do not blacken your eyes with their aggression or box your ears with their abruptness. They are subtlety woven into the tale of Dr. Caligari. . . everything has an air of exaggeration which makes the characters seem unreal as human beings but extraordinarily real as embodying qualities of goodness and evil, peace and terror.[61]

The reaction of the reviewer is precisely what Wiene and his art directors hoped for: a visceral reaction brought on by the unnerving images of the film.

Accepting the notion that film noir and German Expressionism are linked to the art of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter and Edvard Munch is to accept that these films are all connected to Friedrich Nietzsche. The significance of these films, as author Andrew Spicer states,

> rests…on its continued capacity to startle and provoke audiences to deal with difficult issues including psychological trauma, dysfunctional relationships, existential dread, the lure of money, the power and indifference of huge corporations and government…[and] exploring the dark underside of the American dream.[62]

These themes were, in many ways, the same issues faced by Nietzsche. The philosopher struggled with the contradictions of the world, and he questioned all that was around him. He searched for a way to cope with the reality he believed existed. He discovered that the Greeks, through the tension of their Apollonian and Dionysian concepts, created an art that was designed to soothe the soul rather than please the eye. Nietzsche concurred with the Greek view of art and believed, "art functions as an assuagement of man's sufferings. Art directs him for the moment from the world to create a euphoric, yet illusory, relief of its severity; temporarily, it makes him forgetful of his existential situation."[63] These concepts may sound optimistic and could provide a reader with comfort. However, this is not the aim. Nietzsche also claimed that all of life is false—therefore taking refuge in art to escape reality is nonsense. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes, "We are in need of lies in order to rise superior to this reality, to this truth, that is to say, in order to live. . .. Man must already be a liar in his heart, but he must above all else be an artist, one of the greatest of liars."[64] If this is so, what better way to explore life than in the false construct of the noir aesthetic where there can be no happy ending.

Notes

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Appendix
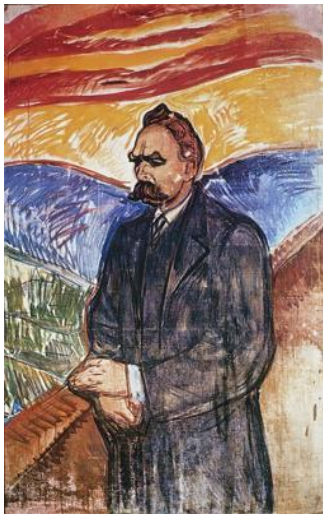
Fig. 1 Munch's fantasy portrait of
Nietzsche (1905)

Fig. 2 Alfred Kubin, *Lady on a Horse* (1901)

Fig. 3 The expressionist set of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)

Fig. 4 Shadows, both real and painted, heighten the sense of terror

Fig. 5 Munch, *Evening on Johan Karl Street* (1892)
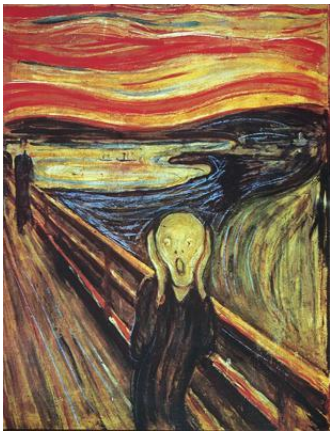
Fig. 6 Munch, *The Scream* (1893)

Fig. 7 Munch, *Anxiety* (1893)

Fig. 8 Munch, *Red Virginia Creeper*

Fig. 9 Dr. Caligari walks through town

Fig. 10 Cesare, the murdering somnambulist, lurks in the shadows

Fig. 11 Munch, *Murderer* (1901)

Fig. 12 Munch, *Murderer in the Lane* (1919)

Fig. 13 Cesare and his victim in the lane   Fig. 14 Caligari tends to his Somnambulist

Fig. 15 Munch, *A Night in Saint Cloud* (1890)

Fig. 16 Munch, *Man and Woman Kissing* (1905, woodcut)

Fig. 17 A close up of Cesare.

The Film Noir Doppelgänger: Alienation, Separation, Anxiety

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> "The real, or what is perceived as such, is what resists
> symbolization absolutely. In the end, doesn't the feeling
> of the real reach its high point in the pressing
> manifestation of an unreal, hallucinatory reality?"
> ~Jacques Lacan

Although the doppelgänger motif has been recognized time and again in film noir as an indicator of alienation and anxiety, an appreciation of its direct literary lineage could help reveal the psychoanalytic substratum of these particularly noir psychopathologies. The literary motif of the doppelgänger originally emerged in folklore and mythology, embodied in figures such as the wraith, the revenant, the golem, the mandrake, and other shape-shifting phantom doubles. In pre-Romantic literature, the motif of the doppelgänger was usually reduced to the farcical plot complications of mistaken identity, as seen in Shakespeare, Moliere, and Dryden.[1] The term "doppelgänger" was itself not explicitly coined, however, until the literature of German Romanticism, specifically in Jean Paul Richter's novel *Siebenkäs*. The early nineteenth century was indeed the era of the development of the modern doppelgänger. Not only did Jean Paul coin the term in 1796, but this was the era of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Adelbert von Chamisso, Ludwig Tieck, Heinrich von Kleist, Justinus Kerner, and Novalis, the German writers who specialized in the doppelgänger motif.[2] Because of the influence of Mesmeric experimentation, the modern psychological investigations of Phillipe Pinel, and the philosophical ideas of Fichte and Hegel had on German Romanticism, the enchantments of folklore and mythology gave way to the first use of the

doppelgänger motif that was accompanied by a real sense of the uncanny, a sense of the uncanny that presages the return of the repressed as a cause of alienation and anxiety. And it is this proto-Freudian sense of the uncanny that makes German Romanticism a precursor of the German Expressionist cinema that emerged a century later, concurrently with psychoanalysis.

Accordingly, then, German Expressionist cinema can be seen as a further development of German Romantic philosophy and literature. Not only did the modern cinema "lend visible form to Romantic fancies," according to Lotte Eisner, but authors such as Jean Paul, Novalis, and Hoffmann also anticipated "the Expressionistic notions of visual delirium" and even composed their works utilizing a proto-cinematic imagery.[3] German silent films are often set in the Romantic era, as if the cinema is itself indirectly paying homage to its founders.[4] German Expressionist films like Hans Heinz Ewers's *The Student of Prague* (1913), Carl Boese's *Golem* (1920), Leo Birinsky's *Waxworks* (1924), G.W. Pabst's *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929), and even F.W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) carried on the doppelgänger motif in a thematically continuous manner from its development by the German Romantic writers. With the German Romantics, the doppelgänger motif became for the first time what Ralph Tymms calls "a projection of the unconscious," and the German Romantic literary works that utilize the doppelgänger motif function as "dramatic presentation[s] of the unconscious personality."[5] Robert Wiene's famous expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) most poignantly reveals, through its concluding narrative twist, not only the doubled nature of the film's main character but the unconscious and uncanny nature of its entire diegesis.

As is well known, the German filmmakers Otto Preminger, Max Ophuls, Douglas Sirk, Billy Wilder, Robert Siodmak, Edgar Ulmer, William Dieterle, Curtis Bernhardt and the cinematographers Karle Freund, Rudolphe Maté, John Alton, and Theodor Sparkuhl all emigrated to the United States in the 1930s and went to work on films noir in Hollywood, bringing with them the style, technique, and thematic concerns of German Expressionist cinema. Granted, these Expressionist techniques became largely tethered to Hollywood's overriding concern for narrative coherence. Nevertheless, they were largely responsible for both the look of film noir and also its ubiquitous use of the doppelgänger motif. Nowhere is this more evident than in the films of Fritz Lang. The doppelgänger motif that Lang incorporated into his Expressionist films *Destiny* (1921), *Metropolis* (1927), *M* (1931), and the *Mabuse* pictures (1922, 1933) carried over to the films noir he made for RKO, Universal, Columbia, and Warner Bros. Even though the expressionism may be more buried in these later films of Lang, the Romantic appreciation of the doppelgänger motif, conveyed through a distorted POV and various other formal techniques, is as every bit as powerful in his 1944 *The Woman in the*

Window as it is in the UFA films. The chiaroscuro stylistic technique and thematic obsessions with the unconscious doubled dimension of narrative from German Expressionist cinema were, it has been argued, imported into Hollywood by these German émigré directors.[6]

If the origins of film noir's use of the doppelgänger motif can be traced to its use in German Romanticism and its proto-psychoanalytical understanding of latent or unconscious thought, then perhaps it would be fruitful to understand film noir's overdetermined use of the same motif through a similar psychoanalytic lens. In his editor's introduction to Otto Rank's famous psychoanalytic study of the doppelgänger *The Double*, Harry Tucker contends that the quest into the mind, the investigation into the integrity of the self, began during the Romantic period, and the doppelgänger was used by various literary writers in an attempt to dramatize and expose the "obscurely understood drives and impulses" of the human mind.[7] In other words, the dyadic relation in which the hero of the doppelgänger narrative finds himself forces the hero to confront a part of himself heretofore disavowed, foreclosed, or repressed. As Rank asserts about the doppelgänger,

> the pathological disposition toward psychological disturbances is conditioned to a large degree by the splitting of the personality, with special emphasis upon the ego complex, to which corresponds an abnormally strong interest in one's own person, his psychic states, and his destinies.[8]

The double, therefore, provides a means for the subject who is trapped in the imaginary to attach to an external object. But the doppelgänger should not be understood as just any external object for the subject or as a hallucinatory means of purging and confronting his own hidden self as something foreign. Rather, in his double, the hero confronts, according to C. F. Keppler, precisely what has been overlooked in his own self-conception,[9] that which is at the heart of the subject yet paradoxically external. His double both creates a sense of alienation, as the subject becomes divided, but it also creates a sense of anxiety as the subject is confronted with what needs to remain hidden in order to maintain a sense of sovereignty over the self. The double, therefore, not only personifies the uncanny possessor of hidden secrets within the doppelgänger narrative, but it also exists as the subject's mirror image that includes what Jacques Lacan refers to as the *objet a*, that element that must be repressed in order for reality to maintain its consistency or, translated to film, for a narrative to maintain its continuity. When the lost part of reality—*objet a*—is included in reality, it, according to Mladen Dolar, paradoxically destroys reality instead of completing it,[10] and this is what occurs with the doppelgänger narratives of the contemporary neo-noir era. When the lack that constitutes

the subject as desiring is itself lacking, the doppelgänger emerges as the subject without lack, as a version of the subject not separated from *jouissance* . . . think of Brad Pitt as the doppelgänger Tyler Durden in David Fincher's neo-noir *Fight Club* (1999). Isn't Brad Pitt precisely whom every man would be if he wasn't lacking?

In his own psychoanalytic study of the doppelgänger, Dolar points out not only that the double realizes the subject's hidden desires but also how this marks itself out in Freud's topology:

> [the double] constitutes the essential part of the ego; he carries out the repressed desires of the id; and he also, with a malevolence typical of the superego, prevents the subject from carrying out his desires—all at the same time.[11]

However, the doppelgänger motif of Romantic literature is updated by film noir in the same manner that Lacan updated Freud's topology of the ego, id, superego with his registers of the imaginary, symbolic, and real. In this manner, one can better articulate the evolutionary development of the doppelgänger motif in film noir from its implicit, image-based use during the classical period in the 1940s and 1950s to its textual, or symbolic, use during the revisionary noir period of the late 1960s and 1970s to its overt manifestation during the neo era of the 1980s and 1990s.

In the classical films noir from the period of 1941-1958, the doppelgänger motif remains mostly imaginary, or imaged-based, and, thus, as Lacan argues, "alienation is constitutive of the imaginary order."[12] Technically, alienation is the Lacanian parallel of primary repression in Freud's thought. The doppelgänger remains latent like much of the hidden meaning of the films themselves, alienated in his appearance, largely concealed—as unconscious thoughts are—by figurative means. As in the ancient mythologies discussed by Rank and with many of the visual style proponents of film noir, the double often emerges in classical film noir through the shadows produced by its high-contrast lighting, by the increased ratio between key and fill lighting, indicative of the noir look. Although the examples are countless, one only need recall Walter Lydecker's conspicuous elongated shadow on the staircase wall near the climax of Otto Preminger's 1944 noir classic *Laura*. Lydecker's shadow is not only conspicuous because it is the only really noir visual touch in the film but also because it marks the revelation of Lydecker's dark alienated side and his guilt in killing the film's titular character or Ann Treadwell, depending if the viewer recognizes the film's narrative twist. The shadow here, of course, represents visually a side of Lydecker that had, up until this point in the film, remained latent, only surmisable through his elitist snobbery. Also, recall Fritz Lang's late classical film noir *Human Desire* (1954). The climactic scene displays

Warren's attempt to murder Vicky's husband, and because Glen Ford is lit from behind, he is shown being led by his own shadow toward the location of his victim in the abandoned rail yard. This image, at once, depicts Warren's evil intentions, his deception towards Vicky, and his desire outstripping his conscious intentions, as his shadowed side visually anticipates his corporeal being. One can also point out the uses of shading by shadow. When Johnny first views Gilda in Charles Vidor's 1946 *Gilda*, for instance, his close-up leaves his visage half shaded, as if demarcating his ambivalence, his doubled and alienated desire, balanced between love and hate as it will deceitfully unravel throughout the film.

Along with the customary use of shadows, classical films noir also rely heavily on literal mirror images to represent the splitting of the self that all noir narratives dramatize.[13] Early in *Beware My Lovely* (1952), while posing as an out-of-work handy man, Robert Ryan's psychopathic character Howard Wilton's reflected face is shown superimposed onto the framed portrait of Helen Gordon's deceased husband, indicating how nice Wilton thinks he could have it financially if he could menacingly step into the empty shoes of Mr. Gordon and assume his identity. In the 1946 noir *The Strange Life of Martha Ivers*, an early shot of Sam Masterson's mirror reflection while staring at a portrait of Walter O'Neil visually captures Martha's alienated love between two men. The infamous telephone cord strangulation scene in Edgar Ulmer's low-budget *Detour* (1945) visually takes place in a mirror reflection, as if to figuratively indicate Al Robert's momentary mental displacement. Of course, the most virtuoso use of the mirror image has to be that of the most virtuoso noir director Orson Welles in the house of mirrors fun house scene in San Francisco during the conclusion of his 1947 *The Lady from Shanghai*. The multiple mirrors bring the doppelgänger motif to an extreme, just as every other noir convention was brought to an extreme eleven years later in classical film noir's swan song, Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958). In Billy Wilder's quintessential film noir *Double Indemnity* (1944), anti-hero Walter Neff and *femme fatale* Phyllis Dietrichson are first shown in an illuminating two-shot composition featuring Barbara Stanwyck's mirror reflection positioned left of Fred MacMurray's shadow, as if to indicate that her alienated desire is already fully conscious while his colluding ambition remains less than fully formed, only unconscious at this point in the narrative.

Although chiaroscuro shadows and mirror images are the dominant and most accessible means of conveying the doppelgänger motif, classical films noir also rely on more subtle means of imaging the splitting of the self, so characteristic of alienation. While the voice-over narrative might seem ubiquitous in classical films noir, it became a convenient means of conveying the hero's double. Unlike the first-person literary narrators of the hard-boiled fiction of writers such as Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain from which

the noir voice-over was derived, the visual nature of cinema automatically doubles the hero by alienating him between the subject of the enunciation and the enunciated subject. Unlike the novels, the narrating hero of film noir becomes split between the narrator and the narrated subject, between the Walter Neff at the office dictaphone confessing in detail his crime and the Walter Neff who remains oblivious of the trap that has been set for him by the *femme fatale* within the narrative he recites in hindsight. The metaleptic structure of the narrative, where the hero receives the truth of his own message, nicely captures the *nachträglichkeit* character Freud associated with unconscious alienated desire.

Frame within framing is also another way which classical films noir use to convey doubling or duplicity. Throughout the 1944 noir *The Woman in the Window*, Fritz Lang consistently shoots Joan Bennett's *femme fatale* character Alice Reed through door, window, mirror, and pillar frames as a means of indicating her imaginary status, as only an unconscious fantasy image within the dream of Professor Wanley, a dream that evokes Wanley's less-than-savory alienated desire. The film utilizes these frames within frames to subtly foreshadow the revelation of the imaginary nature of the diegesis that is only explicitly revealed at the film's close. At the end of Robert Siodmak's *Criss Cross* (1949), Steve (Burt Lancaster) is pictured tightly framed in a doorway as Anna (Yvonne De Carlo) leaves with the loot, turning him into his true, only half-revealed, self . . . the sap.

Dialogic double-talk in classical films noir not only conformed to the Hays Code, but it also illustrates the manner in which devious noir characters were inhabited by two speakers or voices, one directed at the naïve viewer and one at the sophisticated. The speed limit interchange between Neff and Phyllis early in *Double Indemnity* is a classic example. But many other films noir utilize paronomasiac dialogue to indirectly convey the doubled and, therefore, alienated intention of its characters, often revealing indirectly a latent erotic or violent desire. Another somewhat famous example is from Lang's 1952 noir *Clash by Night*. When Barbara Stanwyck's sultry character May is asked by Robert Ryan's character Earl if she wants a drink, she mischievously alludes to her true desire by replying "Let's just say a drink . . . hard times are coming." The police department office in another Lang film *The Big Heat* (1953) has a PSA posted to its wall recommending officers in their off time to "Give Blood Now," indirectly indicating the illegal lengths Det. Bannion will go to shut down the corruption plaguing his department, lengths he himself never knew he could tread until the murder of his wife.

There is also the more-or-less standard plot device of the double cross. Robert Siodmak's 1946 adaptation, or continuation, of Hemmingway's *The Killers* stands out as it is filled with double crosses within double crosses, primarily orchestrated by *femme fatale* Kitty Collins, referred to within the

narrative as that "double-crossing dame." Lastly, there are also several unique visual means classical films noir utilize to convey the doppelgänger motif. In *Beware My Lovely*, when Corky the dog growls at the initial appearance of the film's soon-to-be villain Howard Wilton, the audience is tipped off to the doppelgänger lurking inside the seemingly mild-mannered, down-on-his-luck handyman. One of the most expressionistic means of visually illustrating the alienating effect of the doppelgänger occurs in the 1947 film *Possessed* when Joan Crawford's character uncannily walks into her own subjective POV shot.

Ultimately, the alienation of desire in classical films noir also functions at the level of a doubled narrative structure, one narrative embedded into another. Again, Lang's *The Woman in the Window* perfectly illustrates the unconscious nature of desire when the narrative twist is revealed at the film's conclusion. The obvious Freudian interpretation of the film, granted by the over-determined use of Freudian signifiers in the opening scene of the film in Professor Wanley's lecture hall, revolves around the artificial distinction between waking and dream reality. At the level of psychology, Professor Wanley merely wakes up at the end and thinks, "Phew, I am not really a murderer; I only dreamed I am one." From a psychoanalytic understanding, however, it is not so much that the good professor is a law-abiding citizen who merely dreamed he is a murderer, but rather he is a murderer who is only unconscious of the fact that he has murderous desires.[14]

A similar situation occurs with the more masked narrative twist in Otto Preminger's *Laura*. If the second half of the film is understood as Detective McPherson's dream, and there is enough circumstantial evidence to prove it is, then, ultimately, McPherson is revealed to have fallen in love with a dead woman. *Blue Gardenia* (1953) relies on an amnesiac protagonist and *Fear in the Night* (1947) utilizes both an amnesiac protagonist and a false dream sequence in order to illustrate alienated identity through the doubling of the narrative plane itself.

These devices allow classical films noir to implicitly reveal how the noir protagonist is often haunted by his own doubled desire, duplicitous nature, and monstrous id, a message that shows up diegetically only indirectly either through shot composition, narrative structure, or the femme fatale drawing it out in her seductive manner. What is not, or could not, be shown directly within the diegetic content of the cinema because of the overriding need for narrative coherence, because of generic constraints, or because of the Production Code is forced onto the screen mostly through the formal elements of the film's mise en scène, alienating the story from itself. This is why the doppelgänger within classical film noir remains sustained within the figure of the motif, that figurative comparison that remains least obtrusive, that has the least disruptive impact on the continuity on the film's narrative. Classical film noir is essentially duplicitous because half of the film's content

has to be hidden from the casual viewer while open to the sophisticated viewer; in this manner, the doppelgänger not only remains partially alienated, but it itself doubles as a figure for alienation both within the protagonist and as the mechanism that maintains narrative continuity. Classical film noir, on one level then, is already its own doppelgänger.

Late classical film noir usually appears semi-aware of its own expiration as a genre. Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) actually features a voice-over from the grave and Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) may also be told from beyond the grave after nuclear annihilation; both films take the merely dying Walter Neff from *Double Indemnity* and put him in a coffin, six feet under. But it is only with the brief and minor revitalization of film noir in the revisionary noirs of the late 1960s and early 1970s that classical film noir becomes critically examined and commented on from within. Revisionary noirs such as John Boorman's 1967 *Point Blank*, Alan Pakula's 1971 *Klute*, Robert Altman's 1973 *The Long Goodbye*, and Roman Polanski's 1974 *Chinatown* effectively expose the more or less hidden mythology lying within classical film noir and essentially elevate alienation to a higher stage by separating film noir from its classical tradition. Separation in the Lacanian sense parallels secondary repression as developed by Freud, and it constitutes the emergence of the Symbolic order and the separation with imaginary identity. Through inter-textual critique, a strong desire to de-mystify classical noir conventions, and a new level of formal experimentation, these revisionary noirs affectively display the hidden and often politically dark side of the genre, acting as classical film noir's doppelgänger. As Richard Martin explains,

> many of the seventies neo-noir texts are not only noteworthy for a degree of formal experimentation uncharacteristic of mainstream Hollywood cinema and a similarly unprecedented level of overtly political social commentary but also for their status as self-conscious testaments to the continuing evolution of the noir genre.[15]

The directors of these films (which Arthur Penn, Terrence Malick, and Martin Scorsese could be added) were not customarily genre filmmakers, but here they used generic knowledge and a suitable dose of European art film experimentation to break the imaginary illusion, to deconstruct the logic of the genre from within, and to expose the dark political message that always remained latent in the classical films. But in this manner, these films always have a secondary function as metanarratives. Therefore, their surface narratives are always haunted by this other side, the side that functions as a commentary at best and a critique at worst of the imaginary film noir universe established by mainstream classical Hollywood. The doubling enacted by these revisionist

films noir, the doubling between the noir diegesis and the films' meta-critical purpose, alters the actual diegesis more profoundly than the imaginary motifs of classical noir. The stories of these revisionist films noir, because of the meta-textual doubling, symbolize the duplicitous nature of the artificial and imaginary film noir universe developed and made iconic during the classical era.

In the inaugural modernist noir *Point Blank*, when Boorman demythologizes classical noir by littering his narrative with unmotivated flashbacks and by editing in a manner that disjoins time and space, he draws attention to the constructed and, therefore, artificial nature of his noir tale. These same expressionistic devices also indicate the subjective fantasy behind the noir hero's heroics. Because Walker's footsteps at LAX on the soundtrack aurally precede his arrival in Los Angeles, they haunt the visual track and symbolically underscore the film's secondary concern with issues beyond the frame, with extra-textual generic concerns. If understood as an implied twist narrative where the hero Walker literally never makes it off of Alcatraz alive, then the film reveals the wish-fulfillment nature of noir narratives specifically and the general mythology surrounding Lee Marvin-type Hollywood characters. Betrayed and left for dead in a cell at the abandoned Alcatraz prison, Walker's larger-than-life escapades documented throughout the film, often through elaborate subjective montages, appear in revisionist light as merely the dying illusion of a dead relic and the fading illusion of the noir fantasy originally constructed in the 1940s studio-run magic factories. And the fact that the film accomplishes this through a diegesis that is a dream symbolizes the constructed nature of the noir world.[16] Read as an implied twist film in this vein, the film also captures the dissolution of the classical film noir paradigm at the same time it captures the psychological dissolution of the noir protagonist within the diegesis.

Likewise, Pakula's *Klute* works to de-center the fantasy of the *femme fatale* of classical film noir by providing the first noir told primarily from the femme's own perspective. As Diane Giddis has indicated, the story of *Klute* is really the story of Bree Daniel's post-Lib inner psychological conflict between her desire for love and her determination to remain an autonomous woman.[17] The thrilling suspense story is only an entertaining means of dramatizing Bree's psychological separation from herself. Animated through John Klute, the detective out to protect Bree, and the psychopathic prostitute murderer Peter Cable, Bree's doubled desire for the incompatibles of a love relationship and personal autonomy, provided by the women's liberation movement, is free to do battle in the seedy noir underbelly of New York. Pakula here not only reduces noir to a vehicle for another type of film, but he decenters the power of the masculine narrative sovereignty of classical film noir by providing a female voice over in the form of Bree's disembodied therapy sessions. From a

straight forward perspective, *Klute* is the story of a woman who is terrorized by an unknown psychopath, but, looked at awry and meta-textually, the alternative side of the film provides a narrative critique of the masculine desire underscoring the femme fatale in classical noir. Bree Daniel's victim status, in other words, retroactively points to the actual victim status of all of those classical femmes fatale that were filmed as venomous spider ladies.

Robert Altman demythologizes the classical film noir imaginary by simply casting Elliot Gould as hard-boiled detective Philip Marlow in his adaptation of Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* and by minimizing the power of the traditional voiceover as a result of reducing it to Gould's unnecessary diegetic mumbling. By making Marlowe a man out of time, a 1940s gumshoe driving a 1940s sedan in modern day 1970s Los Angeles, Altman illustrates the uselessness and inappropriateness of this imaginary figure for a larger symbolic reality. Roman Polanski follows suit by situating *Chinatown*'s noir detective Jake Gittes in a virtual wasteland, an obvious symbol for the barrenness of the classically-delineated film noir universe. Through intertextual allusions to classical film noir, these revisionary films indicate that a true understanding of their purpose lies in their relationship with and separation from their host, the classical films noir. In this manner, these revisionary noirs symbolically place themselves as the hidden truth of these classical films. By exposing the reality that is only implied in the overly imaginary original films noir, the revisionist's modus operandi becomes the illustration of the unconscious truth of the originals. Because these revisionist noirs are highly cognizant of their generic status as films noir and because there was no longer the Hays Code when they were produced, they are able to question on screen the imaginary nature of the originals. Relying on intertextual symbols that are more obvious and obtrusive than the figurative motifs of classical film noir, these revisionist films act as the true side of film noir. Acting as meta-textual doubles, these revisionist films noir intentionally attempt to break the imaginary spell of classical film noir, separate noir from its classical illusions, and bring the noir universe back to reality.

In the final permutation of noir films from the 1980s and 1990s, the noir doppelgänger has grown large enough to become an actual character within the film's diegetic space. In other words, while in the classical films noir the doppelgänger remains principally imaginary (is it really there, or only in the viewer's imagination?), it is merely made symbolic with the 1970s revisions. What remains unconscious in the originals becomes interpreted by the revisionary films, just as the analyst interprets the latent double-sided nature of the analysand's message. However, in this final transformation the double appears in the real/reel of the film itself, monstrously throwing its diegetic reality out of joint. While the doppelgänger had previously remained imaginary (buried in mirror reflections or in shadow) and symbolic (buried in an

intertextual relation), in neo noir its previously hidden self directly materializes, creating a sense of anxiety unknown in the previous modes of film noir.

Numerous neo-noirs fit into this category: Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner*, Alan Parker's 1987 *Angel Heart*, David Bryan Singer's 1995 *The Usual Suspects*, Fincher's 1999 *Fight Club*, and Jonathan Glazer's 2000 *Sexy Beast* are some of the most noteworthy. Parker's *Angel Heart* and Fincher's *Fight Club* both function as twist films because narrative unreliability leads to a false *fabula* in both films; their narratives, in a sense, double in on themselves. In both films, the narrative that has been set up throughout the film is completely thrown out of joint by the end with the revelation of the doppelgänger in the midst. *Blade Runner* reverses the tendency of classical film noir by constructing the noir hero Decker as a replicant, a copy without an original, and, thereby, making the original self overtly more imaginary than the replicated doppelgänger. Harry Angel, the noir detective hero of *Angel Heart*, is a hairy angel indeed, having actually sold his soul to Mr. Louis Cyphere years earlier as Johnny Favorite. Favorite has been murderously acting through Angel the entire film without the spectator's or Angel's knowledge, committing the evil deeds Angel could only imagine committing. Likewise, the fact of Tyler Durden's existence as the Narrator's doppelgänger is withheld from the narrator and the spectator alike throughout *Fight Club*. That the narrator lacks sovereign control over his own story is indeed a twist in the film noir cog. The twist in *The Usual Suspects* relies on the false testimony of aptly named arch criminal Verbal, and, therefore, false flashbacks constitute the majority of the diegetic reality. This false diegesis allows Verbal's own doppelgänger—Keyser Söse—to rise to mythological heights. *Sexy Beast*, on the other hand, utilizes an implied twist in order to render its story duplicitous and in order to allow the film's hero Gal to morph into his larger-than-life nemesis Don.

But as far as doing the most damage to and creating the best possibilities for film noir's elaboration of anxiety as a threat of disintegration and fragmentation, the neo noirs of David Lynch stand out for their ability to represent the real as that which resists symbolization.[18] In *Blue Velvet* (1986), Lynch creates a fairly pedestrian use of the doppelgänger motif by introducing his protagonist Jeffrey's two co-workers at the Beaumont hardware store. The doppelgänger nature of these two characters is only revealed by their collective name as the two Eds. However, the pedestrian nature of Lynch's use of the doppelgänger motif disappears when the viewer realizes that one of the Eds is blind, transforming the two Eds into the divided, and here duplicated, Oedipus—the one from *Oedipus the King* who can see but is "blind" and the one from *Oedipus at Colonus* who has blinded himself in order to "see" his unconscious desire. Through this pun, the setting of the film alters from the terrestrial plane of the town of Lumberton to the Freudian plane of the unconscious, and the narrative plane gives way to a poetic plane. The film

doubles its meaning and demands to be read vertically as well as horizontally, altering the diegetic plane in so doing.

This shift takes place more forcefully and explicitly in Lynch's three neo-noir masterpieces where he subsequently takes the doppelgänger motif one step further. By taking a page out of Luis Buñuel's playbook, Lynch actually portrays the doubled nature of the doppelgänger itself: the difference between the doppelgänger as a duplicated self and the doppelgänger as a divided self. Lynch accomplishes this by having the same actor play two different characters (Patricia Arquette as both Renee Madison and Alice Wakefield in *Lost Highway* (1997); Naomi Watts as both Betty Elmes and Diane Selwyn in *Mulholland Drive* (2001); and Laura Dern as both Nikki Grace and Susan Blue in *Inland Empire* (2006)) and by having two actors play two completely different versions of the same character (Bill Pullman as Fred Madison and Balthazar Getty as Pete Dayton in *Lost Highway*; and Karolina Gruszka as Lost Girl and Laura Dern as Nikki Grace in *Inland Empire*). Consequently, the doppelgänger moves from the psychiatric disorder autoscopia, based on a relatively imaginary visual hallucination, to the much more severe and frightening psychiatric disorder known as heautoscopy, a disorder based on increasing depersonalization where the double gets personalized.[19] And, as anyone who has seen any of these three Lynch neo noirs can attest, the doppelgänger's presence in these films creates a clear excess of being over sense in the films' discourse. The presence of the doppelgänger in these films produces the lack of the necessary lack that was manifested by the classical noir doppelgänger. Without this lack, the diegesis loses control of its coherence and the noir here remains trapped by anxiety.

In Lynch's neo-noir films, he directly stages the encounter between the noir hero and his or her doppelgänger that is only hinted at in its motif form in classical film noir. By creating two competing versions of the same reality within the same diegetic space of his films and by creating a cleavage between the films' narratives and their narration, Lynch makes it virtually impossible to piece together a coherent *fabula*. Questions linger: Did Part II of *Lost Highway* really happen? Did Part I of *Mulholland Drive* really happen? Do any of the scenes outside of Eastern Europe really happen in *Inland Empire*? And, if not, does the film's title no longer refer to a specific geographic location in Southern California but instead to some fragmented psychological space? Do, therefore, Part II of *Lost Highway* and Part I of *Mulholland Drive* belong to this same psychological space? Lynch's neo-noir narratives lack the needed continuity because he makes large sections of each film function as a doubled displacement of the rest of the film. By dismissing continuity, Lynch dismisses that structure necessary for warding off narrative anxiety. Meaning can, and has been, made of the relationship between the separate sections of Lynch's neo-noir films, but, on one level, Lynch must be granted the license to create narratives that cannot be symbolized in the same way as most other film

narratives. As a marker of anxiety, Lynch's films unveil the uncanny in numerous ways: they flatten reality; they defamiliarize reality; they make the ordinary seem strange and the strange seem ordinary; they heavily utilize what are normally unheard sounds; they are littered with those surreal "places of evil pleasure" and "grotesquely immobilized corpses."[20] Unlike the classical and revisionist noirs whose narratives are haunted by the possibility of a doppelgänger, Lynch's narratives are saturated with the presence of the doppelgänger. There is simply no possibility of a film or a *fabula* without it. The object of anxiety that should have remained buried in the narrative is simply overwhelming.

In the classical film noir, restricting the doppelgänger to a motif allows for minimal disruption of the film's diegetic reality. In the revisionary film noir, the elevation of the doppelgänger to a symbol has the more pronounced effect of altering the noir world itself. In the neo-noir films under discussion here, the elevation of the doppelgänger to a metaphor—the most intrusive of the cinematic figures—creates an actual character out of a figure, a character that remains excessive of and threatening toward the film's own continuity, cohesion, and coherence. In these neo noirs, the doppelgänger emerges as something supplementary to reality, something in excess of the symbolic realm that itself, together with the imaginary, constructs our sense of a cohesive reality. Classical and revisionary film noir (although the latter to a lesser extent) embrace the continuity mechanism of suture that is firmly rooted in desire, itself a product of the relation between the imaginary and the symbolic. The neo noir, however, embraces itself by allowing that which must remain hidden, for continuity's sake, to materialize on the diegetic plane. Therefore, the neo noir doppelgänger functions as a stand in not for what is lacking, as with the classical and revisionary versions, but for something that is in excess of what is being symbolized by the narrative: the *objet a*, in Lacanian terms.[21] The classical doppelgänger invariably indicates a splitting of the subject and, therefore, epitomizes lack. The neo-noir doppelgänger, on the other hand, is based on replication and thereby stands as an image of excess.[22] Since these neo noirs fall under the domain of the drive, they are more indicative of our contemporary post-Oedipal order that itself eschews the symbolic order of desire.

Notes

1 Ralph Tymms, *Doubles in Literary Psychology* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1949), 35.
2 See especially Jean Paul's *Siebenkäs*, *Hesparus*, and *Titan*; Novalis's *Heinrich von Oftergingen*; Tieck's *Genoveva*; Kerner's *Reiseschatten*; Hoffman's *Elixire ds Tenfels* and "The Sandman"; Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl*; and Kleist's *Penthesilea* and *Der Prinz von Homburg.*

[3] Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: U of California P, 2008), 113.

[4] Ibid., 112.

[5] Ibid., 51.

[6] Geoff Mayer and Brian McDonnell, *Encyclopedia of Film Noir* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007), 4. See also, Vincent Brook, *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2009.

[7] Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. Harry Tucker (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1971), xx. Rank's study was first published in German as "Der Doppelgänger" in the journal *Imago* in 1914, right at the origin of German Expressionist cinema. The first English translation of Rank's study was in *Beyond Psychology* in 1941, the same year as the release of John Huston's film *The Maltese Falcon*, the first film noir.

[8] Ibid., 48

[9] C. F. Keppler, *The Literature of the Second Self* (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1972), 11.

[10] Mladen Dolar, "'I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding Night': Lacan and the Uncanny," *October* 58 (1991): 15

[11] Ibid., 12.

[12] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychosis, 1955-1956*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 1993), 146.

[13] Jacques Lacan first developed his understanding of alienation in his famous "Mirror Stage" essay. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrit*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 76.

[14] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 16-17.

[15] Richard Martin, *Mean Streets and Raging Bulls: The Legacy of Film Noir in Contemporary Cinema* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 26.

[16] Leighton Grist, "Moving Targets and Black Widows: Film Noir in Modern Hollywood," in *The Book of Film Noir*, ed. Ian Cameron (New York: Continuum, 1993), 268.

[17] Diane Giddis, "The Divided Woman: Bree Daniel in *Klute*," in *Movies and Methods*, vol. 1, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: U of California P, 1976), 195.

[18] Lacan argues, "There's an anxiety-provoking apparition of an image which summarises what we can call the revelation of that which is last penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence*." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988), 164.

[19] Peter Brugger, "Reflective Mirrors: Perspective-taking in Autoscopic Phenomena," *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry* 7, no. 3 (2002): 180-82.

[20] Slavoj Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2000), 14.

[21] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krystof Kieślowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI, 2001), 187.

[22] Ilana Shiloh, *The Double, the Labyrinth and the Locked Room* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 28.

The Role of Location in Film Noir Movies

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Just as the war years cast a gloom over the country in the 1940s and into the 1950s so, too, did Hollywood, producing pictures with a decidedly darker tone. A new genre or style, soon to be termed *Film Noir*, came about. These films were not so much entertainment as social studies exploring the gritty seamier side of society. Usually B movies, their budget constraints pushed directors to use more exterior locations in order to reduce costs. But there was a positive to this; location shooting offered creative opportunities to enhance the storytelling not possible within the confines of a studio or backlot. By simply stepping outside the studio walls the 1940s moviemakers swept aside the claustrophobia inherent in most 1930s Hollywood productions, creating a new experiential universe for their audience.

I host a movie location blog, reelsf.com, presenting *Then* and *Now* locations from movies set in San Francisco, many of them classic film noir. The site, with hundreds of locations, lets readers calibrate the changes in the city over the past century, at the same time vicariously enjoying the sins of fictional citizens from the past. Compiling and comparing *Then* with *Now* images led to a realization that the impact of location footage was often greater, sometimes in ways unexpected, than its original intended contribution, a synergism that personalized and enhanced the viewing experience. This article explores this theme with the help of captures[1] from noir movies of that period.

The expression "terroir" describes the sense of place that a vineyard can impart to its wines by way of distinctive aromas and flavors. In much the same way locations can represent the terroir of a movie. Consider, for example, *The Third Man.*[2] If ever a sense of place permeated a movie, this is it. Director

Carol Reed's masterpiece, arguably the best film noir of all, was filmed in Vienna not long after the war ended, the perfect setting for Graham Greene's tale of mystery and intrigue about Holly Martins' search for his old friend Harry Lime. Reed employed quintessential high-contrast noir lighting throughout, both above ground where the bruised and rubbled city paralleled Martins' realization that Lime was no longer the fine fellow he used to know and below, during a chase in the city sewers, a metaphor for Lime's adopted underworld activities. (Figs. 1 and 2) Reed also made much use of "dutch angles," off-kiltering the camera to add a disorienting effect. (Fig. 3) Appropriately influenced by German Expressionism the tilt, harsh light, deep shadows and hosed-down glistening streets synergized into unforgettable atmospheric images.

Fig. 1 Classic noir lighting in *The Third Man*

Fig. 2 Gloom meets doom in the sewers below

Fig. 3 "Dutch angles" disorient the viewer

Locations were often used to heighten suspense or fear. Viewers who would never go to potentially dangerous urban neighborhoods at dead of night find themselves there while watching a noir movie, as in the stalking scene in *The Sniper.*[3] We quickly learn that social misfit Eddie Miller's unhappy childhood with an abusive mother has left him with a deep-seated hatred of women. His response to any perceived slight is to target the lady in question. And so pulses quicken and we fear for one of his victims as he stalks her through the menacingly dark streets and alleys of San Francisco's Telegraph Hill. (Fig. 4) The foreboding shadows trumpet her coming fate and we want to call out, as if to warn her; such is the location's dramatic impact. There are many more examples throughout noir, as in *Born to Kill,*[4] when the naive Mrs. Kraft is dropped off by a cab at the westernmost edge of town somewhere in San Francisco's Outer Sunset for a rendezvous with a killer. (Fig. 5) The clammy fog wafting across the desolate sand dunes sets the tone; it seems to migrate from the screen, permeating the audience and inducing clammy palms amongst the impressionable.

Fig. 4 Stalking a victim in *The Sniper*

Fig. 5 In a lonely place in *Born to Kill*

Locations can also bring about a psychological response that can draw us into the moment. In *The Lady from Shanghai⁵* there's an unsettling scene in which George Grisby, a borderline paranoiac, offers $5,000 to the drifter Michael O'Hara if he will kill somebody. *"*Who, Mr. Grisby?" brogues O'Hara, "I'm particular who I murder." The startling reply? "It's me!" Director Orson Welles, who played the O'Hara role as well, carefully chose this location, filmed in Acapulco. The characters step out onto a lookout jutting high above the rocky shore. (Fig. 6) As Grisby delivers the fateful words our gaze is directed down and past him to the rocks and the swirl far below. (Fig. 7) Beads of sweat on Grisby's brow, coruscating reflections on the water and a dizzying vertiginous perspective inflict the same surprise and unease upon us as did his words on O'Hara.
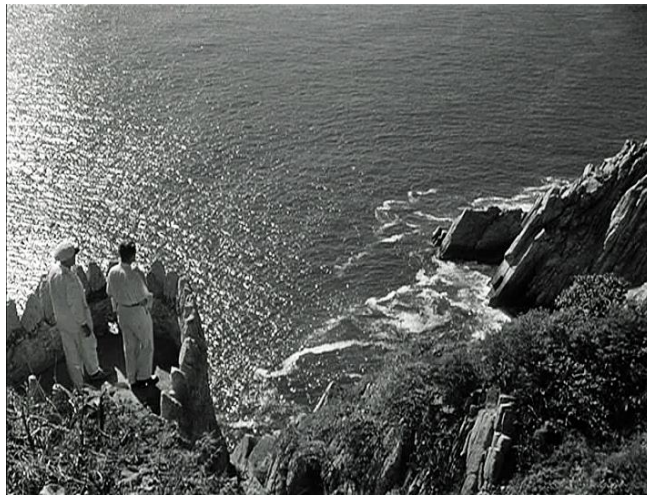
Fig. 6 The lookout in *The Lady from Shanghai*

Fig. 7 "It's me!"

In much the same way, albeit more overtly, Alfred Hitchcock worked the audience in his noir-inflected movie *Vertigo.*[6] He wanted everybody to share the dread overcoming Scottie Ferguson during his pursuit of the enigmatic Madeleine Elster up a winding set of severely steep stairs. Although created by subterfuge, the implied location of a California Mission bell tower (a matte painting, Fig. 8) and the tower stairs (a studio set, Fig. 9) were realistically conveyed. When Scottie unwisely looks down his point of view is shown by a

camera shot that simultaneously pulls back even as the lens zooms forward; the disquieting zoom swoon effect pulls us all into the vortex. (Fig. 10)

Fig. 8 The bell tower in *Vertigo*

Fig. 9 The chase up the bell tower stairs

Fig. 10 Scottie's terrifying view

In the same film, Hitchcock's sly humor surfaced through the use of location-as-metaphor when he made sure the besotted Scottie's San Francisco apartment enjoyed a window view of Coit Tower rising proudly in the distance, admitting in a later interview to its intended significance: a phallic symbol. (Fig. 11) Now on a roll, his gleeful closing shot in *North by Northwest*[7] of a train entering a tunnel served the dual purpose of leaving us in no doubt as to the intentions of passengers Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint while at the same time cocking a snook at the industry's Production Code. (Fig. 12)

Fig. 11 A Freudian allusion in *Vertigo*

Fig. 12 ... and another in *North by Northwest*

Viewers feel a certain satisfaction when they see a familiar location in a movie. They relate. Perhaps they live around the corner or they might have been there on a visit or come across it in books and magazines. In any case the connection somehow in a small way de-fictionalizes the onscreen action. That is how I felt when Humphrey Bogart got tough at the Golden Gate Bridge in *Dark Passage,*[8] (Fig. 13) filmed just 11 years after the bridge opened and a decade before Alfred Hitchcock took us back there for Kim Novak's plunge into the bay in *Vertigo.*

Fig. 13 Everybody's favorite bridge in *Dark Passage*

Perhaps the most powerful feeling that film noir locations can induce on an audience was unplanned and unanticipated by the moviemakers: nostalgia. The passage of time allows us to see things as they used to be and L. P. Hartley's quote: "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there"[9] often springs to mind. While this may be true of all old movies, those of the film noir era seem to particularly resonate, perhaps because their time coincided with the end of a long period of social stagnation right before the post-war years ushered in change as an ongoing way of life. The strings of yearning can be plucked by changes in cultural mores, favorite places, or by disappearing neighborhoods. Evolving fashion is a case in point; downtown shopping in Union Square in the noirish *Portrait in Black*[10] echoes a time when automobiles had fins and people dressed up to go shopping; hats were de rigueur and women wore stylish dresses, shoes and gloves. Today, sadly, our

autos are more generic, heads are bare and presentable-formal has for better or worse become slob-casual. (Fig. 14)

Fig. 14 Then *...* Downtown shopping in *Portrait in Black*

... Now, street fashions have changed, for the worse

The neo-noir thriller *The Lineup[11]* did us a great favor by recording for posterity interior and exterior footage of the venerable Sutro Baths at San Francisco's Ocean Beach at the very edge of the Pacific Ocean. (Fig. 15) This location was fortuitous indeed as eight years later, the financially ailing 70-year-old structure was destroyed in a suspicious fire. What once in its heyday was a hugely popular family destination with seven swimming pools, a skating rink, a museum and a concert hall, all under 100,000 panes of glazed roofing, was gone forever. Watching scenes like this either stirs childhood memories or leaves the audience wondering what it was like to live back in the time.

Fig. 15 Then *...* The hilltop entrance above a sprawling entertainment complex in *The Lineup*

... and Now, Sutro's is no more

A recent look down to what is left of the Sutro Baths

Similarly, who can blame viewers who long for lost neighborhoods? Los Angeles' Bunker Hill was at the turn of the 20th century an enclave of grand Victorians and other large homes built by the wealthy on hills conveniently next to downtown. Over time, as city transportation improved, they moved away to trendier parts and the homes mostly devolved into rooming houses for seniors and those of low income. Deteriorating structures, steep hills and

narrow streets and alleys, handily close to Hollywood, made Bunker Hill a magnet for moviemakers; dozens of films noir were shot there. It may have descended into seediness but the thriving neighborhood served an important social need; no one could say it lacked soul. But heartless city planners saw it differently; in a sweeping redevelopment commencing in the late 1950s, ethnic and cultural cleansing by any other name, they razed the neighborhood to make way for new civic buildings and modern office and residential high-rises. Take a look at the capture from *Criss Cross*[12] showing Burt Lancaster exiting an old streetcar, itself capable of conjuring up nostalgic pangs. (Fig. 16) Behind him is Court Hill, part of Bunker Hill, atop the twin-bore Hill Street tunnel. By the time the city-sanctioned developers were through not only the buildings were gone but so too were the tunnel and even the hill itself.

Fig. 16 Then *...* Bunker Hill, in *Criss Cross*

... and Now, from the same spot, what hill?

The same fate befell San Francisco's old Produce Market, close by the Ferry Building's waterfront, preserved for us in *Thieves Highway.*[13] (Fig. 17) For forty years this area of warehouses and wholesale businesses teemed with activity as trucks rolled in through the night from the surrounding fields and farms while

others fanned out the following morning distributing the packaged produce across the city. Then in the 1960s the market was relocated to clear the way for a massive redevelopment that razed and transformed it into an extension of the Financial District. Sound familiar? Entire blocks and some streets vanished. There must be many an office worker in the aluminum-clad Alcoa Building or one of the sleek Embarcadero Center towers who have no idea that they displaced Melo-Glo Tomatoes and Cape Cod Cranberries, not to mention Chickie brand Asparagus or the risqué-labeled Buxom brand Melons.[14]

Fig. 17 Then *...* The Produce Market in *Thieves' Highway*

... and Now, **high**-rise offices have taken over

San Francisco's waterfront has undergone a drastic transformation as well. *Thieves Highway* includes a suspense-filled scene during which two thugs chase Rica, a hard-bitten soft-centered lady of the night. (Fig. 18) The images present a fine example of noir lighting as well as a time warp to street blocks lined with flophouse hotels and dive bars. Today the cleaned-up and redeveloped waterfront would be unrecognizable to those sailors, longshoremen and other workers who routinely drowned their sorrows there at the end of a hard day. What used to be is now a figment of the past, the site of a Tennis and Swim Club. It is interesting to conjecture whether denizens both then and now, in reacting to the changes from opposite points in time, would converge at the same conclusion: would they all lament the loss?

Fig 18 Then *...* A waterfront street block in *Thieves' Highway*

... and Now*,* a sports and exercise club replaced the razed block

The pictorial examples here presented have illustrated how locations liberated the moviemaker from the studio, how they can imbue an overall look and feel, metaphorically enrich the story, induce fear and suspense, psychologically draw us into the mind of a character, relate to the familiar and, powerfully, remind us how things were that no longer are. Individually each element served the purpose but collectively they undoubtedly shaped the evolution of the noir style itself. There is much that meets the eye when watching films noir and much more besides a nod to the power of the genre. Psychological prompts and visits to long-gone haunts touch us to the core and take us beyond simply observing the human condition; they remind us that we are a part of it. As we revert from the noir world back into our own we may find ourselves suffering from an emotional hangover, sympathizing with the downtrodden or even secretly rooting for the bad guy. We reflect on how much our surroundings have been affected by city planners and developers and how our way of life is yielding to the inexorable pressure of cultural change. All this for the price of a ticket to a film noir movie.

Notes

[1] Images in this article were either screen captures obtained from fair use public domain sites or photographs taken by the author.

[2] *The Third Man.* Directed by Carol Reed. London Film Productions Ltd., 1949. Starring Joseph Cotton, Orson Welles and Alida Valli.

[3] *The Sniper.* Directed by Edward Dmytryk. Columbia Pictures Corp., 1952. Starring Arthur Franz, Adolph Menjou and Marie Windsor.

[4] *Born to Kill.* Director Robert Wise. RKO Radio Pictures Inc., 1947. Starring Lawrence Tierney, Claire Trevor and Walter Slezak.

[5] *The Lady from Shanghai.* Director Orson Welles. Columbia Pictures Corp., 1947. Starring Orson Welles, Rita Hayworth, Everett Sloane and Glenn Anders.

[6] *Vertigo.* Director Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures Corp., 1958. Starring James Stewart, Kim Novak, Barbara Bel Geddes and Tom Helmore.

[7] *North by Northwest.* Director Alfred Hitchcock. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp., 1959. Starring Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint and James Mason.

[8] *Dark Passage.* Director Delmer Daves. Warner Bros. Pictures Inc., 1947. Starring Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall and Agnes Morehead.

[9] L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (London: Penguin, 1997), 5.

[10] *Portrait in Black.* Director Michael Gordon. Universal Pictures Co. Inc., 1960. Starring Lana Turner, Anthony Quinn, Richard Basehart and Sandra Dee.

[11] *The Lineup.* Director Don Siegel. Columbia Pictures Corp., 1958. Starring Eli Wallach and Robert Keith.

[12] *Criss Cross.* Director Robert Siodmak. Universal Pictures Co. Inc., 1949. Starring Burt Lancaster, Yvonne de Carlo and Dan Duryea.

[13] *Thieves Highway.* Director Jules Dassin. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp., 1949. Starring Richard Conte, Valentina Cortesa and Lee J. Cobb.

[14] Nostalgists can check out those colorful produce labels and more at http://www.reelsf.com/thieves-highway-crate-labels

Joseph H. Lewis and the Changing Noir Vision of American Culture from Gothic Heroines to Cold War Gangsters

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Director Joseph H. Lewis' *films noir* provide a microcosm of the changing noir vision of American culture. Lewis' noir films reveal changes in Hollywood's classic noir crime cycle as America's culture, film industry, and gender roles evolved over the postwar era. From its shadowy emergence in World War II to its changing style in the postwar era, *film noir* developed an array of incarnations. Literally "black film" or "dark cinema," film noir centered on tough guy detectives and femme fatales in hard-boiled pulp fiction, naïve ingénues in *roman noir* female gothic suspense thrillers, and psychotic antiheroes such as sadistic Cold War gangsters and tormented cops in postwar noir films.[1]

Lewis' noir cinema elevated low-budget filmmaking to an art form. Lewis directed an array of low-budget noir films—*My Name is Julia Ross* (1945), *So Dark the Night* (1946), *The Undercover Man* (1949), *Gun Crazy* (1950), *A Lady Without Passport* (1950), *Cry of the Hunted* (1953) and *The Big Combo* (1955)—at many different studios as independent production flourished in Hollywood by the end of the Second World War. As film noir emerged in the 1940s, film scholars such as Thomas Schatz have observed that World War II transformed the motion picture industry in the United States as America mobilized for the conflict and Hollywood shifted from a pre-war to wartime climate affecting studio production conditions, creative personnel, censorship and the types of films produced.[2]

Film noir capitalized on these unique wartime production conditions such as war-related blackouts in the Los Angeles basin, restrictions on location

shooting, rationing of film, lighting, electricity, set materials and recycled sets shrouded in shadow, fog, rain, cigarette smoke, mirrors and shrewd camera angles so distinctive of noir's cinematic milieu. New advances in technology also enabled noir filmmaking innovations with lightweight cameras and better, deep focus lenses (and faster, light sensitive film stock) which enhanced noir's distinctive shadowy chiaroscuro look and aesthetic visual style with high contrast, low key lighting and cinematography. During World War II, Lewis made combat films and had experience with these new innovations.

Responding to a shifting cultural, industrial, production and reception climate, including changes in censorship, film noir thrived during and just after World War II, catalyzed by a mix of war-related filmmaking constraints, competing censorship regimes (between Hollywood's Production Code Administration Hays Office and Washington's Office of War Information), a changing domestic audience of working wartime women (not unlike iconic female war-worker Rosie-the-Riveter), and a talent shortage for the duration as Hollywood's creative personnel enlisted in military service.

As the war ended and film noir proliferated, Lewis filmed gothic crime thriller *My Name is Julia Ross*, inexpensive sunlit noir *So Dark the Night*, Cold War G-men and gangsters in *The Undercover Man*, outlaw cult classic *Gun Crazy*, *A Lady Without Passport*, low-budget swamp noir *Cry of the Hunted* and stylish underrated noir gangster yarn, *The Big Combo* as postwar independent production soared. His noir films shifted from gothic thrillers to crime-fighting masculine gangster films in the postwar era.

With men overseas over the course of the conflict for the duration, women fulfilled the wartime labor need. Lewis began directing noir films during this unique production climate. His big break came during Hollywood's labor shortage: a chance to direct female gothic crime thriller *My Name is Julia Ross* at Columbia Pictures.

Like hard-boiled *serie noire* fiction, film noir also related to *roman noir* female gothic crime thrillers such as *My Name is Julia Ross*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), *Suspicion* (1941), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Spellbound* (1945), *Notorious* (1946) and George Cukor's *Gaslight* (1944, remaking Thorold Dickinson's 1940 British thriller).

As in masculine hard-boiled *serie noire* crime fiction that appealed to tough guys and war-hardened combat veterans, an array of female-centered noir styled period films, such as *roman noir* gothic thrillers (historically set in an England of an earlier time), were popular with women viewers in a domestic home front film audience.

These historical female gothic noir period films also evaded Washington's federal propaganda censorship of films which regulated Hollywood screen depictions of the contemporary 1940s home front and combat front.[3] Lewis returned to Hollywood and made female gothic noir *My Name is Julia Ross*

(1945), which articulated shifting cultural gender relations as the war drew to a close.

As working women were rechanneled back into the home by the end of the war, *My Name is Julia Ross* presented a job seeker's nightmare. Lewis' gothic noir film (produced in Columbia's B unit) was based on Anthony Gilbert's 1941 British *roman noir* novel *The Woman in Red*. It was scripted by Muriel Roy Bolton and produced by Wallace MacDonald for Columbia Pictures' B unit.

In October 1943 *Time* had called the *roman noir* novel on which it was based, *The Woman in Red*, an "excellent thriller" of a "jobless and desperate English girl" employed and victimized by a "sinister London household" ruled by an "old lady with murderous intentions" until a private detective "rescues the damsel" and "clears out the villainous nest."[4] Gothic ingénue Julia (Nina Foch, in her first starring role) plays a single, out-of-work London woman seeking a secretarial job. Her employer turns out to be a deadly scam artist/kidnapper/mother-in-law (Dame May Whitty) with a psychotic, homicidal momma's boy son (George MacReady) who claims to be Julia's husband. (MacReady would also star as an Axis criminal spouse, sadist heavy husband of Rita Hayworth, in *Gilda* the next year.)

Lewis drew on gothic horror conventions that amplified the crime thriller's gender distress, and emphasized its misogynism, dysfunctional relationships, and psychological instability with ominous chiaroscuro visual style, including a black cat, a secret passage, shrouded tight close-up camera shots, dim low-key lighting, and mysterious shadows.

My Name is Julia Ross revealed the importance of showcasing and targeting women in a wartime film and labor market at home and abroad (both in the U.S. and U.K.). It featured a female protagonist's point-of-view (with whom American and British home front working women could relate) and depicted an independent Rosie-the-Riveter's worst terror, thus resonating with real-life career girls lured away from employment in the city into suburban matrimony. After applying for work in London, Julia is abducted by the crooked, criminal mother-son duo who trap her in a creepy old mansion on the cliffs of the Cornwall coast. Far away from London's urban civilization, remotely separated from any help, she is kept behind bars, drugged up, and imprisoned in a fake marriage to a sadistic psychopath. His overbearing mother menacingly leads Julia to doubt her sanity, then endeavors to obliterate her identity and tries to kill her.

Cinematically, Lewis' gothic noir film, like Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) and *Notorious* (1946), captured the cultural distress, paranoia and domestic strife that many women faced after moving from career to domesticity at the end of the war. It depicted marriage and wealthy quiet life on the country estate not as wedded bliss, but rather as a surreal nightmare of misogynistic imprisonment: the working gothic heroine's would-be employer

becomes a lethal femme fatale in-law manipulating her serial-killer son to ensure Julia's demise—after he has already murdered his real wife.

Lewis filmed *My Name is Julia Ross* from July 19 to August 4, 1945, just days before the war ended. Lewis estimated the film's modest cost was $175,000—actually $50,000 over budget. Lewis explained:

> I was falling behind—I had a twelve-day schedule and I wound up shooting that picture in eighteen or twenty days— which was an unheard-of thing. I was doing a sequence and I said to myself, "Joe, I don't like this shot. You got a lot of dialog there, what can you do?" Finally I hit on it. The camera was over George Macready's shoulder, on Nina Foch, and all you saw were her eyes, because the rest of her was covered by his shoulder. And I shot the *entire* sequence in that one shot.[5]

Not unlike *My Name is Julia Ross*' female protagonist (Nina Foch) seeking work rather than marriage, one of Hollywood's most powerful women, writer-turned-hyphenate executive producer, Virginia Van Upp, served as executive in charge of production at Columbia Pictures during this time, rising to studio executive (just under Harry Cohn) from 1945-1947 as the motion picture industry grappled with, and emerged from, a war-related labor shortage.

Wartime films noir targeted independent home front women, many working jobs (with disposable income) in booming defense industries as men served overseas. By the end of the war, men began returning from military service seeking employment as they resumed civilian life. Like the unemployed protagonist Julia Ross, many jobs women had filled to temporarily aid the manpower shortage dried up as veterans (including many suffering from post-traumatic stress as a result of the war) returned and women were rechanneled into more subservient domestic roles in the home. (Van Upp even gave up her producing gig at Columbia after her husband returned from the war, and before getting a divorce.)

Advertising for *My Name is Julia Ross* was also aimed at a female home-front audience. Promotion taglines clamored: "*She went to sleep as a secretary…and woke up a madman's 'bride'!*" and "*'Bride' of a Madman Who Married To <u>Murder</u>!*" Studio publicity showed a cold-blooded murderous husband malevolently clutching an unconscious Julia as he towers over her and his evil mother/co-conspirator suspiciously looks on. Adopting gothic horror conventions, posters read: "In This Weird Mansion Dwells The Eeriest Mystery You Will Ever See!" and "*Meet Julia Ross* who lived through a nightmare of terror! *Trap The Husband* whose insane whims had to be obeyed! *Beware Of The Mother* who would even kill to save her son! *Help The Bachelor* who risked his life on a desperate gamble!"[6]

Although *My Name is Julia Ross* was a modest low-budget B picture, it was previewed to audiences in advance and shown as a top-billed feature rather than a second-billed programmer in many theaters. It was a successful sleeper hit. Upon its November 8, 1945 release, the *New York Times'* Bosley Crowther praised Lewis' moody noir style, "psychological overtones" and "effectively ominous atmosphere."[7]

As the war wound down, film critics lauded the popularity of psychological crime pictures and the public's penchant for realistic graphic depictions of violence and a brooding dark visual style (so characteristic of film noir) growing out of the war. Hollywood jumped on the noir bandwagon as critics and filmgoers craved the shadowy, stylish noir films so popular with war-hardened audiences. After the blackouts, rationing and shooting constraints of the war years, Orson Welles shot a brooding noir differently—in sunlight outdoor small town settings (a bright Hollywood back lot) cloaking evil in his classic 1946 film noir *The Stranger.*

After the war, film noir visual style, gender roles, and narrative conventions changed as crime pictures became increasingly masculine, targeting men returning from the conflict overseas. In many noir films, antiheroic protagonists shifted from criminals to crime-fighting investigators. For instance, Lewis' next noir picture, *So Dark the Night* (1946), is more male-centered with visually lighter cinematography. It leaves the urban jungle and brings the noir setting to sunlit pastoral locales into the bright high-key light of day. Promoted as "*Most Baffling of Mysteries!,*"[8] *So Dark the Night* starred émigré actor Steven Geray as French crime detective and schizophrenic murderer, Henri Cassin. Lewis uses shadowy demon lighting in a climactic shot—which reflects Henri's tormented, duplicitous point-or-view in a window—to effectively convey his dangerous split-personality. Recycled sets were disguised as exterior rural French countryside with some shooting at Columbia Ranch in Burbank, California.

So Dark the Night had a rather misleading title capitalizing on the popularity of film noir without reflecting the shadowy low-key cinematography in its photographic style. Instead Lewis' low-budget setting appeared shot in broad daylight and the film's interiors were flooded with light. Scripted by Dwight V. Babcock and Martin Berkeley based on a story by Aubrey Wisberg, *So Dark the Night* was filmed December 8 – 20, 1945, produced by Ted Richmond for low-budget Darmour Inc. and released October 10, 1946 through Columbia Pictures. *Variety* praised Lewis' film about a "schizophrenic Paris police inspector who becomes an insane killer at night." His "tight combination of direction, camerawork and musical scoring produce a series of isolated visual effects that are subtle and moving to an unusual degree." Critics noted Lewis' low-budget innovation: "Despite the obvious budget limitations, the layout of the streets, interior decorations and landscape shots define France as it exists

in our imagination."[9]

Film noir and the American motion picture industry (and its gendered labor pool and postwar film market audience) transformed following World War II in an emerging Cold War. Washington's House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and the Supreme Court's Paramount antitrust case against the industry were reinstated at the end of the conflict. Amid a growing Red Scare fueled by Washington's House Un-American Activities Committee and the Hollywood blacklist, by 1948 the Paramount antitrust Supreme Court decision dismantled the classical studio system's vertical integration. With competition from the growing postwar popularity of television by the 1950s, tensions and institutional pressures were high as major studios were forced to sell off lucrative theaters and exhibition chains. By 1945, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) industry trade association was renamed the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), and its head Will Hays replaced by Eric Johnston. As the war concluded, Hollywood was also eager to depict gangsters onscreen after Washington's Office of Censorship had discouraged certain celluloid criminals as unpatriotic and potential fodder for Nazi propaganda for the conflict's duration.

Film noir was inspired by documentary realism, stories of actual gangsters, and topics that had been censored during the war years. For example, when notorious real-life gangster Al Capone died in January 1947 (after serving prison time), Frank J. Wilson wrote "Undercover Man: He Trapped Capone" for *Collier's* magazine, the basis for Lewis' *The Undercover Man* which also inspired his later noir *The Big Combo*.[10] Scripted by Sydney Boehm, adapted by Jack Rubin and produced by Robert Rosson for Columbia Pictures, *The Undercover Man* starred Glenn Ford as a crime-fighting Treasury agent (like famed Elliot Ness). It also starred James Whitmore (in his first screen role) as Ford's partner and *My Name is Julia Ross* star Nina Foch as Ford's loyal, absent but accommodating wife sent off to the country, and, subsequently, out of most of the picture. By the late 1940s, like many noir pictures, this film is all about the men.

Originally titled *Chicago Story*, *The Undercover Man* was based loosely on events surrounding the arrest of Capone. It was filmed from May – June 1948 by Burnett Guffey (who shot *My Name is Julia Ross* and *So Dark the Night*) and released in April 1949.[11] Lewis' *The Undercover Man* opens:

> In the cracking of many big criminal cases—such as those of
> John Dillinger, Lucky Luciano and Al Capone, among
> others—the newspaper headlines tell only of the glamorous
> and sensational figures involved. But behind the headlines are
> the untold stories of ordinary men and women, acting with

extraordinary courage. This picture concerns one of these men.

Revealing the influence of neorealist technique, Lewis' noir film includes a scene with an immigrant mother pleading with the discouraged agent (Ford) to stand up to crime, and moving him to tears. Lewis explained how he captured the actor's emotion in one take:

> I shot that particular sequence with three cameras. I knew I had to shoot the rehearsal. If you recall, Glenn Ford wept. This is a man crying, and it's wonderful to see a man cry—it's something rare and beautiful. I knew I could never capture this if we shot a portion of it on somebody else and then went over and over and over. I shot the rehearsal.[12]

Publicized as: "*The Inside Story Of A Great U.S. Criminal Investigation!*," critics emphasized its crime-fighting, noting how the film captured realistic documentary visual style and violence. *Variety* praised *The Undercover Man* as a "good crime-busting saga...narrated in a straightforward, hard-hitting documentary style," noting its "standout features are the pic's sustained pace and its realistic quality. Fresh, natural dialog help to cover up the formula yarn, while topnotch performances down the line carry conviction." Hollywood trade papers commended Lewis' direction that "mutes the melodramatic elements but manages to keep the tension mounting through a series of violent episodes. Glenn Ford plays a Government Treasury agent on the trail of an underworld czar. Aiming to nail the racketeer on a tax-evasion rap, Ford attempts to contact some stoolpigeons but the syndicate knocks them off before they can squeal. Ford bolsters his conventional part with a sincere, matter-of-fact performance."[13]

The *New York Times* observed,

> Maybe you won't believe this, but Uncle Sam's sleuths who get "the goods" on the big income-tax violators lead lives which are dangerous and as tense as the lives of any G-men in the business of hunting super-crooks. At least, that is what they tell us in Columbia's *The Undercover Man*, the tale of a tax detective.... According to this fearful fable of a Treasury Department "cop" who nails a big syndicate operator on a $3,000,000 tax-evasion rap, the perils of sleuthing for such culprits among ledgers and dry account-books are similar to those of the fellow who goes after the gangster with a gun.

Noting the nonfiction inspiration of the film, critics explained:

> Indeed, the aspects of resistance which the tax-evader puts up are remarkably like the objections of the villains in the standard gangster films. Here the big tax-evader, who is strongly suggestive of Al Capone, has his men rub out those "stoolies" who would turn over his looks to the cops. He suborns municipal officials, intimidates the local police and even dares have his hoodlums "rough up" the Treasury men.[14]

Revealing how prevalent realistic semi-documentary visual style was in late-1940s crime films, critics complained about its frequent recurrence:

> That is one fault of this picture: it looks so much like so many films of the cops-and-robbers formula, in the new semi-documentary style, that it offers nothing refreshing in the way of pictorial surprise. Furthermore—and this is fatal—it is a drearily static film, for all its explosive flurries of gun-play and passing of violent threats.[15]

The *New York Times* added,

> The big crisis in the picture comes when the Treasury man, played by Glenn Ford, is uncertain whether to stick with the case or retire to a farm. And the basis of his decision to go on sleuthing for Uncle Sam is a long-winded lecture on justice which a sad-eyed Italian woman gives. Mr. Ford, in a battered gray hat and a baggy suit, makes a pretty case for higher salaries to civil servants but a not very impressive sleuth.[16]

In a changing film noir and postwar industry climate, hard-boiled fiction (which was praised during World War II) was dismissed five years later and called "humdrum pulp fiction" in 1950 reviews of Lewis' noir films. Initially, Lewis' status as a low-budget B-film director marginalized his being considered a prestigious cinema auteur. Despite Lewis' subsequent critical following for his economical film noir directing technique, he was rarely promoted in studio publicity or praised in critical reviews upon the films' original release. For example, even Lewis' most famous film noir, his innovative cult classic *Gun Crazy*, was initially panned as "episodic and familiar" when it was first released.[17]

Based on MacKinlay Kantor's 1940 short story in the *Saturday Evening Post*

(adapted by blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo), *Gun Crazy*, produced by Maurice and Frank King with cinematography by Russell Harlan, featured Peggy Cummins and John Dall as a wild gun-obsessed, sex-crazed Bonnie-and-Clyde-style outlaw couple who get their kicks on violent crime until they meet their brutal demise in a fog-shrouded swamp. Like *The Undercover Man*, *Gun Crazy* was a postwar noir gangster film. However, *Gun Crazy* includes an androgynous femme fatale who is a cold-hearted, violent gunslinger who seems more strong and masculine than her male counterpart. *Gun Crazy* opens with a rain-drenched noir flashback sequence of a juvenile delinquent (Russ Tamblyn as Dall's younger self), then jumps ahead to much brighter photography in the semi-documentary style of Jules Dassin's *Naked City* (1947), as Lewis filmed on location in Montrose, Reseda, and Angeles Crest Highway just outside Los Angeles, California.

Gun Crazy's violent sexual innuendo played havoc with Hollywood screen censorship. In fact, Motion Picture Production Code censor Joseph Breen rejected the first draft of the screenplay. By March 1949 *Hollywood Reporter* noted alluring blonde siren Veronica Lake was considered for the film's femme role.[18] *Gun Crazy* was shot from May – June 1949 for about $450,000. Suggesting provocative postwar gender relations, Lewis' noir film title was changed to *Deadly Is the Female* in October 1949, then released through United Artists in January 1950. Reviewed by many publications as *Deadly Is the Female*, the film's title was later changed back to *Gun Crazy* by the time it opened in New York in August 1950.[19]

Gun Crazy displayed remarkable technical style. Lewis admitted the film was not successful during its original release, but studios industry-wide clamored to see how he shot it. "Every studio wanted to run that film, because they wanted to know how we used four and five rear-projection machines at the same time." He actually shot the film live on location with portable equipment (which was used more frequently after the war). Lewis filmed the criminals' famous getaway from their point-of-view within a speeding car. He explained, "I wanted to make dolly shots and you can't put a dolly in a sedan. I got my crew together and said…I *know* it can be done." Lewis filmed a bank holdup for over two miles with one shot. (After extensive pre-production planning with test shots of two extras on 16mm film, he filmed on location in Montrose, California.) Lewis completed the final sequence (originally scheduled for four days) in three hours by renting a stretch limousine with a crew of eight technicians (including himself) behind the front seats. His cameraman sat on a jockey's saddle on a greased plank pushed back and forth to simulate a dolly shot. "Improvised dialogue outside the limo was captured by tiny microphones hidden under the sunshades and outside sounds by two mikes on poles held by technicians strapped to the car's roof."[20] Lewis gave his noir *Gun Crazy* a western flavor with his sharpshooter fugitives dressed in

matching cowboy-cowgirl outfits while he filmed his outlaw couple from the saddle to eroticize violence and crime as a sexual thrill and provoke censors.

Gun Crazy's industry acclaim opened a few doors for Lewis, who scored a gig at prestigious major studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), known for its lavish resources and high production values. Lewis said MGM hired him after being impressed with his documentary style on *Gun Crazy*, but he later complained of the studio's unnecessary opulence. Lewis worked on projects like sunlit crime film *A Lady Without Passport* (originally, *Visa*, a documentary-style story of Cuban immigrants) about an undercover agent (John Hodiak) pursuing illegal Cuban-alien smugglers (Macready, Geray) and romance with sultry star Hedy Lamarr, and *Desperate Search* (1952), an adventure drama featuring musical star Howard Keel.

A Lady Without Passport was set outdoors in Havana and the Florida Everglades and featured bright locations and high-key lit soundstage shots filmed from January to February 1950 with technical assistance from U.S. Immigration. Released in August 1950, *A Lady Without Passport* avoided the darker shadowy visual style more typical of film noir with the exception of a wonderfully dynamic Latin jazz sequence shot extremely low with skewed Dutch angles of a kinetic dance performance and Afro-Cuban band in a dark, shrouded nightclub.

In the wake of the postwar popularity of Italian neorealism, by May 1952 the *New York Times* announced that Vittorio Gassman, a "film star in Italy before coming here a few months ago" would play an "escaped convict who is eventually straightened out by an understanding warden" in *Cry of the Hunted*, Lewis' best noir at MGM. Reflecting its postwar production context and men returning home from war, industry analysts also referenced the Hollywood blacklist and noted that former musical/noir star Dick Powell—of Busby Berkeley musicals and *Murder, My Sweet* fame—moved into directing a film about a "veteran who gets mixed up with gangsters when he returns to civilian life."[21]

Lewis' *Cry of the Hunted*, a low-budget endeavor at MGM and a riveting under-recognized film noir, was one of the best pictures produced by the studio's B unit supervised by Charles Schnee. Written by Jack Leonard and produced by William Grady, Jr., it featured a jaded law enforcement official who chases an escaped fugitive from a prison cell through a black tunnel and a Louisiana swamp. Lewis claimed he shot the film on the lot, but sequences included locations filmed in September 1952 at Louisiana bayous and Angel's Flight Railway on Bunker Hill in downtown Los Angeles. *Cry of the Hunted* was a tight masculine swamp noir that, unlike his earlier *My Name is Julia Ross*, exuded muscular macho virility. It was also known by its working title: *Men Don't Cry*. Lewis' noir film was a crime narrative of rugged outdoor survival in the wilderness and the relationship between two men on opposite sides of the

law. Yet, *Cry of the Hunted* humanized its ethnic fugitive from justice who was running for his life.

Lewis shot a striking noir sequence in a pitch-black prison cell where the lawman brutally beats and tries to force the ethnic criminal-inmate (Gassman, with a Russian/Eastern European accent) to inform and name the names of his co-conspirators. *Cry of the Hunted* can be seen as a fascinating allegory for Red Scare xenophobia and the Hollywood blacklist. It traces the fugitive fleeing and hunted by the tenacious lawman obsessed with his capture. It included rugged manly fistfights, alligators, turbulent quicksand, drug-induced swamp fever hallucination sequences, an opportunistic ladder-climbing cop, and a shady sheriff who shoots first and asks questions later. Typically, women were relegated to the periphery of this postwar noir film.

It was during Hollywood's growing Cold War production climate that Lewis suffered a heart attack (at the age of 46) after years working at a breakneck pace. He took a year-and-a-half hiatus, and eventually left MGM before directing his independently-produced film noir classic, *The Big Combo*, a move that coincided with Hollywood's rising postwar trend toward independent production. In July 1954 the *New York Times* reported Allied Artists would co-produce "gangster melodrama" *The Big Combo* (aka *The Hoodlum*) with star Cornel Wilde and wife/co-star Jean Wallace's Theodora Productions and Security Pictures, another independent company headed by writer Philip Yordan and producer Sidney Harmon. *The Big Combo* was released in 1955 by Allied Artists, which was in the "midst of large scale expansion…affiliating with outside producers and production units" and was trying to sign other noir directors such as John Huston, William Wyler and Billy Wilder.[22]

The Big Combo moved beyond some of Lewis' earlier low-budget ventures. Allied Artists, formerly Poverty Row studio Monogram Pictures, foresaw a waning future for low-budget films. Monogram established Allied Artists to make costlier B-plus films in 1946, with higher production values. (In 1953 Monogram renamed itself Allied Artists.) Following the 1948 Paramount antitrust decision which broke up the vertical integration of Hollywood's classical studio system, low-budget B films in the 1950s, including economical films noir, were increasingly reformulated into telefilms as low-budget film production at many Hollywood studios across the industry retooled for television. By March 1953, as television increasingly targeted women and families at home while postwar noir films targeted men, NBC broadcast a television adaptation of Lewis' female gothic *My Name is Julia Ross* on network TV.

As seen in *The Big Combo*, many filmmakers were moving into independent production in this changing postwar era. Film noir visual style and regulatory strictures also changed as filmmakers increasingly turned to widescreen color

pictures, and Production Code censorship eased. Independently-produced films allowed more latitude in evading censorship of salacious screen content, particularly after censor Joseph Breen's departure in 1954. Yet, after praising the life-like gritty realism, graphic violence and hard-boiled narratives of earlier mid-1940s film noir, critics such as Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* called for Hollywood to curb cinematic violence, graphic realist noir style, tough gangsters and juvenile delinquency in 1950s films. Many reviewers noted the violence and brutality in *The Big Combo* when a kingpin tortures the police detective protagonist. Lewis also suggested oral sex and homosexuality in the noir film.

The Big Combo is one of Lewis' finest films, noted for its stunning film noir style. It opens with stark shadows, deep-focus cinematography, and a moody jazz soundtrack. With its exquisite noir cinematography filmed by John Alton, *The Big Combo* remains one of the most beautifully shot of all Lewis' pictures. By the mid-1950s, brighter, less shadowy semi-documentary style and television police procedural conventions—and color film production— eventually replaced the look and feel of the black chiaroscuro and hard-boiled narratives of mid-1940s World War II-era film noir style. The ambivalent critical reception to Lewis' brilliant collaboration with Alton may have indicated that his stylized crime homage to earlier shrouded classic noir conventions (applauded by critics a decade before at the end of World War II) had become more of an atypical, increasingly rare cinematic experience in an era of color, widescreen and lighter high-key television-like visual style by 1955.

The Big Combo is an impressive culmination of Lewis' body of film noir work. His films noir—evolving from *My Name is Julia Ross* to *Undercover Man*, *Gun Crazy*, *Cry of the Hunted* and *The Big Combo*—are a remarkable microcosm illustrating how the classic noir cycle and Hollywood itself transformed over a ten-year period. In relation to broader industry trends, Lewis' noir pictures show a changing film noir style shifting from studio-bound wartime production with recycled sets to greater location filming and realistic muted shades of gray in the semi-documentary style of postwar Hollywood. As fascinating cultural and industrial products, these films reveal how Lewis, and film noir, responded to institutional pressures in the wake of the Cold War, the Hollywood blacklist, unraveling of the studio system, censorship, rising popularity of television, and increasing independent production.

Lewis' noir pictures demonstrate innovative aesthetic style challenging censorship constraints while responding to shifting gender roles, a changing audience moving from independent Rosie-the-Riveter-style working women to target a growing male audience as men returned from overseas, exploring issues of masculinity, gender distress, misogynistic violence and sexual turmoil. Lewis' noir pictures moved from female-centered gothic thrillers to crime-

fighting gangster narratives as Hollywood's dark crime trend moved to more masculine-centered documentary style in the postwar era. Responding to a shifting cultural, industrial, production, reception and censorship climate, Lewis forged a sophisticated standard of 'B' noir, as seen in the artistry of *Gun Crazy* and *The Big Combo*, and transcended marginalization of his work when his low-budget films were initially released in the 1940s and 1950s.

After the war, Lewis' films noir, such as *The Undercover Man*, *Gun Crazy*, *The Big Combo*—like Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) and Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958)—invoked elements of the gangster cycle as censorship ebbed. Lewis' stylish noir gangster films provide unique perspective on shifting cultural and industrial considerations as noir films evolved from earlier 1940s female-centered *roman noir* gothic thrillers to more masculine postwar terrain as a growing Cold War climate arose. As the industry and film noir changed, *The Big Combo* was one of Lewis' last projects before moving into television. Stars, writers, directors and Hollywood itself shifted to telefilm production as film noir faded. Lewis' final noir picture coincided with the decline of film noir in the 1950s, articulating a changing *noir* vision of American culture in a changing Hollywood system a decade after World War II.

Notes

[1] Sheri Chinen Biesen, *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005).

[2] Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Scribner's, 1997); Biesen, 2005; "Windfall for the Salvagers," *New York Times*, 26 October 1941.

[3] As the U.S. became involved in the conflict in the early-mid 1940s, to boost morale and mobilize for the war effort, Washington's Office of War Information (OWI) Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) and Office of Censorship regulated Hollywood films concerning the wartime combat and home fronts as the industry churned out political propaganda.

[4] "September Murders," *Time* (*The Woman in Red* book review), 11 October 1943.

[5] Joseph H. Lewis quoted in Peter Bogdanovich, *Who the Devil Made It?* (New York: Ballantine, 1997) 659-662.

[6] Publicity for *My Name is Julia Ross*, University of Southern California, 1945.

[7] Bosley Crowther, "My Name Is Julia Ross," *New York Times*, 9 November 1945, 16. Crowther observed: "The director and scenarist of the…new mystery, *My Name Is Julia Ross*, deserve a B-plus for effort at least. It is quite evident that they strived earnestly to whip up excitement and suspense, but somehow that electrifying quality which distinguishes good melodrama is lacking in this transcription of the Anthony Gilbert novel, *The Woman in Red*. The elements of a mystifying entertainment with psychological overtones are present in this story about a girl who is engaged as a private secretary by a rich old dame and discovers that her employer plans to drive her crazy and thus cover up evidence of a previous murder. Julia, you see, is a dead ringer

for the victim, and the scheme, is to produce her as the corpus delicti." (Though his review suggested that Lewis was not an actor's director: he "has not been as adept in handling the players, and that, we suspect, is why *My Name Is Julia Ross* misses the mark. As the frightened heroine, Nina Foch depends chiefly on studied expressions of shock and bewilderment, and she gets only routine support from George MacReady and Dame May Whitty.")

[8] Publicity for *So Dark The Night*, University of Southern California, 1946.

[9] *Variety* noted the "story revolves around the ill-fated romance between a middle-aged Parisian detective and a young country girl who is already betrothed to a neighboring farmer" and found "strangled to death." "So Dark the Night," *Variety*, 18 September 1946, 16.

[10] Fred Stanley, "Hollywood Peeks Into the Future," *New York Times*, 21 February 1943.

[11] *The Undercover Man* was shot on the back lot for about $1 million, although in March 1948 the *Los Angeles Times* reported it would be shot on location in Chicago, later noting some scenes were filmed at Union Station in Los Angeles. "The Undercover Man," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 March, 4 May 1948. Lewis quoted in Bogdanovich, 675-679. It was just a few years after Ford's performance as tormented crime antihero opposite a vivacious Rita Hayworth in Columbia's film noir, *Gilda* (produced by Van Upp)—before recasting him with Hayworth in Columbia's Cold War-era noir *Affair in Trinidad* (1952) and virile cop (sans Rita) in Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953).

[12] Lewis quoted in Bogdanovich, 671-675.

[13] *The Undercover Man* Publicity, USC Special Collections, 1949; "Undercover Man," *Variety*, 23 March 1949, 8.

[14] Bosley Crowther, "*The Undercover Man*, With Glenn Ford as Federal Agent," *New York Times*, 21 April 1949, 30.

[15] Crowther, 1949, 30.

[16] Crowther, 1949, 30.

[17] Howard Thompson (H.H.T.), "Episodic and Familiar," *New York Times*, 25 August 1950, 17.

[18] "Gun Crazy," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 4 March 1949, 10.

[19] *Gun Crazy* was copyrighted as *Deadly Is the Female* in December 1949 by Pioneer Pictures.

[20] Lewis in Bogdanovich, 675-679; Lewis in Francis Nevins, *Joseph H. Lewis*, (London: Scarecrow, 1998) 38-39.

[21] Thomas M. Pryor, "Vittorio Gassman in New Metro Film – Italian Actor Named to Star in *Cry of the Hunted*, Story of a Convict and His Warden," *New York Times*, 27 May 1952.

[22] "3 Groups Ready to Film *Big Combo* – Allied Artists Joins Theodora Productions and Security Pictures in Melodrama," *New York Times*, 28 July 1954.

Reviving Noir: An Interview with Eddie Muller

Doré Ripley
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Eddie Muller, aka "The Czar of Noir," is the creator of the Noir City film festivals, which for more than ten years have been resurrecting classic and rare noir films in selected U.S. cities and international venues. In addition, Muller is a writer, filmmaker, and noted noir historian. His books include *Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir*, *Dark City Dames: The Wicked Women of Film Noir*, *The Art of Noir: Posters and Graphics from the Classic Film Noir Era* and his latest work, *Gun Crazy: The Origin of American Outlaw Cinema* (2014). Muller has twice been named the San Francisco Literary Laureate. He has recorded numerous audio commentaries for DVD reissues of classic noir films and can often be seen on Turner Classic Movies (TCM) as a guest and a host.

Muller is the founder and president of the non-profit Film Noir Foundation which was created as an educational resource promoting the cultural, historical, and artistic significance of film noir as an original American cinematic movement. Its mission is to find and preserve films in danger of being lost or irreparably damaged, and to ensure that high quality prints of these classic films remain in circulation for theatrical exhibition to future generations.

DR: Let's start with the big question: What is film noir? Many argue whether noir is a genre, series, style, movement, cycle, type, or style. How would you define film noir? What characteristics do you look for in a great piece of noir?

EM: Film Noir is the only truly organic artistic movement in Hollywood history. That's *one* answer, of many possible ones, but for me it's probably the most applicable as a mainstream explanation. It developed within the crime

genre, or more precisely, within what were known in the industry as "crime thrillers" and "murder dramas"—the distinction being that "crime" pictures were about professional crooks and "murder" stories were usually about amateurs. For example, *Kiss of Death* would be a crime thriller, but *The Postman Always Rings Twice* would be considered a murder drama. Noir happened when American hardboiled crime fiction was adapted to the screen with many of the techniques and artifice left over from German Expressionistic cinema. In short, a peculiarly European approach to art direction and cinematography was melded with a peculiarly American storytelling style and vernacular lingo.

But to me, noir isn't just about the look—its most compelling stories involve desperate characters on a course of self-destruction and what is most emblematic of "true" noir is that these tales are told in the first person—the audience is meant to empathize with the doomed protagonist, generally someone who knows what they are doing is wrong, perhaps even fatal, *and they do it anyway.* That, to me, is the crucial factor in great noir. Let's call it "empathy with the damned."

DR: The Noir City Film Festival, which started in San Francisco and recently celebrated its lucky 13th year, has satellite festivals in Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, Austin, and Washington, D.C. This seems to establish that noir is making a comeback; to what do you attribute this resurgence?

EM: I don't know if this is true or not. I think that 10-15 years ago was when noir (meaning the vintage films themselves) had a perceptible mainstream resurgence. That was due somewhat to my early efforts programming festivals of lost films, but mostly to the studios producing an abundance of noir collections on DVD—which were always the best-sellers. The reason for that is, mostly, that it is a darkly glamorous way for people to revisit mid-20th century America, which was unquestionably the height of American style. Noir allows people to enjoy all that without wallowing in nostalgia, because the stories are tough and cynical—the noir era was Ground Zero in the culture's loss of innocence.

My festivals are successful because we give people a chance to see these films as they were meant to be seen, and we're also recreating the communal experience of movie-going, creating almost a ritual for like-minded people to share their interests (and/or obsessions). I've definitely seen a lot of other venues, theaters and museums following our lead, hoping a rejuvenated interest in classic noir will help salvage their venues.

It's interesting to note that I formed the Film Noir Foundation in 2005 to raise money to save lost and obscure examples of the genre—and no one had tried the same thing with any other genre. No one is trying to save Westerns, or Musicals, or Screwball comedies. Does that mean Noir is what the people

want?—or that other people in my position are simply not as passionate about other types of films or as adept at packaging and presenting them? I don't know the answer.

DR: In what other cities can enthusiasts expect to see future noir festivals?

EM: There is *no* expectation. I have, however, received queries from Denver, Detroit, Louisville, Tampa Bay, and Dublin, Ireland. At a certain point, we are bound to reach the stage of diminishing returns. I weigh everything very carefully, to ensure that doesn't happen.

DR: The Film Noir Foundation has restored movies once thought lost, such as *The Sound of Fury* (1951), *Too Late for Tears* (1949)—described as the Holy Grail of film *noir*—and this year the Noir Film Foundation restored releases of *Woman on the Run* (1950) and *The Guilty* (1947). What titles is the foundation currently restoring?

EM: I expect our purview to extend across international borders. We recently struck the first prints ever with English subtitles of several excellent if virtually unknown Argentinean films noir, *Apenas un delincuente* (1949), *El vampio negro* (1953), and *No abras nunca esa puerta* (1952)—all of which are incredibly good. It looks likely that this year we'll restore the Argentine film *Los tallos amargos* (1956), which is truly remarkable, one of the best noir films made anywhere in the 1950s. Yet no one knows *anything* about it.

My colleague in Buenos Aires, Fernando Martin Peña (who found the full-length *Metropolis* several years back) is largely responsible for enlightening me about these films. We will continue to search for "missing" examples of American noir, but if all we're doing is recovering bargain-basement B-films from Poverty Row studios—I'd rather be rescuing truly great if little-known films from overseas. One thing I have learned in the past few years, something not particularly well-known to cinema "scholars," is that noir was definitely not an exclusively American phenomenon.

DR: San Francisco's 2015 Noir City Film Festival featured the theme of "Til Death do us Part" and featured films "centered around the bonds of matrimony." What is your theme for 2016?

EM: "'The Art of Darkness' is a collection of 25 noir-stained films exploring the pressures, pitfalls, paranoia and pain of being an artist in an indifferent and often cruel world. This time the tortured protagonists weren't felons or fall guys, but were writers, painters, dancers, photographers, and musicians." (www.noircity.com)

DR: You have worked with Turner Classic Movies on film noir projects, how have those films been received by the general public? Can you share any current collaboration on showcases with TCM?

EM: I guess I've become TCM's "noir guy." I don't know exactly how the films are received, you'd have to ask the network. But they asked me to program and host a two-month noir series this June and July [2015], called "Summer of Darkness." Every Friday night I'll present four films. So I guess that means the public is responding positively.

DR: Your top 25 noir films include, from number 25 *Raw Deal* (1948) to the top 5 which are *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *Criss Cross* (1949), and your number 1 pick, *In a Lonely Place* (1950). You believe each of these particular noir films are "still engrossing the sixth time you've seen it." Has your list changed over time? Does reaching a certain age, or having seen a certain film seven times, change the way you look at noir?

EM: Of course your reaction to a film changes as you change. If I redid that list now, I'd certainly make room for *The Breaking Point* (1950), which might even crack the Top 5; I've seen it maybe 6-8 times in the past two years and it's a compelling and virtually flawless film. I might even put *Woman on the Run* on that list, just for personal reasons.

I respond to films in a very organic way, not like a collector who declares "This is the best, for this reason—and so it will always be." I couldn't care less. I used to get a huge thrill out of the *Lady of Shanghai*—now I just see what a weirdly misshapen, incomplete film it is. But so what? That's *my* reaction. If somebody wanted to argue with me that it was Welles' greatest film—don't bother, you win. But I know that such a declaration is just one perspective, at a particular time. I no longer have any interest in winning these intellectual battles over what's better or worse. I'm more interested in rescuing unknown films and getting them seen. Hell, I saved *The Guilty*—all 71 grimy, low-rent minutes of it—and had people come up to me saying, "That was astounding!" and "That was a waste of time and money!"

DR: Noir film style has been described as a black-and-white film featuring chiaroscuro lighting, where neon light is reflected off rain-slick pavement and highlights canted shots. If one is just looking at style, what is the quintessential noir film? How much does the dark story-line contribute to this style?

EM: If you want quintessential, I'd say *Double Indemnity* and *Out of the Past,* both for the themes and the atmosphere. I think the classic noir storyline is a steady downward spiral that the protagonist mistakes for an ascension into ecstasy.

DR: Your book *Dark City Dames* features the women of film noir. "Sinister and sexy, [film noir] forged a new icon: the tough, independent, take-no-guff dame. Determined, desirable, dangerous when cornered, she could handle trouble—or deal out some of her own." What makes a great femme fatale? Who is your favorite?

EM: The *femme fatale* is the woman every man secretly desires—and the last person he should ever actually meet. Clearly, the essential part of her appeal, beyond mere sexual allure, is mystery. The characters in *Double Indemnity* and *Out of the Past* are really projecting their existential angst and ennui onto a desirable woman—they are entering into a pact in which she is supposed to be his savior; she's being used by the man to give his life a depth of meaning and excitement that it doesn't otherwise have.

Yvonne De Carlo in *Criss Cross* is one of the best *femmes fatales* because by the end the viewer is allowed to see it's all an illusion—we've been sharing Burt Lancaster's delusional obsession with her. At the end, she's revealed to be just a simple woman and she has some of the best lines in noir when she berates him for idolizing her. Far from trying to destroy him (which is how most of these characters get interpreted) she's only trying to *escape* from him ("Why did you have to come back here? Why! Why can't people fend for themselves?"). Far from the typical male-centric reading in which the man is the spider-woman's victim, in many of these films it's the man who destroys the woman with his insane (if understandable) adoration.

DR: If you look at literary and cinematic noir men they seem to be in pain, pain that is often more psychological than physical. Who is your favorite angst-ridden anti-hero hiding under that fedora? What makes him tick?

EM: Most of these guys are failures. Failures without any of the mainstream crutches people use to keep themselves propped up: religion, family, work, etc. They are unmoored from all of that and are typically trying to find solid footing through some last-ditch attempt at "fitting in." If they only had enough money, or the right woman … but they don't get the money and they don't get the woman (to paraphrase Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity*).

DR: The dark brooding city can often be deemed a character in noir films. Why do you think San Francisco so often occupies that coveted spot among the *dramatis personae*?

EM: Because it's water on three sides, is geographically claustrophobic, and has lots and lots of fog. Plus, it's got a fair share of exotica only 400 miles from Hollywood. Filmmakers could get a totally different look for a film without having to take the cast and crew far from home.

DR: Some may argue the definition of neo-noir*,* but *Bladerunner* and *Mulholland Drive* are two popular neo-noir films. How do you view neo-noir and do you have a favorite movie?

EM: I prefer films that extend the noir ethos rather than try to recreate it. I like *Blade Runner*, but when I watch it now I find it too spot-on—literally transposing Raymond Chandler into a dystopian future.

　Mulholland Drive is one of my favorite films ever: it takes a classic noir "amnesia" premise and jumbles it into two staple noir narratives: the whodunit and the protagonist-as-perpetrator, all rendered through the *dreams* of an unreliable narrator! Plus, I can watch it endlessly to pick out all the sly references to other films and little bits and pieces of Hollywood history. Let's just say that for someone steeped in noir, it was not at all hard to follow the film's internal logic.

DR: As a writer, your style is part Raymond Chandler and part newspaper man. Your lines often take on the pulp style of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s making your works a joy to read. What is your favorite line from a noir film?

EM: "I don't go to church. Kneeling bags my nylons." Jan Sterling in *Ace in the Hole*.

　Thanks for the kind words about my novels. Mostly I try to write those like a newspaper guy from the '40s; what I take from Hammett and Chandler is the pace, always moving on to a new scene, never letting anything stay in one place too long. It's fun.

DR: You seem to have a disdain for over-intellectualizing a film. In your latest book *Gun Crazy* (2014) you write that what sometimes makes a great noir film is its ability to "defy intellectualization." What noir films particularly defy being pigeon holed at the point of a gun?

EM: Any of them—if you don't succumb to over-analysis.

I find that a film often is about precisely what it declares itself to be about. I don't need an interpretation. Far too much film criticism stems from graduate school thinking, in which the exercise is to hone your critical faculties by delving deeper and deeper into a book or movie. All well and good—except when your regard for your own "original thinking" supersedes what the author or filmmakers are actually saying. I'm all for rigorous critical thought—but I am not pleased when sloppy theorizing displaces crucial historical context. But hey, I'm a journalist by craft—I am far more interested in *how* a movie came to be made a certain way (like *Gun Crazy*) than in what the movie is purportedly about, or how the film fits into someone's pre-determined theme of mid-century gender politics or some such thing. If you want to *write* that story—I'd suggest going and reading the memos contained in the studio vaults, rather than trying to ascribe underlying meanings to the films themselves.

FYI—what I mean by "defy intellectualization" is that no matter how far behind the curtain you go, studying the film, tracing its origins, reading all the scholarship—it still manages to hit you on a purely visceral, emotional level. It plugs right into you in a way you can't think yourself out of.

DR: *The Noir City Annual* is a great read for anyone who likes noir, with essays from film noir's origins in pulp and comics to profiles of the best actors/writers/directors. What kind of works are you looking at or for in upcoming editions? Who/what will be featured in future editions?

EM: We're right now working on an issue which primary focuses on graphic storytelling. We'll have articles on the many incarnations of Batman, Will Eisner's *The Spirit*, the noir influence of Jim Steranko (my boyhood idol!), the fantastic long-form storytelling of Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips (*Criminal, Fatale, The Fade-Out*), the tragic life of artist Jack Cole… and then we'll do a similar issue on music: noir composers, contemporary variants, Tom Waits, Johnny Cash, etc. We have no shortage of material, especially when you start pushing the boundaries a bit.

To find out more about the Noir City Film Festival or to support the Film Noir Foundation, go to their website at www.filmnoirfoundation.org.

"Why Do You Make Me Do This?": Spectator Empathy, Self-Loathing Lawmen and Nicholas Ray's Noir Vision in *On Dangerous Ground*

Kevin Henderson
Drury University

In the spring of 1950, while Raymond Chandler was rewriting his 1944 essay "The Simple Art of Murder" for *The Saturday Review,* Nicholas Ray was riding with third-shift police officers "down the mean streets"[1] of Boston's toughest districts to bring a grittier authenticity to *On Dangerous Ground*, his seventh film noir since his 1948 debut, *They Live by Night*. Ray's research began as an attempt to honor Chandler's "lonely men . . . doing a hard, dangerous job,"[2] but it also fueled his need to push noir beyond Chandler's constraints against these lonely men allowing their code of ethics to be corrupted or their emotional torments to surface.[3] Ray would violate both codes in *On Dangerous Ground*'s (1951) most indelible scene, a confrontation in which Officer Jim Wilson (Robert Ryan) screams, "why do you make me do this?" at the unarmed suspect he soon batters.[4] Filmed nine years after *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and eight before *Touch of Evil* (1958), this scene can be read as a turning point in the middle of noir's classic era, one in which viewers witness a hard-boiled cop cracking under pressure, exposing his fear and sadistic rage, and questioning his loss of agency in the pursuit of being, as Chandler would phrase it, "the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world."[5]

While much has been written about the noir antihero's struggles with "white masculinity,"[6] post-war anxiety,[7] and fatalism,[8] comparatively little has been written about the startling emotional frankness and brutality of lawmen like Officer Wilson—the "psychotic" cops of fifties noir that Paul Schrader alludes to in his "Notes on Film Noir."[9] Even less has been observed about the complicated demands on spectator empathy when detective heroes no

longer exhibit the emotional and physical restraint of their Marlowe, Spade, and Hammer kin. In this essay I examine how the emotional volatility of Nicholas Ray's *On Dangerous Ground*, and the characterization of Officer Jim Wilson in particular, intensifies the conflicts of empathy noir engenders in its viewers. I explore how Wilson's angry question—"Why do you make me do this?"—may be alternately directed at the suspect, at the spectator's desire to blame the suspect, or inwardly at Wilson's need to interrogate his own fear, rage, and self-loathing. I also argue that multiple elements of Ray's noir vision in *On Dangerous Ground*, from the radical shifts in style to the disorienting tones of what Bernard Herrmann would call his favorite score, serve to disrupt viewers' affective engagement with noir's most common trope: the world-weary yet right-minded investigator. In my conclusion I highlight the influence of Ray's emotionally fraught film on a spectrum of retro- and neo-noirs, particularly on Curtis Hansen's *L.A. Confidential* (1997), whose abusive Officer White (Russell Crowe) also suffers a fear of lost agency.

Spectator Empathy, Sympathetic Narratives, and Meta-Emotions:

Theories of affect and emotion in film spectatorship, most notably in the scholarship of Murray Smith, Alex Neill, Noel Carroll, Greg B. Smith, and Carl Plantinga, share the common goal of analyzing the roles of empathetic spectatorship on cognitive assessments and understanding film narrative. In his most recent work, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*,[10] Plantinga argues that "elicited emotions and affects are characterized and differentiated by structural features, such that the film's intended affective focus can be reasonably well determined," which reinforces the position of many interdisciplinary affect studies (certainly in rhetoric, feminist epistemology, and neuroscience) that emotions are not merely idiosyncratic but identifiable and serve as adjunct, not adversary, to critical judgment.[11] To aid in the analysis of "elicited emotions and affects" that constitute spectator empathy, Plantinga distinguishes four foundational affective responses that films evoke: the *sympathetic/antipathetic emotions,* which "arise from the spectator's assessment of a narrative situation primarily in relation to a character's concerns, goals, and well-being," the *direct emotions,* which "stem from the spectator's concerns about and interest in the content of the unfolding story," the *artifact emotions*, which take as their object the combined aesthetics and cinematic elements of the film itself, and the *meta-emotions*, which take into account either the "spectator's [self-awareness of their] own emotions or the responses of other spectators."[12]

Plantinga's terms prove useful for complicating the commonplace that noir protagonists are inherently "unsympathetic," as Sharon Cobb suggests in "Writing the New Noir Film."[13] Cobb believes:

the audience feels little sympathy for the characters and their situations because they are not likeable personalities and they do forbidden things. If movie audiences can't feel sympathy for the characters, then they care little about what happens to them and cannot connect to the story on an emotional level.[14]

Cobb then argues that only a noir's "understanding and intrigue," which Plantinga would say appeal to spectators' direct emotions, can compensate for this lack of natural spectator sympathy toward noir's antiheroes.[15] Plantinga's distinctions help us shift Cobb's assessment toward a closer analysis of why seemingly unlikeable characters still create not only sympathetic but emotionally-engaged spectatorship. For example, we might assess that sustained conflicts between types of affective responses is what tightens our connection to film noir, especially if we experience positive feelings toward a director's stylized noir vision (artifact emotions) while negotiating our sympathetic responses toward characters who make us fear for their safety (direct emotions) while also feeling guilty about our identification with amoral behavior as these characters "do forbidden things" (meta-emotions).[16]

In his conclusion, Plantinga calls for scholarship that attempts to identify "what sort of emotional experiences are offered by specific genres."[17] Leaving aside the question of whether noir is truly a genre and not merely a cinematic style or identifiable cluster of post-war American films, I agree that a necessary part of describing the "noir vision" must involve describing the affective responses it elicits, the emotional complexities it offers, and the empathies it both develops and disrupts.[18] To this end, I examine how the conflicts in spectator empathy that *On Dangerous Ground* creates may help us define an affective experience that is distinctly noir.

"Only The Worst Can He See In People": Aligning Empathies and Re-Placing Blame in the Opening Act of *On Dangerous Ground*

"Take a good look at this man," insists the stern narrator of *On Dangerous Ground*'s original trailer before warning: "don't blame him!" The trailer, which plays like RKO's attempt to define Ray's curious film as classic noir, is two minutes and ten seconds of expressionistic shadows, rain-slicked streets, sweaty men with outstretched bribes, chiaroscuro lighting, and lonely cops in trench coats. Only a cliff wall and close-ups of studio interiors are included to represent the last two-thirds of the film, or the country storyline that Ray originally intended to shoot in color, à la *The Wizard of Oz*, to heighten the film's emotional contrast.[19] The trailer also works hard to remove Wilson's accountability in a series of conditional fragments ("*If* his face is hard and

tough, *if* his eyes are cold and cruel, *if* his fists talk and make talk") that accompany shots of Wilson pummeling his suspects. The trailer's narrator even contextualizes a backstory for Wilson ("Yes, he's lived with corruption all his life, breathing the evil stench wherever he walks") and provides assurances that spectator empathies should align with Wilson's code of honor ("Alluring arms can never touch him. Bribing hands can never reach him") before disrupting this alignment in a final admission that "only the worst can he see in people and only violence can satisfy the hate inside of him."[20] The few phrases that splash across the screen in film noir font promise a story that "will hold you thrill-and-terror bound!"—a promise that implies the spectator's desire to be "held" by noir's aesthetic thrills and "bound" to the affective terrors Ray mines from Wilson's psyche.[21]

Before analyzing scenes that challenge the trailer's warning not to blame Officer Wilson, I will provide a brief summary of the plot that co-screenwriters Ray and A.I. Bezzerides[22] struggled to adapt from Gerald Butler's 1947 novel, *Mad with Much Heart.* After hospitalizing an unarmed suspect, Wilson is sent upstate to a wintry, rural town where a young girl has been murdered. During his investigation, Wilson becomes infatuated with Mary Malden (Ida Lupino), the blind older sister of Danny (Sumner Williams); Danny is the prime suspect in the killing. During his rejuvenating stay with Mary, Wilson must also aid and confront Brent (Ward Bond), the murdered girl's father, whose fits of grief and rage mirror Wilson's prior volatility. Mary makes Wilson promise he will protect her mentally-disturbed brother from Brent's vengeance, but Wilson is unable to do so and risks losing his chance to create a life apart from the dehumanizing conditions of the city.

Although the plotline involving Mary, Danny, and Brent is lifted from Butler's novel, Ray added the thirty-minute micro-noir of *On Dangerous Ground's* opening act to the lean eighty-two-minute running time of Bezzerides' adaptation. Butler's British novel, which Ray began obsessing over during production on *Born to Be Bad* (1949) and Raymond Chandler's rejected adapting,[23] opens with Wilson having already left London for the English countryside. Ray not only insisted on relocating the setting to America—or to a decaying urban pastiche that more closely resembles previous noir than an actual American city—he added the backstory. Butler's narrative offers little insight into what jaded Wilson (always referred to as "James Wilson" and never "Jim") or gave him the nightly "feeling of heading for the lonely places"[24] Naturally, Ray was attracted to the dynamic between two deeply isolated characters like Wilson and Mary (his affinity for the lonely is the common denominator of his eclectic *oeuvre*) and championed his noir translation of Butler's book when RKO, Howard Hughes, and his friend and reluctant producer John Houseman remained hesitant to baffled.[25]

Unlike its source material, *On Dangerous Ground* opens with short sequences that establish cramped domesticity and spousal worry as officers Pop Bailey and Pete Santos finish dinners, pick up badges, reassure their loved ones, and holster their guns. In the third sequence, Ray offers viewers the contrast of Officer Jim Wilson's evening ritual. Wilson lives alone, only picks at his meal, and sifts through mug shots at a small table in the middle of his efficiency apartment. The mug shots are of recently released criminals named Gordy Miller, Bernie Tucker, and George "Mushy" Miller, whose nickname provides ironic contrast to Wilson's vacant stare. After introducing the three officers' home lives, Ray places viewers inside a cramped squad car for a ride-along beneath a procession of neon and street lamps. In Ray and Bezzerides' re-imagining of Butler's protagonist, Wilson becomes the proleptic *Taxi Driver* of classic noir: he has spent too many nights driving the city's rain-slicked streets, staring out at the "garbage" he's tasked with policing to the ominous strings of a Bernard Hermann score, and raging against the threats to society he is now becoming. Locating viewers inside the car for prolonged periods enhances our sympathetic responses to the lives these men endure. The loose plotting also enhances viewers' *direct* emotions as we worry about lurking threats and the sense that something bad must happen soon as the film minutes pass. Our empathetic congruence with Wilson and his partners only increases when they briefly leave the car to visit their precinct, where they are ordered to locate the "cop killer" Bernie Tucker, then at a local bar, where we witness Wilson's disgust at bribes and underage propositions, and finally a drug store, where Wilson attempts to flirt with a cashier before learning she has a boyfriend.

Throughout this sequence—roughly the first fifteen minutes of the film—Ray combines a claustrophobic *mise-en-scene* inside the car, traveling city footage from a car hood mount, and one abrupt scene of hand-held camera work.[26] In the latter case, Ray positions viewers inside an actual car where we assume Wilson's P.O.V., which likely mirrors Ray's during his Boston ride-alongs. After making a sudden U-turn, Ray's hand-held camera wheels to spot a man in a gabardine coat (matching a repeated A.P.B. on the police radio) bolting down the sidewalk, which leads to Wilson (and viewers) leaping from the car to give chase on foot. Ray switches back to a stationary shot as Wilson and his partners corner the running man and learn he was just running to get home to his wife. Wilson still turns to shove the man when he hears him mutter, "dumb cop," but his partners quickly restrain him as heavy shadows fall over the police and the gathering crowd. These sudden alternations between mounted shots and hand-held camera work may suggest the tension between the noir RKO anticipated and the *verite* sensibility Ray's research inspired. The alternations also re-engage viewers' direct *and* artifact emotions as we respond to shadowy threats while admiring Ray's ability to capture the vantage and

rhythms of an overnight patrol. These abrupt alternations in camerawork also foreshadow the emotional incongruities of two key scenes that follow.

"Who is Not Himself Mean, Who is Neither Tarnished Nor Afraid": The Unraveling of the Hard-Boiled Investigator and the Unbalancing of Spectator Emotions

After spending the first fifteen minutes of his film aligning viewers' sympathetic and direct emotions with those of his protagonists, Ray seems to make a case for early fifties noir remaining dark in style but formulaic in affect. Not only do we empathize with Wilson and his partners as we share their squad-car gaze, their conversations about the patrol's physical and mental tolls, their desire to catch the renegade Bernie, and their need to make it home without injury, we also feel an alignment of artifact emotions due to a stunning mix of noir's visual cues and the drama of Hermann's score. The first disruption of this alignment occurs seventeen minutes into *On Dangerous Ground* when Wilson interrogates Myrna (Cleo Bowers), who may have a lead on her boyfriend Bernie's whereabouts. As soon as Wilson enters her tiny apartment and starts rifling through photos and keepsakes on her vanity, the tone of the film changes. Ray cuts to a reverse angle that positions the viewer behind Wilson's back for the first time in the film, accentuating Robert Ryan's height and capturing a more desperate look from Myrna, who oscillates between seductive and frightened, as she is separated from the audience. At this point, viewers gain a sense that Wilson may be capable of stepping outside his implied moral code. Steve Vineberg notes how Wilson puts Myrna in an "untenable position: if she gives up [Bernie], he'll probably kill her, but she knows when she meets Wilson that she can count on nearly the same brutality from him if she doesn't."[27] Wilson disrupts the sympathetic emotions he generated in the earlier drug store scene (i.e. his quiet sadness after realizing the cashier would never date a police officer) by grabbing Myrna's wrist until she reveals a bruised bicep. "With love from Bernie," she sneers before striking Wilson. "You'll make me talk. You'll squeeze it out of me with those big strong arms," Myrna teases him. "That's right, sister," Wilson responds, looming closer in her doorway as she puts a cigarette in her mouth.

Ray doesn't show any more of Wilson's intimidation or, importantly, the nature of Myrna's confession, which only adds to a shift in viewers' sympathetic and direct emotional concern from Wilson to Myrna: for the first time in the film Ray leaves viewers off-balance, disillusioned, and uncertain how to feel, and with a meta-emotional awareness of what may be previously misplaced empathies. Following the dissolve, we see Wilson descending the heavily shadowed staircase from Myrna's apartment. He pauses a moment on the landing to reflect, sigh, and light a cigarette with a newly emptied look in

his eyes, implying he has not only strong-armed information out of Myrna but had sex with her. Back in the patrol car, the camera stays fixed on Wilson's empty stare while his partner Pete, plays the role of conscience and humanity. "You sure don't care about people, do you?" Pete asks before suggesting that even if the lead on Bernie is solid, Bernie's men will likely kill Myrna for talking.

In the film's most famous scene, Wilson finally corners Bernie in his apartment. Wilson and Pete startle Bernie when they burst in, and, from a low angle by the foot of his bed, we watch Bernie (Richard Irving) leap up in panic and get chased around the room. The chiaroscuro lighting and riot of shadows that accentuate this chase locate viewers within a recognizable film noir checklist, though the emotional tenor in Bernie's room escalates beyond this noir's previous register. After Bernie is subdued, wide-eyed and sweating profusely, Wilson tells Pete to clear the room. Ray once again positions viewers behind Wilson's back as he advances on Bernie, who remains seated. Only Wilson's right arm is visible in this shot and his hand approximates a loosely held pistol; importantly, viewers are also forced to close in on Bernie as the camera follows Wilson's advance. Echoing Myrna, Bernie leers at Wilson and softly taunts: "Hit me. Go on, hit me," which provokes a conflict of anger, indignation, and fear in Wilson's face when Ray cuts back to it. Ray returns to a medium shot of Wilson addressing Bernie, switching our spectatorship again from the aggressor's to the suspect's perspective as we look up at the weathered lines of Robert Ryan's face, his sad eyes now rimmed in shadows. "You're going to make me crack you, aren't you?" Wilson asks Bernie and, perhaps, the viewers who sense what's coming. "Why do you make me do this?" Wilson demands, "Why do you make me do this? You know you're going to talk. I always make you punks talk. Why do you do it? Why?"

Ray tightens his close-up as Wilson's questions reveal a spiraling combination of fear, self-loathing, and loss of control, all of which disrupt any gratification viewers might have experienced at the level of sympathetic and direct emotions, even if viewers' meta-emotional responses have already begun rationalizing that "garbage" and "cop killers" have it coming. One of the most affective elements Ray intuits about noir is that if the protagonist can't sympathize or condone—or even feel fully in control of—his own actions, then spectators can't experience sympathetic narrative emotions for these actions. Wilson's break from any private code of honor allows Ray and Bezzerides to push their noir vision farther into the darkness and its spectators farther past more familiar or melodramatic empathetic involvement. Relatedly, spectators' meta-emotional responses begin to question why we ever empathized with Wilson and whether or not we might find an emotionally satisfying response to Wilson's cry of "Why did you make me do this?"

There are multiple ways to interpret Wilson's question. At the most literal level, Wilson, like the RKO trailer narrator, is shifting his agency to a corrupt and corrupting society, suggesting a naturalistic determinism is to blame for his violent outbursts. However, we might also imagine Wilson's question being asked of us, noir's willing spectators, who may enter any noir hoping for a chance to live vicariously through a protagonist's flaws. Yet a third way to interpret Wilson's question is that he is asking his own confused emotions about why he behaves so violently, which actually echoes many scenes of self-interrogation in *Mad with Much Heart*. In his novel Butler alternates between a terse third-person exposition of Wilson's investigation and a second-person interrogation of Wilson's motives, a narrative strategy that A.I. Bezzerides found challenging to translate into a script.[28] Although Butler's James Wilson is never as consumed with rage as his screen incarnation, he does reveal, in second-person interior monologue, violently chivalrous feelings toward a suspect who may have harmed Mary in the past: "I don't care what you say, what anyone says. This was different and if anyone did that again to her you'd do it again to him or anyone else. Whatever anyone did to her they'd get the same from you."[29] When James Wilson finally faces his emotional conflicts in the last third of the novel, he recognizes how closed off he has been from the affective aspects of his humanity. As Butler has him wonder:

> What is happening to you? . . . How do you feel, then? It's a mix-up. But it shows you, because the other things just made you feel with the surface parts of you. They made your spine tingle, or they made your eyes go misty, or they made your pulses jump a bit faster. But that was all. You didn't feel before what you are feeling now. You didn't use the same deep parts of you for doing the feeling with.[30]

James Wilson's recognition of his deeper capacity for feeling also suggests the heightened emotional awareness Ray strove to elicit in noir performances and in viewers' responses to them.

Like the question of "why did you make me do this," the question of why Wilson "didn't feel before" highlights the absent backstory in Butler's novel and, in Ray's film, the absence of traumatic contexts for Wilson's near-sociopathic abuse of his role in law enforcement. Wilson's eruptions into violence exceed the immediate threat (the suspect is taunting and believed to be a cop killer but is also seated and unarmed) and make viewers wish for a context to help them make sense of, or re-align, their sympathetic narrative emotions with the protagonist's abusive behavior. Even Bosley Crowther, writing for *The New York Times*, complained in his review that "the cause of the cop's sadism is only superficially explained."[31] Although we can suppose that

additional insights (childhood abuse or displaced anger toward the death of a loved one) might help us reconcile our antipathetic emotions toward Wilson's violence—our meta-emotional concern about empathizing with the self-loathing Wilson versus our positive artifact emotions toward the beauty of a noir scene so exaggerated that it borders on oneiric projection[32]—we may be missing the point of Ray's cinematic approach. Ray's noir vision seems contingent on keeping spectators' emotions incongruent and, like his protagonists, deeply conflicted. This *lack* of full reconciliation (or return to fully aligned empathies) is what gives *On Dangerous Ground* its unsettling affective resonance.

Unresolved Emotions and The Legacy of Ray's Noir Vision:

In the last third of the film, the countryside narrative more directly adapted from Butler's novel, Wilson begins to recognize his emotional instability by staring into the face of the grieving and vengeful Brent (Ward Bond). Unlike Wilson, Brent loses emotional control without any accompanying signs of fear or self-loathing, such as when neighboring farmers get caught in the crossfire of his pursuit of Danny. These scenes seem to introduce an awareness-leads-to-redemption narrative aimed at re-aligning viewers' sympathies with Wilson's capacity for growth. In terms of artifact emotions, the last two-thirds of the film also ask spectators to engage with shots of snow-covered mountains that oppose the noir imagery of the film's first act. It is interesting, however, that none of the original reviews or subsequent scholarship on *On Dangerous Ground* reference the look on Wilson's face when Mary asks him to protect her "disturbed" younger brother from Brent. In this scene, one of the most emotionally charged in the second half of the film, Ray cuts to Wilson smiling at Mary with a white light in his eyes that echoes his detached stare following the encounters with Myrna and Bernie. Although viewers are clearly being asked to sympathize congruently with Wilson's love interest and the potential redemption of his humanity, I would argue that Ray has chosen to interrupt this empathetic alignment with quick visual reminders—often involving a distant or suddenly conflicted look on Wilson's face—of the inner turbulence we know Wilson still possesses.[33]

In these subtler ways, Ray's shifts in tone and setting continue through the end of the film, which concludes with a shift that even confused Bezzerides and Houseman. After wrapping the production with a darker finale that stayed truer to the novel (e.g. Wilson may wish to stay, but it's too late for he and Mary, which may have struck Ray as too close to the condemned to loneliness ending of his previous noir, 1950's *In a Lonely Place*), Ray reshot the ending to conclude with Wilson staring out his car window at the noir city, hearing his partner's admonition that "to get anything out of this life, you gotta put

something in it from the heart," and then driving back to the country to join hands with Mary on her parlor stairs. Ray's revised ending asks viewers to accept that the violently abusive Wilson has been redeemed and that leaving the city will bring inner peace and a first chance at love, even though the rural countryside is where we have witnessed young men preying on even younger girls, lynch mobs and, ultimately, homicide. R. Barton Palmer explains Ray's last minute revision as a "'personal' gesture or a mistake" that can be read as a "correlative of the director's emotional investment" and the signature of Ray's auteur spirit.[34] I don't disagree with Palmer's assessment but am more interested in the lingering effect of this last tonal shift on spectator empathy and judgment. For viewers who need a sense of punishment—of virtue rewarded and all vice punished—there is the meta-emotional conflict of accepting a sentimental resolution to the moral ambiguities and graphic abuse the rest of the film depicts. For those determined to use Wilson's redemptive suffering to rationalize a romantic ending, there is the meta-emotional need to suspend moral judgment in favor of embracing the idealism of Ray's concluding shot.

Plantinga's categories of spectator emotions are again helpful for understanding why Ray's sentimental ending may leave us feeling so unsettled. In just the last three minutes of *On Dangerous Ground*, viewers are tasked with processing conflicts between their sympathetic narrative emotions (a realignment with two lonely, wounded souls who suddenly find healing in a recuperative setting far from the city's corruption), their direct emotions (a need to feel like characters' goals have been accomplished) and their artifact emotions (the many cinematic demands to empathize with the film's closing mood, including the contrasting brightness of the final scene, the romantic soundtrack choices, and the framing of two attractive actors at long last embracing). In addition to the conflict between these responses, viewers' emotions are likely at odds with the ending due to the expectations of genre, which either enhances the artefactual experience or further delays a sense of closure as viewers wrestle over their aesthetic judgment of Ray's choices. Ultimately, an affective reading of how disruptive *On Dangerous Ground*'s conclusion is for spectator emotions may have pleased Ray as he continued to explore ways to sustain, without resolving, the deep emotional conflicts he saw lurking within more conventional material and, certainly, within his own psyche.

The legacy of *On Dangerous Ground*, which provided a template for bad cop protagonists and sustaining empathetic uncertainty, can be observed in a range of neo- and retro-noirs. In the first season of HBO's *True Detective* (2014) we witness Officer Mickey Hart (Woody Harrelson) misdirecting his loss of agency into his abuse of suspects, witnesses, co-workers, and his own sympathetic narrative (spectator empathy is further disrupted when Hart beats

two teen-agers who have had sex with his daughter, only to return to the bedroom of his own young mistress). In the second season of *True Detective*, Officer Roy Velcaro (Colin Farrell), a vengeful and violent L.A. police officer who wants to reconnect with his son, forces viewers to struggle with a sustained conflict of sympathetic/antipathetic responses.

In terms of pastiche, we can see Ray's vision throughout Steve Martin's noir spoof *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (1982), especially when Detective Rigby Reardon (Martin) flies into fits of rage over a childhood trauma that leaves him shouting, "Cleaning woman! Cleaning woman!" and attacking anyone within reach. In terms of participatory pastiche, video games such as *L.A. Noire* (2011) allow gamers the option to free play as a post-WWII police detective who can savagely beat confessions out of witnesses and innocent bystanders.

Ray's most noticeable legacy, though, can be seen in Curtis Hansen's *L.A. Confidential* (1997). Whereas Ray and Bezzerides offer us ways to identify noir qualities by observing what they added to non-noir material, Hansen and Brian Helgeland's adaptation of the third novel in James Ellroy's sprawling L.A Quartet (*The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential,* and *White Jazz*) was already borne of noir's D.N.A. Since the screenwriters were faced with the task of narrowing Ellroy's labyrinthian plotlines into the running time of a major studio release, it is interesting to note how many of the characteristics Officer Bud White (Russell Crowe) shares with his film ancestor Officer Wilson made the final cut.

White's character, a "time bomb with a badge" is an L.A. police officer circa 1953 who has, in his partner's estimate, a "tendency to overinvolve himself in matters pertaining to abused" women.[35] In the film, viewers first encounter White in his unmarked patrol car watching a scene of domestic abuse on Christmas Eve. Hansen encourages a very sympathetic alignment of spectator emotions by the time Officer White marches into the home, drags the abusive husband outside, and beats him on the sidewalk with the aid of Christmas decorations. In Ellroy's novel, and later in Hansen's script, we are given a traumatic backstory to explain White's extremely violent reactions (his father beat his mother to death in front of him when he was sixteen), an empathetic contrast to Officer Wilson's missing backstory in Ray's film. In Ellroy and Hansen's noir landscape, L.A. police only encourage White's brutality, first when his partner Dick Stens suggests that "thumping wife beaters might drive the nightmares out of his system" and later when White's instability is exploited by a corrupt police chief who needs him to beat confessions out of suspects in the bureau's official and unofficial interrogation rooms. At the end of the third interrogation sequence, Hansen lingers on White's face in a way that echoes Ray's close-up on Wilson's visceral reaction to losing control: White may not yet appear self-loathing, but viewers see a horrified conflict of unresolved anger, sadness, fear, and uncertainty.

Like Wilson, Officer White is lonely and unmarried, capable of sudden brutality, and portrayed as believing he has little agency in the anger that consumes him. Unlike Wilson, White tests strains the limits of spectator empathy as he moves from beating those who abuse women to breaking his only moral code and slapping Lynn (Kim Basinger), a Veronica Lake look-alike who plays the Mary Malden part of being the other lonely soul who can recognize White's humanity.[36] Much like Ray's film, spectators' sympathetic and direct emotional responses are then complicated by a happier-than-anticipated conclusion that has White and Lynn leaving the corruption of L.A. to recuperate in Lynn's rural Arizona hometown, even though viewers have learned that this is where she began her life as a sex worker and apologist for abusive males like Officer White.

By its nature, film noir creates disjunctive emotional responses in its viewers, offering sympathetic narratives for unapologetically amoral characters and crafting cynical yet darkly beautiful visions that produce antipathetic responses and, simultaneously, strongly positive artifact emotions. Before attempting to recreate these disjunctive affects in the western (*Johnny Guitar*, 1954), the biblical epic (*King of Kings*, 1961) and, most successfully, the teen film (*Rebel Without a Cause*, 1955), Nicholas Ray explored the transgressive power and possibility in noir at a point when noir could have bordered on formulaic self-parody. With each of his seven films between 1948 and 1951, and culminating with *On Dangerous Ground*, Ray found noir to be an ideal testing ground for playing with inherited spectator empathies, or the audience's inclination to sympathize with noir protagonists regardless of moral or ethical choices. The ways in which violent cop protagonists such as Officer Wilson, and much later Officer White, challenge Chandler's codes of honor and stoicism without, in Chandler's words, "destroying the formula,"[37] offer us great insight into the complicated empathies film noir elicits, especially in Ray's vision, which often forces spectators to leave the theater with unsettled emotions, uncertain empathies, and a suspended sense of moral judgment.

Notes

1 Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," *The Saturday Review* (April 15, 1950): 30.

2 Chandler, "Simple Art," 29.

3 Patrick McGilligan, *Nicholas Ray*: *The Glorious Failure of an American Director,* (New York: It Books/Harper Collins, 2011), 193-94.

4 *On Dangerous Ground*. DVD. Directed by Nicholas Ray. 1951. Los Angeles, CA: Turner Home Entertainment, 2006.

5 Chandler, "Simple Art," 31.

[6] Megan E. Abbott, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

[7] Martin, Richard. *Mean Streets and Raging Bulls: The Legacy of Film Noir in Contemporary American Culture.* Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow P., 1997.

[8] Pippin, Robert B. *Fatalism in American Film Noir: Some Cinematic Philosophy.* Charlottesville: U of Virginia P., 2013.

[9] Schrader categorizes the early to mid-fifties as the "third and final phase of film noir . . . the period of psychotic action and suicidal impulse, [in which] the noir hero, seemingly under the weight of ten years of despair, started to go bananas." Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996), 59.

[10] Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*, Berkeley: U of California P, 2009.

[11] Plantinga, *Moving Viewers,* 11.

[12] Plantinga defines other emotions in relation to the cognition of film but clusters those I've defined as "foundational" and deeply inter-related in his discussion of the formation of spectator empathy. Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 69, 72-73, 224.

[13] Sharon Cobb, "Writing the New Noir Film" in *Film Noir Reader 2*, ed. by Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), 207.

[14] Cobb, "Writing," 207.

[15] Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 72.

[16] Cobb, "Writing," 207.

[17] Plantinga, *Moving Viewers*, 225.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ray later claimed he "wanted the warmth that color could have provided so much [he] let both Ward Bond and Ryan and Lupino overplay at times. . . . had the film been in color [Ray believes he] would not have stretched so much in creating the contrast of the violence and the wet, dirt, sleet, slush, and mess [of the city] with the sheen of the snow, the starkness, the pastoral quality." Nicholas Ray, "Color," in *I Was Interrupted: Nicholas Ray on Making Movies,* ed. Susan Ray (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993), 58.

[20] RKO Pictures Original Trailer for *On Dangerous Ground.* DVD. Directed by Nicholas Ray. 1951. Los Angeles, CA: Turner Home Entertainment, 2006.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Bezzerides' noir pedigree already included writing *Long Haul*, the source novel for *They Drive by Night* (1940), and the novel and screenplay for *Thieves' Highway* (1949). Following *On Dangerous Ground*, he would write the script for *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955). In spite of this pedigree, or perhaps because of it, Ray would frequently send scribbled notes of police slang and psychological observations from his extensive preparation in Boston.

[23] McGilligan, *Glorious Failure*, 191. McGilligan reports that the "dean of hard-boiled crime fiction wrote Houseman to say that Butler's novel had 'no humor at all which makes it tough for me' and that he found the emotionally conflicted cop 'a ridiculous

character.' McGilligan also relates that Houseman "never showed Chandler's dispiriting letter to Ray."

[24] Gerald Butler, *Mad with Much Heart* (London: The Albatross Ltd., 1947), 184.

[25] McGilligan, *Glorious Failure*, 191.

[26] Although Ray famously receives auteur credit for his directing prowess, credit for Ray's vision in *On Dangerous Ground* should also be given to cinematographer, George E. Diskant.

[27] Steve Vineberg, "Noir Nobility," *The Threepenny Review*, 95 (2003), 29.

[28] As an author of several noir novels and screenplays, Bezzerides could articulate which narrative strategies best remained in their separate mediums; by most accounts, Ray took a less formulaic, more holistic approach to scriptwriting and would later be famous for saying, "If it were all in the script, why make the film?"

[29] Butler, *Mad,* 68.

[30] Ibid., 168.

[31] Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review*: On Dangerous Ground*, Story of Detective Turned Sadist, pens at the Criterion." Rev. of *On Dangerous Ground*, dir. Nicholas Ray. *New York Times* 13 Feb. 1952: 35.

[32] By oneiric I'm only suggesting that the confrontation in Bernie's bedroom is so hyper-noir in its mix of exaggerated acting styles, dutch angles, and expressionistic shadows that viewers may wonder if they are seeing Wilson's own distorted noir dream of the fallen city and his role as interrogator and dispenser of justice within this dream.

[33] Geoff Andrews observes that the character of Wilson offered Ray what most interested him: "a violent man riven by contradictory impulses." Geoff Andrews, *The Films of Nicholas Ray: The Poet of Nightfall.* (London: BFI, 2004) 4.

[34] R. Barton Palmer, "On Dangerous Ground: Of Outsiders," in *Lonely Places, Dangerous Ground: Nicholas Ray in American Cinema*, ed. by Steven Rybin and Will Scheibel. (Albany: State U of New York P, 2014), 57-58.

[35] James Ellroy, *L.A. Confidential,* (Los Angeles: Warner Books, 1997).

[36] In the shooting script, Hansen and Helgeland write that White "backhands her hard" three times with the last "taking her down." They also note that "the sins of the father are visited on the son." Curtis Hansen and Brian Helgeland, *L.A. Confidential.* Screenplay. (Los Angeles: Warner Books, 1997), 194.

[37] Chandler, "Simple Art," 32.

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The Lady from Shanghai: A Reworking of the *Noir* Standard

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> "Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves." Harold Bloom[1]

Introduction: Cultural Context

As Hirsch writes in his comprehensive *Film Noir: The Dark Side of the Screen*, "when Welles later made films that were clearly in the *noir* vein"—for example, *The Lady from Shanghai (1947)*, the film under inspection here—"he was returning to a style his own seminal work had helped to forge."[2] Welles was an inventor and an innovator, a director who sought to master a style and, after having done so, explode its expectations and reimagine the form. Whether this was out of a strict professional focus or a mere personal boredom, his innovations in the genre of *noir*, and American film more generally, are significant accomplishments worthy of further inspection.

This article examines the style of *film noir* with a focus on how Welles' film *The Lady from Shanghai* reworked what had become, by the mid-1940s, familiar tropes and conventions in the genre. After he paved the way for the genre with *Citizen Kane* (1941), Welles mastered the form of *film noir* with *The Stranger* (1946) and then took his work a step further in *The Lady from Shanghai* by subverting the many conventions of *noir* he originally helped establish. *The Lady from Shanghai* parodies certain elements of *noir* and melodrama in an attempt to render anew the disruption and malaise *film noir* sought to evoke in its viewers, and in so doing asserts itself as a quintessential, though unique, *film noir*.

Noir Development: Roots and Convention

Referring to images of wealth, love, and other desirable, even ideal states, J.P. Telotte explains how classic Hollywood films' "comforting narrative style and plot closure hint at the absolute attainability of those images—the potential and indeed imminent fulfillment of desire."[3] *Noir* challenged this mode with stories of defeat, deception, and death, often shadowed with suggestions of determinism at play, where all who sought these desirable entities (or those who, in most cases, were lured into acting on their lust of these entities) wound up dead or otherwise defeated. Welles' films in particular approach this theme, often demonstrating how easily we are led on by these images of desire, "led often into madness and self-destruction."[4] The all-encompassing desire for wealth or, more often, power seen in characters such as Detective Quinlan from *Touch of Evil* (1958)*,* become *self*-consuming desires, because for Welles, the apparent determinism at play in *noir* is often a self-mediated flaw and not the work of some greater force of fate. The shootout scene from *The Lady from Shanghai* represents visually this self-consuming lust for wealth and power as Arthur and Elsa Bannister, drawing guns on each other, actually have their aims reflected back on themselves by the hall of mirrors. It is the perfect psychological distortion in which the characters, in this moment of lurid desperation, are unable to recognize their own displaced lust and its destructive consequence: "I am aiming at you, aren't I, lover?" Bannister asks Elsa.

By the time the term "*noir*" was coined around 1947, the film genre had developed an inventory of visual, thematic, and plot tropes used to identify previous *films noir* and utilized in the making of new *noirs*. Welles, in *The Lady from Shanghai*, drew largely on those conventions to re-render that disruption by turning the tropes on themselves, by repositioning them in an ironic light that brought a freshly-disturbing touch to a then-familiar genre. Despite its branching out from more traditional *noir* customs in its open and outdoor settings, its deceptive chiaroscuro, its manipulation of actor/actress reputations in its characters, among other diversions, *The Lady from Shanghai* remains an exemplary addition to the canon of *film noir.*

Orson Welles: Flamboyant Stylist

In a telling comment, Hirsch describes Orson Welles as the "pre-eminent American director of *noir*…the most flamboyant of *noir* stylists."[5] Certainly, Welles had a taste for the exquisite and theatrical; Welles got his start in the theater and quickly became notorious for his large personality, including his public stunts such as his 1938 *War of the Worlds* broadcast that sent the public into a legitimate scare of an ongoing alien invasion, as well as his tendency to

deliberately contradict his own statements on his works in various interviews. But Welles was also a great innovator in film who paved the way for *noir* development even in his early work. Though not a *noir* itself, his first film, *Citizen Kane*, boasted inventive film techniques and a narrative style that would influence the genre greatly. His third film, *The Lady from Shanghai*, then expanded the boundaries of *noir* which Welles himself helped to forge through his previous works. Hirsch writes:

> Welles exerted an enormous influence on both the visual and narrative patterns which were to coalesce into the recognizable *noir* style…[*Citizen Kane's*] splintered structure—the divergent points of view of the people whom the journalist interviews, the interweaving of past and present, the series of flashbacks—anticipates the narrative labyrinths of many of the richest *film noirs.⁶*

Welles combined Expressionist elements, as seen in his famous endless mirror scenes in both *Kane* and *Shanghai*, with Realist techniques such as depth of field shots and organic, overlapping dialogue to give remarkably accurate, though certainly imaginative representations of reality in his films.

Welles was often haunted by a detachment from his work, though, resulting from the intervention of producers and production companies in the final editing and cutting of his films. Barbara Leaming chronicles this detachment carefully in her biography, *Orson Welles*, in which Welles comments candidly on his constant financial struggles in producing his various film and drama projects, as well as this sense of detachment, which seemed to occur with every movie he made. In a mid-1960s interview with Dick Cavett on *The Dick Cavett Show*, Welles describes this intervention of the production companies in reference to the final scene from *The Lady from Shanghai*:

> After my version of it, which got its one preview, Harry [Cohn] decided to fix the music, and he got a theme song, which we then had Rita sing […] Cohn decided that the theme song would be nice in a sort of symphonic version under the shootout in the mirror scene. So instead of just hearing the crash of glass echoing and nothing else, except ricocheting bullets…you have—[*Welles humming the theme*]—all throughout, which kind of louses up the proceedings.⁷

Welles could not be too bitter about this, though, as he became involved in *The Lady from Shanghai* project only as a repayment for Cohn's last-minute financial support of Welles' disastrous *Around the World in 80 Days* production.⁸ But

Cohn's dissatisfaction with the film was no secret. In his narration of *Arena: The Orson Welles Story* (1982), Leslie Magahey says, "When he first viewed *The Lady from Shanghai*, producer Harry Cohn offered anyone in the room $1,000 to explain the plot to him. Not even Welles took him up on it."[9] Comical as it is, this story reveals something essentially *noir* about the film: the confusion evoked in the viewer by the plot, the subversion of the "whodunit" drama that many *films noir* attempted and Welles accomplished in *The Lady from Shanghai*. Leaming, intending to simply describe Cohn's dissatisfaction with the film in her biography of Welles, also alludes to this *noir* element: "Nor was Cohn satisfied when he *did* get the picture, rather belatedly, in March of 1947. By then *The Lady from Shanghai* was $416,421,92 over budget.[10] Even worse, as Orson suspected, Cohn could not understand the movie, which, as if in reaction to *The Stranger*, was "probably Orson's most disorienting to date."[11] This disorientation of the viewers—even of the producers—helps *The Lady from Shanghai* stand firm as a remarkable *film noir*, despite those changes Welles could not control. The film creatively toys with *noir* conventions in order to successfully renew the sense of malaise that is fundamental to the genre.

Revitalizing a Genre

According to Borde and Chaumeton, *The Lady from Shanghai*, released in 1947, falls within the "glory days"[12] of film *noir*, from 1946-1948, in which *noir* had reached its purest form and was not yet overburdened by the complete fulfillment of expectations set by the films' predecessors. Still, the genre had its catalogue of conventions, and Welles was able to successfully manipulate several of those conventions in his film.

In early *noir* there is a noticeable emphasis on the city setting, and a common representation of the American city as darkly urban, treacherous, entrapping, indifferent to individuals, criminally dense, and claustrophobic. A look at some *noir* titles illuminates this idea: *Street with No Name* (1948)*, Panic in the Streets* (1950)*, The Naked City* (1948)*, Cry of the City* (1948)*, Night and the City* (1950), *Phenix City Story* (1955)*,* and so on. Mikhail Bakhtin describes in further detail the typical *noir* setting:

> The cocktail lounge, the nightclub, the bar, the hotel room, the boardinghouse, the diner, the dance hall, the roadside cage, the bus and train station, and the wayside motel. These are the recurrent and determinate premises of film *noir* and they emerge from common places in wartime and postwar American culture.[13]

For Welles to supplant the traditional city setting with an adventure on the open ocean, to span the narrative from San Francisco to the West Indies to Mexico to Brazil and back, all while maintaining those essential elements of claustrophobia and paranoia Schrader described as one of the defining characteristics of *noir* is quite impressive. The perception of malaise and potential crime hangs ubiquitously in the air throughout the film, and that characteristic claustrophobia is maintained as all the characters in this spider-web plot are stuck together on the Bannister's small yacht.

Welles produces this disorientation with other elements of the film, as well: the various locations of travel and indistinct character origins bolster the rootlessness of the characters and their relative displacement from sturdy society; the mysterious nature of the criminals leaves the viewer curious as to what exactly the characters' motives are; the ethnicities of O'Hara and Elsa, as well as Arthur Bannister's physical handicap and the grotesque and constant sweating of Grisby, all add to the general disorientation of the characters in the film.

Welles was quite intentional in producing this disorientation. Leaming recalls,

> In a memo to Cohn, Orson suggested that he had hoped for "something off-center, queer, strange"; to give the entire film a "bad dream aspect […] Our story escapes the 'cliché', only if the performances and the production are *original*, or at least, somewhat *oblique*." To keep the film "from being just another whodunit," Orson argued, would require the "quality of *freshness* and *strangeness*" with which he had tried to imbue it [emphasis in original].[14]

Much of this desired "strangeness"—and thus, much of what makes this film a brilliant example of *noir*—can be attributed to Welles' growing fascination with the theories of German poet, playwright, and theater director Bertolt Brecht.[15] Brecht argued that estrangement in theater and film applies "*both* to form and to content; that is, it is not simply reality (content) that is viewed afresh in the successful work of art, but art (form) itself. The artist must do away with artistic clichés, stale modes of perception, by inventing forms capable of viewing the world" – and viewing the *form* itself – "in original, oblique, perhaps somewhat startling ways" [emphasis in original].[16] These remarks lay bare the self-reflective nature of the film, a *noir* that critiques, in its own unconventional way, major themes not only of American culture but also of the *noir* genre itself.

A close reading of the film reveals several of Welles' ingenious subversions, namely in the categories of determinism, social commentary, and

images of the Other in *noir*. The film opens up with shots of the open ocean, an ever-wavering sheet of seawater evocative of the unconscious and of the unsettling narrative of the film, an evocation that is echoed in O'Hara's wandering through San Francisco's Crazy House at Playland in the final shots. Welles' film instigates this disorientation from the outset as the viewers are tossed into this open ocean balancing act from which they are never really settled. There is an evident dreamscape feel to the film. After the ocean shots are washed out by a final crashing wave, the action, or the dream, begins: "When I start out to make a fool of myself there's very little can stop me," O'Hara narrates. "If I'd known where it would end I'd have never let anything start—if I had been in my right mind, that is. But once I had seen her, once I had seen her…"—falling, now, into a mesmerized state—"…I was not in my right mind for quite some time." Already the film stirs up notions of a dream/nightmare state and of a determinism at play, as O'Hara is lured in by Elsa and soon will not be able to resist.

While determinism is a common philosophical theme in *noir*, Welles attempts, in his Brechtian-influenced way, to render this notion anew. O'Hara admits that he "start(s) out to make a fool of himself," thus revealing himself as the initiator of this dilemma, and not merely a victim of a deterministic fate. Towards the end of the film, during the aquarium scene, O'Hara tells Elsa he is a "deliberate, intentional fool…the worst kind." He is convinced, even in retrospect, that his demise is of his own doing.

Welles maintains this deterministic inquiry throughout the film as a play between O'Hara as self-mediating his disaster and the group of the Bannisters and Grisby as controlling his fate. It appears that the meeting between Elsa and O'Hara in the park was not such a coincidence. When Elsa gets mugged by three "non-professionals,"[17] she ditches her bag that has the gun in it (an irrational move for someone being mugged), and later says she "wanted (Mike) to find it." She seems more intrigued than worried when O'Hara tells her he killed a man in Spain—a quality she would want in the fall guy for her plot—and when he takes her to her car, Grisby and Broome are conveniently waiting there.[18] Then, in O'Hara's first meeting with Grisby, an entirely strange affair, Grisby insistently asks about the man O'Hara killed. "I'm very interested in murders," he says, "would you do it again? Would you kill another man?" It seems the scheme has already been devised: Elsa draws O'Hara in with her performance in the carriage, Grisby and Broome are there to identify him, Grisby plants in O'Hara's mind the ideas of killing another man and of "swimming" with Elsa, all while Bannister is revealed merely to be the drunken fool who thinks he is part of the ploy.

The question of whether or not O'Hara's fall into this plot is his own doing or is the force of fate appears again in the cigarette-passing scene. While discussing money with Bannister, O'Hara insists that he is "independent," thus

a man of agency beyond any deterministic fate, and says he is quitting as he descends into the cabin with the other deckhands. As soon as he gets below, though, he hears the siren song of Elsa and is drawn right back up to the deck. The indication here is that, while he thinks he is an independent man of agency, he is actually hypnotized by the allure of Elsa and thus under the influence of outside forces. But Welles, in keeping with the theme of this film, is not simply conforming to *noir* customs; O'Hara's fate is no simple defeat or death, but it is no Hollywood happy ending, either.

The dream element persists in the film as well, particularly when O'Hara decides to take the job on the boat. After Bannister passes out at the bar with O'Hara and the other two sailors, O'Hara narrates: "I told myself I couldn't leave a helpless man lying unconscious in a saloon. Well, it was me that was unconscious, and he was exactly as helpless as a sleeping rattle snake." Just then a foghorn blows and O'Hara becomes hypnotized with the idea of pursuing Elsa as a deckhand on their yacht. When he accepts the job there is a short montage: shots of the boat's rear wake endlessly stirring, followed by a flash of the stern, a winding compass is shot with a twisting camera angle, until a dog barking snaps the viewer—though not O'Hara—back out of the hypnosis. "What was I, Mike O'Hara, doing on a luxurious yacht pleasure-cruising in the Caribbean Sea?" O'Hara ponders, as if he has just woken up in a daydream, or is realizing he is stuck in a nightmare.

When the action begins in Central Park, the viewer encounters another of Welles' divergences: the chiaroscuro of the femme fatale. Elsa is shown in a carriage in Central Park, a glowing white figure, blooming out of the black carriage and black backdrop with radiant blonde hair, a sparkling white dress and direct, soft lighting to accompany her—an uncharacteristic lighting choice for Welles.[19] The lighting suggests a character of pure intentions, and her whiteness in these shots is quite explicit. O'Hara, on the other hand, emerges as a foreign figure with an Irish accent, dressed in black and dimly lit. The film cuts to a close-up shot of Elsa in the carriage, who stares into the camera with a captivating, albeit subtly sinister smile as O'Hara narrates over the shot. "Some people can smell danger," he says, as if urging the audience to smell the danger of Elsa underneath her innocent appearance. The black polka-dots on her dress give the only indication of a darker personality beneath her white appearance.

This opening scene initiates the discussion of the Other in the film. O'Hara, the "Irish brogue" is depicted in black clothing, dimly lit with a Irish accent—a traditional image of the Other as non-white; Elsa, on the other hand, is innocently white, glowing, and beautiful. Welles intentionally sets up this ironic contrast to throw the viewer off, to play with the American stereotypes of the Other and the *noir* convention of light as suggestive of purity and shadow as suggestive of malice. Oliver and Trigo, in their article

"Stereotype and Voice in *The Lady from Shanghai*," detail this ironic play on stereotypes as Welles' subversion of audience expectation. Elsa's blackness, or evil, "stems from her dangerous duplicity," they write, "both as wife displaying her outlaw sexuality by cheating on her husband"[20]—a standard *noir* femme characteristic—"and as domestic and treacherous Asian"[21]—a stark twist on the traditional *noir* character-type that develops later on in the film. She is revealed, in her initial conversation with O'Hara, as the daughter of white Russian parents, a woman who was born in Cheefoo and has lived and worked in both Macao and Shanghai—two of the world's most dangerous cities. Her Otherness is declared then, but the images on the screen seem to conflict with the story she is telling. The audience is left wondering how this woman can be of Russian descent and Asian heritage, while appearing so utterly white and innocent. As Kaplan describes it, "the iconographic 'whiteness' that Welles insists on in Elsa's opening image, and Michael's iconographic 'blackness'"[22] are intentional ploys to deceive the viewers by reworking this stereotypical expectation.

Elsa's deceiving appearance can be seen as Welles' attempt to subvert a *noir* trope, but it can also be described as a social critique of stereotypes in America. What we expect from "white" characters (referring both the ethnic *and* moral whiteness) and what we expect from "black" characters (again referring both the ethnic *and* moral blackness) is completely inverted in the film. Diawara claims that characters "become 'black' because of their 'shady' moral behavior,"[23] but the American standard, adopted without question in *noir*, says the "blackness" is rooted on the surface and infects inwardly. In reversing this notion Welles has Elsa play right into this standard. He has her use this stereotype as a means of duping other characters en route to accomplishing her scheme; Elsa's apparent "whiteness" in the film is simply performance.

In her first encounter with O'Hara (and the audience) Elsa appears an innocent, radiant blonde who "[doesn't] smoke." When O'Hara shows up with a drunk Arthur to the yacht, though, Elsa is now wearing a black sailor coat and white hat, and Michael the white shirt and black cap. The caps represent what they seem on top, on the outside, while their respective shirts hint at their true characters and reveal an immediate role reversal from their conspicuous meeting in the park (and she is not shy about smoking cigarettes on the yacht). Later, after the picnic, when Grisby, Arthur, and Elsa are calling each other names and bragging about what information they have on and can hold against each other, Bannister drunkenly insinuates that he has blackmailed Elsa into marriage. He says to her, "Tell them the story of how we came to be married," to which she replies, "Would you like me to tell Mike what you have on me?" The implication is that they "came to be married" by something Arthur "has on her," thus, her Otherness is solidified as she seems to only be in the

country by way of some involuntary marriage to Arthur. She is a foreigner at heart, and a femme fatale in the truest sense, and everything in between is a mere performance of "whiteness."

Though Elsa's true character is hinted at throughout the film,[24] it becomes quite evident in the closing scenes in which she is seen speaking fluent Cantonese, navigating seamlessly through what seems an underground Chinese community in San Francisco, and exposing herself as the true killer and mastermind of the criminal plot. Finally, as she opens the door to the Crazy House to confront O'Hara, the audience encounters the real Elsa: a "black" Other performing "whiteness," though her performance is dwindling as her true self continues to be exposed. Her performed "whiteness" in this scene is now represented only by the dim glow of a flashlight and her "fluorescent" hair,[25] while the rest of her appearance is clocked in dark shadows. Her fate encloses her appearance.

Returning to the deterministic aspect of the film, it appears Welles has successfully subverted the traditional determinism of *noir*. Certainly, O'Hara is lured into this near-fatal scheme by outside forces, notably by the allure of the femme fatale, Elsa.[26] But he is aided in this descent by his own actions—and is saved by them, as well (visualized, literally, in his escape from the courthouse). Telotte notes that "Michael is shanghaied by a mysterious, beautiful, and manipulative woman…*but only because along each step of the way he has acceded to his entrapment*" [emphasis added].[27] While typical *noir* losers are fated from the beginning, victims of a Biblical fall of man in the form of lust, greed, or ambition—or just because fate decides to put the finger on you for no good reason—Welles again suggests that we are actually instigators of our own fate; outside forces weigh heavily on our being but the ultimate trajectory of our lives is determined by our own actions and morals. What is most ironic about this, though, is that O'Hara's apparent victory at the film's conclusion is diluted by the claim that, while Arthur's letter will proclaim him "innocent," he is not so convinced. He will "try to forget her," he says, or else he will "die trying." The play continues; Elsa will continue to haunt him, as outside forces will continue to push him around, though he will always have the agency to make his own decisions and write his own fate.

In a final subversion of *noir* tropes, O'Hara peers back from the exit door of the Crazy House at a defeated Elsa calling out for mercy. The barred exit casts shadows across O'Hara reminiscent of the shadows cast by venetian blinds, metal gates, or other props on so many *noir* losers before him, the classic attempt to symbolize prison bars and represent the psychological entrapment of those characters. Unlike most *noir* losers before him, though, who end up dead, defeated, or entrapped as those barred shadows so aptly suggest, O'Hara turns and walks easily through the exit, out into the open, sober beachfront landscape, his heroic return to the unconscious, where the

story began. O'Hara exits the Crazy House a free and (potentially) innocent man.

Shanghai Legacy

As a summary of *noir* convention, Hirsch writes:

> Like the gangster film, the *noir* thriller established its conventions quickly. The low angles and theatrical lighting that embellish *The Maltese Falcon* soon became the common currency of the new genre. Because many film *noirs* have a similar look and sound—those same rainy abandoned city streets, those ominous flickering neon signs, that moody, lonely jazz score, that tight-lipped, he-man narration—critics have suggested that the genre offered a ready-made style to which any competent director could easily adapt himself. A common critical assumption has indeed been that *noir's* hard-and-fast visual conventions tend to erase the eccentricities of individual style, and that *noir* dramas all look and "feel" pretty much the same.[28]

In many ways, this "critical assumption" is correct. But if there is one director to break this mold, to reproduce the idiosyncratic eccentricities that gave rise to the examination of *auteurship* in the genre, Welles is the man to do so. Hirsch calls it the "baroque theatricality of Orson Welles"[29] and in this he is accurate, especially considering Welles' early history with and persistent involvement in the theater. In *The Lady from Shanghai* Welles successfully subverts numerous *noir* conventions and effectively re-works what was quickly becoming a stock genre.

Scenes such as Grisby and O'Hara's hike in Acapulco illuminate the ornate creativity of Welles. Grisby announces, "I want to make you a proposition," and they begin their walk. With each part of the scheme revealed, they ascend to the next point on the hike, like game pieces making their way through a board game. Atop the summit, with each menacing detail about the proposed murder, they inch closer to the edge of the lookout, the shots zooming in closer and closer until, in a beautiful shot looking down over the characters and into the ocean, they are framed as if O'Hara is holding Grisby over the edge by his shirt. Grisby says, "I want you to kill me—so long, fella!" and darts out of the frame as if he has just leaped of the cliff. It is a wonderful Expressionist moment in the film, a wrenching moment that disrupts the viewer and forces the question of whether or not O'Hara is in fact in control of his own fate—whether or not *we* are in control of our own fates—and a

great example of just how much room for innovation and creativity there was in the genre that was starting to appear, and be criticized as, pre-packaged.[30]

Notes

[1]   Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A theory of poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

[2] Foster Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen* (London: De Capo Press, 1981), 124.

[3] J.P. Telotte, "Narration, Desire, and a Lady from Shanghai," *South Atlantic Review* 49 (1984): 56.

[4] Telotte, "Narration, Desire, and a Lady from Shanghai," 57.

[5] Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen*, 124.

[6] Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen*, 122-123.

[7] *Arena: The Orson Welles Story* (BBC: 1982).

[8] In his interview with Magahey on *Arena*, Welles, referring to his taking on *The Lady from Shanghai* project for producer Harry Cohn, commented, "I went back to Hollywood to *pay my debt*. I had a French girl…all set to shoot it…" but Cohn thought Rita Hayworth would be best for the part, and "…that turned it from 5 weeks to a big, super movie" [emphasis added].

[9] *Arena: The Orson Welles Story* (BBC: 1982).

[10] In his interview with Megahey in *Arena*, Welles claims to never have gone over budget, and to never have gone beyond schedule in the making of his movies.

[11] Barbara Leaming, *Orson Welles* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1983), 336.

[12] Etienne Chaumeton and Raymond Borde, *Panorama of American Film Noir: 1941-1953* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2002), 59.

[13] R. Barton Palmer, ""Lounge Time" Reconsidered: Spatial Discontinuity and Temporal Contingency in *Out of the Past (1947),*" *Film Noir Reader 4: The Crucial Films and Themes* (2004), 56.

[14] Leaming, *Orson Welles*, 338.

[15] Leaming suggests the Chinese theater sequence towards the end of the film is a direct result of Brecht's influence on Welles. Welles had recently read one of Brecht's essays that spoke of his theory of "the alienation effect" epitomized by the Chinese theater, and Welles implemented this effect into his film. The Chinese theater actors in this scene are filmed looking at the audience, looking particularly at O'Hara and the police as they enter the crowd, and O'Hara and Elsa are able to talk loudly without disturbing the audience, because, according to Brecht, "the Chinese theater is perfectly tolerant of interruptions and disturbances" (336-337). The result is a wonderful disturbance in which the viewer is forced, and often fails, to find its bearings as to who are the performers and who is the audience. The increasing close ups on the various actors faces in this scene also raise the tension, adding to the omniscient sense of claustrophobia and intelligently hinting at the impending result of this attempted escape.

[16] Leaming, *Orson Welles*, 338-339.

[17] O'Hara says, "These young fellas were not professionals, and that's maybe the reason why I start out in this story a little bit like a hero, which I most certainly am

not." Welles is playing, here, with the idea of the *noir* hero, or anti-hero. This is echoed in the bar scene in which O'Hara's sailor friend describes him as "quite a hero, quite a tough guy," referencing the typical hard-boiled tough guy heroes of traditional *noirs* like Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*. Ironically, O'Hara turns out to actually be a hero, or at least one who is able to escape the usual *noir* fate, not through a hard-boiled toughness, though, but through a legitimate morality.

[18] Welles uses the idea of narrative voice-over conflicting with the images on the screen brilliantly in this scene, just as he does in the first encounter with Elsa. As the camera pulls into a close-up of O'Hara lighting a cigarette, the parking lot attendant sighs and says, "Gee, some guys have all the luck." While the attendant is actually referring to Elsa's husband, the viewer ironically sees/hears it as O'Hara's "luck" that has drawn him into the precarious scenario.

[19] Naremore points to this uncharacteristic soft-focus close up to give a convincing argument that Welles is mocking "Hollywood's synthetic sexuality" (Telotte 67). Welles, he says, dyes her hair "a fluorescent blonde and dress[es] her in near parodies of calendar-girl fashion" (67). Later, when the crew is at sea, "he poses her rather like a figure in an advertisement – a smiling woman in a bathing suit, reclining on a rock, her toes nicely pointed and the wind blowing her hair" (67). The soft-focus seems a takeoff of the pin-up girl photographs, and Grisby's viewing her through his spyglass brings Elsa into a frame that might very well be a pin-up poster. Welles' conscious additions of these almost satirical touches throughout the film make it an effective self-reflexive *noir*, though we can just as easily credit the direct lighting, soft-focus shots to his ironic play on Otherness in the film.

[20] Benigno Trigo and Kelly Oliver, "Stereotype and Voice in *The Lady from Shanghai*," in *Noir Anxiety* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 62.

[21] Trigo and Oliver, "Stereotype and Voice in *The Lady from Shanghai*," 62.

[22] E. Ann Kaplan, "'The Dark Continent of Film Noir': Race, Displacement and Metaphor in Turner's *Cat People* (1942) and Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948)," *Women in Film Noir* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 194.

[23] Eric Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir," *American Literary History* (1997), 544.

[24] In the wonderful cigarette-passing scene Elsa is implied as the mastermind of the plot. The cigarette passing is "a visual metaphor for Elsa's explosive scheme and for Michael's scripted roles as the fool who lights the match" (Oliver and Trigo 58). Later, on the river in Acapulco, rowing to the picnic, there are shots of a parrot violently squawking, a snake slithering out of the water, and a crocodile flashing its menacing jaws at the passersby. Grisby is visibly scared, but Elsa remains unmoved, suggesting her identification with such dangerous animals.

[25] Telotte, "Narration, Desire, and a Lady from Shanghai," 67.

[26] Trigo and Oliver comment, "True to *noir*, the abetting forces of evil are all associated with the feminine" (58).

[27] Telotte, "Narration, Desire, and a Lady from Shanghai," 66.

[28] Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen*, 113.

[29] Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen*, 113.

[30] Interestingly, this scene was foreshadowed in Welles' previous film, *The Stranger*, in which a Nazi commander named Rankin, played by Welles, living in disguise in small-town America stocks the top of a clocktower and looks down at a deranged angle at his now wife, just before throwing her, symbolically, down the ladder. In this case, it is Rankin who heaves himself off the tower. Likewise in *Shanghai*, O'Hara is perceived as the one who potentially pushes Grisby over the edge. This type of stylistic overlap, from *Kane* to *The Stranger* to *The Lady from Shanghai* and on, is characteristic of the brilliant and coherent creative mind that is Orson Welles.

Choosing "between the morality of the law and the morality of simple justice": The Intersections of Culture, Justice, and National Identity in Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958)

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Orson Welles's 1958 film noir masterpiece, *Touch of Evil,*[1] is a tableau of intersection—not only of mind, body, time, and space, but also of the constructs of national identity, borders, and the dangers of vigilantism. Although Welles spent a decade living and making films in Europe, his exile was documented only recently as being an escape from the blacklist and the House Committee on Un-American Activities hearings into allegations of Communist influences in Hollywood and the entertainment industry.[2] The FBI maintained a file on Welles from 1941-1956, and despite their acknowledgment that there was "no record of Communist Party membership," he was labeled a Communist and his name was placed on the National Security Index in 1945.[3] His progressive politics were such that they permeated his films and his interviews. When *Touch of Evil* is considered in the light of Welles's commitment to social justice at a time when American Cold War anti-communism found such idealism dangerous and problematic, a new cultural text is revealed, one that is as compellingly relevant today (in terms of its issues, themes, and humanistic values) as when it was first released in 1958.

The specific political events that impelled Welles to social activism include two that bear relevance to a cultural reading of intersection, borders, and boundaries of all kinds. During the second World War, he agreed to serve as the spokesperson for The Citizens' Committee for the Defense of Mexican American Youth, and, in this capacity, he became involved conspicuously in the cause of those Mexican Americans arrested for the Los Angeles murder of José Diaz in August of 1942—an event that the newspapers dubbed the Sleepy

Lagoon murder case.[4] Many members of the Mexican American community were subjected to police harassment and this characteristic wartime bigotry was fueled by the jingoism of the local press. Seventeen Mexican Americans were arrested for the murder.[5] Welles wrote the foreword to a political brochure that was published in June 1943. In it, Welles dramatized the experience of a Mexican American he had met, who was enlisting in the United States Army. This inductee, Pete Vasquez, related an extensive series of experiences of discrimination and prejudice. The passages that Welles quoted from Vasquez highlighted the vast discrepancy between the patriotism of the Mexican American community during the Second World War, and the discrimination and prejudice to which they were subjected.[6] All of the seventeen Mexican Americans arrested were released for want of evidence by the Court of Appeals two years after their arrest. [7] These events had an impact on Welles to the extent that he understood vividly the racism that contaminated American justice during World War II.

The second important event that influenced Welles as he would shape *Touch of Evil* occurred immediately after the war. Isaac Woodard, Jr., an African American veteran who served fifteen months in the South Pacific theater (and who earned a battle star), suffered a brutal beating at the hands of the white chief of police for answering the abusive comments of a racist white bus driver in Batesburg, South Carolina. As a result of this savage beating (and the delayed medical attention that was a direct result of Woodard's race), the veteran was blinded.[8] The NAACP asked Welles to become involved in the Isaac Woodard, Jr., case, and he devoted several episodes of his ABC radio program, *Orson Welles Commentaries*, to the case.[9]

Welles identified with this injustice to the point that he scripted impassioned pleas on behalf of the victim and his plight. Welles spoke, he said, "in the name of all who in this land of ours have no voice of their own. I come with a call to action."[10] It is important to consider the spirit of Welles's humanistic commitment as a background for the interpretation of *Touch of Evil*. He argued that:

> The blind soldier fought for me in this war. The least I can do now is fight for him. I have eyes. He hasn't. I have a voice on the radio. He hasn't. I was born a white man and until a colored man is a full citizen like me I haven't the leisure to enjoy the freedom that colored man risked his life to maintain for me. I don't own what I have until he owns an equal share of it.[11]

Ironically, the beating occurred on Lincoln's birthday, in 1946. Seven months later, in September, the Department of Justice arrested the police officer.

Welles was notified in the same month that his ABC radio program was discontinued.[12] There is no question but that Welles felt a deep and impassioned identification for those who experienced injustice at the hands of the law, and its instrument, the police.

Touch of Evil was the first film Welles directed in the United States following his decade of political exile. It would also be his last. It is well known that he was contracted to play the role of the corrupt police officer in the film, but that the film's leading man, Charlton Heston, advocated strenuously on behalf of Welles directing the film as well.[13] *Touch of Evil* was based on the novel, *Badge of Evil*, written by Robert Wade and William Miller (under the pseudonym Whit Masterson) in 1956. The changes Welles made to the studio's screenplay based on the novel were profound. He altered the San Diego setting to the town of Los Robles, on the border between the United States and Mexico. Although the novel's hero (an assistant D.A.) is part of an interracial marriage, he is a white man with a Mexican wife. This theme of interracial tension is not crucial to the novel. Welles changes his hero to a Mexican investigator who is leading an anti-drug-smuggling and anti-rackets campaign for the Mexican government's Ministry of Justice. Reversing the polarities of the novel, Welles made the hero be a Mexican and his wife an American, from Philadelphia. This reversal (one of many Welles would initiate) destabilizes the traditional valences for cultural configurations of national identity, justice, gender roles, racism, and vigilantism.[14]

In *Touch of Evil,* Welles revises the characters and relationships of the novel and transforms the critical themes. The border becomes a zone of dispute, and the criminal elements operate as readily on the American side of the border as on the Mexican side. Recasting his leading characters as newlyweds, Welles depicts them at the onset as attempting to cross the border from Mexico to the United States. Their romantic passion as a couple is set in opposition to their divergent national loyalties. The corruption that undermined authority in the novel is no longer a personal and private flaw of the officer of the law; in Welles's landscape, the entire border region is contaminated by a corruption that challenges us to redefine and address anew our operational system of cultural values.

Welles cast Charlton Heston as the film's hero, the Mexican agent of justice, Ramon Miguel Vargas. Vargas's wife, an American, is played by Janet Leigh. For the role of the dissipated, corrupt, world weary, and racist vigilante police captain, Welles cast himself. Audiences at this time were not accustomed to cross-racial casting, and the idea of Heston as an urbane, highly educated, and civilized Mexican law enforcement agent was a challenge to stereotypes of Hollywood heroes and typecasting. The organized crime family that Welles creates—the Grandi family—is neither Mexican nor American: they operate easily on both sides of the border and the nominal leader, Uncle

Joe Grandi, is an American citizen.

From the onset of the film, Welles focuses on cultural intersections. He designed a visual and musical collage of cultural dislocations, as evoked by a remarkable continuous tracking shot that proceeds from one side of the border to its crossing, and by disjunctive musical splicing of jazz, rock 'n' roll, boogie woogie, Mariachi, Latin, and Chicano styles. His conception employs the seemingly "natural" sounds that would spill out of the various cultural establishments that the characters walk past on their way to the border crossing. As the characters move back and forth across the border, the significance of being on one side versus the other is minimized and, ultimately, confused. National distinctions become blurred; assumptions of national values and gender roles are likewise usurped and appropriated. *The first thing we see is a bomb being planted in the trunk of a convertible.*

Accompanying the newlyweds to the border is this convertible automobile, driven by Rudy Linnekar, a prominent American contractor whose financial investments control the entire region; in the car with Linnekar is Zita, a Mexican stripper that Linnekar has met in a striptease joint on the Mexican side of the border. Susan Vargas volunteers that she is an American citizen, from Philadelphia. The customs agents recognize Vargas for his significant role in arresting a key member of the Grandi crime family. When asked the same question of whether she is American, Zita says, "No…I've got this ticking noise…ticking noise in my head!"[15] Immediately after crossing the border, Susan tells her husband, "Mike, do you realize this is the first time we've been together in my country?"[16] It is at this moment that the bomb explodes! Welles has planted the idea of an interracial romance as having incendiary potential.

Borders and boundaries are questioned and dissected. Is the ticking exterior (a bomb) or interior (a psychotic delusion)? What difference does it make whether two lovers are together in one country or another so long as they are together? Careful and persistent details reinforce this probing inquiry. Susan refers to her Mexican husband not by his own name, but by the American version of it—not Ramon, not Miguel, but Mike. Only once, when she is engaged in romantic banter with her husband over the telephone, does she call him by his name, Miguel. When Vargas, an agent of law enforcement, hears the explosion, he comments to Susan, "This could be very bad for us." Her context is their marriage, and her response is, "For us?" Vargas clarifies, "For Mexico, I mean."[17] Already, "us" is revealed as possessing contradictory connotations: a married couple in love, of different national origins and cultures, is divided by the "us" that associates each person individually with the collective citizenry of the specific country of origin. The polarities of orientation—the idea of "home"—are subjected to rigorous scrutiny by so many of the principle characters that Welles has subverted the concept of Cold

War nationalism and substituted an international fellowship of humanity.

As viewers, we are oriented typically to national identification. But Susan, the American heroine, when encountering a Spanish-speaking youth she does not know who bears a message for her, calls out, "Lead on, Pancho!"[18] Lest we ignore this possibly derogatory slur, Welles shows us "Uncle Joe" Grandi (the brother of the mobster Vargas has arrested and against whom he will testify in Mexico City), who confronts Susan, "My nephew says you call him Pancho. Why?" Faced with her own unconscious bigotry, Susan says, "Just for laughs, I guess."[19] We are presented with an American heroine who bears a romantic fascination for the "type" of her "Latin lover" (the only time she calls him Miguel) and yet who carries alongside this a prejudice against Mexicans and other marginalized foreigners. When encountering another man she does not know who speaks Spanish, she tells him, "I don't want any more post cards."[20] These marginalized "aliens" are depicted in her imagination as hawking the debris of tourist towns—the knickknacks and souvenirs that constitute detritus once one returns "home," to "normalcy."

But Susan Vargas is not the only American racist. Captain Hank Quinlan (as played by Orson Welles) is harboring a murderous hatred. Many years earlier, his wife, he believes, was murdered by a "half-breed," and, like a modern-day Ahab, he craves vengeance for the one criminal that escaped his personal retribution. When first meeting Quinlan, Vargas is eager to assuage the political sensitivity of competing police forces of different nations, each claiming jurisdiction for purposes of justice. "I'm merely what the United Nations would call an observer," he tells Quinlan. "You don't talk like one, I'll say that for you. A Mexican, I mean," is Quinlan's bigoted rejoinder.[21] The viewer's innate proclivity for patriotic identification is problematized by Welles's detonation of traditional cultural stereotypes.

The police have settled on a suspect for the bombing. They believe that the culprit is Manolo Sanchez, the Mexican lover of the dead man's daughter, Marcia Linnekar. In the interrogation scene, Welles emphasizes the incendiary theme of racial intermarriage by constructing a series of doubles: Ramon Miguel Vargas, the Mexican "chairman of the Pan American Narcotics Commission"[22] is married to Susan, an American of an upstanding Philadelphia family; Manolo Sanchez, a Mexican shoe salesman, lives with Marcia Linnekar, the American daughter and heiress of the fortune of a prominent contractor. In each instance, the "stable" imperialist model of the American male "conquering" the Latina daughter is subverted by the gender reversal.

Pitted against each other, in the personages of Vargas and Quinlan, are two different conceptions of guilt, justice, and the law. Quinlan tells Vargas, in derision, "All a lawyer cares about is the law!"[23] And Vargas responds by reminding him, "It's a dirty job…enforcing the law, but it's what we're

supposed to be doing."[24] Sanchez, frightened that Marcia has departed with her American attorney, leaving him alone to be interrogated, suggests that he will be subjected to police brutality.[25] Years before the Supreme Court's Miranda decision (Miranda v. Arizona, 1966) that required suspects be informed of their rights, and even more years before the War on Terrorism distilled some of these prescribed legal rights, Welles is alerting his audience to the potential abuses of police authority. Quinlan lectures Vargas, "Just because he [Sanchez] speaks a little guilty, that don't make him innocent, you know."[26] And even when Vargas (and we along with him from his perspective) see clearly that what Vargas disclosed inadvertently as an empty shoebox in Sanchez's bathroom is being bandied about by Quinlan as the box in which Quinlan's colleague, Pete Menzies, has found two sticks of stolen dynamite, even after Vargas knows that the evidence against Sanchez has been planted by Quinlan, Vargas is subjected to Quinlan's patronizing taunt, "You people are touchy. It's only human you'd want to come to the defense of your fellow countryman. Folks will bear your natural prejudice in mind."[27] Vargas is only able to accuse: "You framed that boy!"[28]

These two orientations, these contrasting views of guilt and justice, of identity and origin, are not only seen in Quinlan and Vargas; they are also seen, in unstable combustible combinations, in the other characters. Brought in to the Sanchez interrogation against his will, the gangster Grandi reminds everyone that he's "an American citizen!"[29] But when Grandi lured Susan to the American side to wield an indirect threat against Vargas not to testify against Grandi's imprisoned brother, Vargas characterizes this for Quinlan as his wife being "accosted in the street a little while ago and led across to some…dive on your side of the border."[30] "My" side is good; "your" side is bad: if all believe in this polarizing epithet, then all sides are equally contaminated. Welles reveals this brilliantly in a telling exchange between Susan and Miguel. Frightened by her encounter with Grandi, Susan tells Miguel, "There must be [a motel] somewhere on the American side of the border…. I'll be safe there."[31] Vargas takes this personally and responds that he wants to "be able to think he could look after his own wife…in his own country."[32] Vargas's identity as a proud Mexican is pitted against his identity as a typically chauvinistic 1950s man, filled with Machismo, who needs to guard his woman. Susan corrects herself noticeably: "Oh, Mike, if I go to an American motel, it's just for comfort…not for safety."[33] But it is in this same "safe" American motel, the seedy Mirador, run by the Grandi family, that Susan is harassed and terrorized! It is, in its own way, as dangerous and degenerate as that other Grandi business, the Mexican establishment, Grandi's Rancho Grande, the striptease joint where Rudolph Linnekar met up with Zita before his fatal automobile explosion. Vargas summarizes the rampant destabilization of identity, values, and ethics that characterize these blurred

border intersections: "This isn't the real Mexico. You know that. All border towns bring out the worst in a country."[34]

Welles exploits powerful images that instill fear and terror—drug trafficking; rape; prostitution; gang violence; promiscuity; miscegenation; abduction (what used to be called "White Slavery" and is today the forced enslavement of marginalized women into prostitution and the sex trade)—to provoke the audience's instinctive identification of Susan Vargas (Janet Leigh) as a virtuous American symbol of gentility. Although the plot will later allege that the apparent rape of Susan Vargas by the Grandi gang with their polymorphous perversity is only a symbolic rape—an assault meant to terrorize her and threaten her husband; and although the plot will later allege that the apparent degeneracy of Susan into drug abuse and prostitution is likewise a sham, a symbolic theatrical battering, the hallowed affinities of the audience have been attacked. In a state of chaos and disarray, we need a sense of safety, a sense of "home," a sense of justice and civilized values.

When Vargas is able to prove to Pete Menzies that his best friend Quinlan has not been an intuitive genius detective armed with an innate ability to ferret out the guilty party, but instead, is a vigilante, he places Menzies in a quandary that is central to all of Welles's most passionate concerns: do I betray my best friend, the man who saved my life ("he was wounded stopping a bullet that was meant for me"),[35] or do I betray myself, my career, and the values of the law on which my career is based? Am I defined by the friends I choose, or by the nation of my origin, or by my attitudes and human values?

Vargas expresses his position in this manner: "I don't think a policeman should work like a dog-catcher…putting criminals behind bars. No! In any free country…a policeman is supposed to enforce the law, and the law protects the guilty as well as the innocent."[36] Quinlan mocks Vargas's ideas as "very special": "he seems to think it don't matter whether a killer is hanged or not, so long as we obey the fine print…in the rule books."[37] The cause Welles is championing here is every bit as relevant today, at a time when criminal defense attorneys are treated with contempt and derision in all forms of mass cultural entertainments. Vargas insists that a policeman's job is meant to be "tough. The policeman's job is only easy in a police state. That's the whole point, captain. Who is the boss, the cop or the law?"[38] Quinlan resorts to a defense of national loyalty: "Thirty years I gave my life to this department…and you allow this foreigner to accuse me!"[39]

The battleground is menses and Menzies. Who will Susan love, her country or her man? Who will Pete love, his best friend, his partner, or his professional identity? Susan says to Miguel (and not for the last time!), "Take me home,"[40] but where is that? Is "home" anywhere she might go, now that Miguel has succeeded in freeing her from the trumped-up drug and murder rap? Or does it refer to a particular location, a national identity? Quinlan warns

Pete: "Vargas'll turn you into one of these here starry-eyed *idealists*. They're the ones making all the real trouble in the world."[41] By this time, a desperate Quinlan, his authority challenged by an idealistic opponent, is sinking fast: he has murdered Grandi in a crime that compulsively repeats the murder of his own wife—in a scene that involves disrobing and eroticized struggling, Quinlan strangles Grandi with a woman's stocking. In this deliberate parallel, Welles reveals Quinlan as the moral "half-breed." Tormented with self-hatred projected outward as racism and inward as self-destruction, Quinlan leaves his cane in the room with Grandi. Menzies, the cop, has found the evidence that refutes the integrity of Quinlan, the genius detective. When Pete challenges Quinlan that he can't blame Vargas for Grandi's murder, Quinlan raves, "I blame Vargas for everything!"[42]

Menzies has chosen his side; he chooses justice, the ideal, over the cop, the personality. He makes the difficult choice to live in a civilized democracy, and not in a totalitarian police state. As he confronts Quinlan, he knows that Vargas is tracking them, taping Quinlan's incriminating words. It is particularly ironic in this sense that, as Pete has sided with Vargas, Quinlan persistently refers to Pete as "partner," attempting to implicate him in Quinlan's corruption. When Quinlan refers to his successes, to "all those convictions," Menzies replies, "How many did you frame?" Ultimately, Quinlan's denial, "Nobody!" deteriorates into "Nobody that wasn't guilty."[43] Chided by Pete for his crimes: "Faking evidence," Quinlan offers the feeble euphemism, "Aiding justice."[44]

Even at the most crucial of thematic affirmations, Welles complicates the issues, reminding us of the profundity of this human condition. Quinlan intends on coercing Vargas to run, so he can shoot him for resisting arrest. "How could you arrest me here?" Vargas asks. "This is my country."[45] But Vargas very nearly *is* murdered by Quinlan—saved by the bullet of Menzies, who, betrayed by Quinlan's betrayal of Pete's values, shoots Quinlan with his dying effort. Quinlan's perception that Pete has betrayed *him* has prompted him to murder his best friend. In this veritable slaughterhouse, in this swamp of human values, where does one take refuge? Vargas says to Susan, "It's all over, Susie. I'm taking you home. Home."[46] Where is "home"? Where is "Home"? Is it the United States? Is it Mexico? Is it the haven of civilized values and justice? Or is it merely the absence of terror? Welles has so discomforted the accepted cultural assumptions of the Cold War era that the audience was (and is) powerfully confused.

Since the "happy ending" is impossible to accept without irony, the attention reverts back to Quinlan, his abuse of power, and his corruption of justice. As Vargas has earlier noted, it is easy to be a policeman in a police state. It is analogously simplistic to cast blame on Quinlan as the villain who has framed an innocent man. Vargas's American ally, Schwartz, reveals that

Quinlan "framed that Mexican…kid, Sanchez. But he didn't even need to. The kid confessed about that bomb."[47] This is Welles's bombshell: even though we saw that the shoebox was empty, Sanchez nevertheless was guilty, because…he confessed. But Welles has "planted" the evidence that confessions may not be true when they are the result of brutality. Is Sanchez actually guilty in spite of Vargas's obstruction of justice? Or has justice itself become "Quinlanned"? Has justice, in its own name, beaten out a false confession through any means necessary to cling to the fiction of guilt and innocence?

It is at this point that Welles ends his film, with the previously skeptical Schwartz eulogizing Quinlan, "Well, Hank was a great detective all right."[48] But Tanya (Marlene Dietrich), the gypsy prostitute who once loved Quinlan, and who knows him in some sense more truly than anyone else, responds "And a lousy cop. He was some kind of a man. What does it matter what you say about people?"[49] Here, Welles knowingly alludes to Raymond Chandler's elegiac ending to *The Big Sleep*, with its image of an oil swamp of corruption, with a sick and depraved upper class hovering above, everyone else in contact permanently contaminated, with death as the great leveler, the great equalizing force of life:

> What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep, you were not bothered by things like that. Oil and water were the same as wind and air to you. You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell. Me, I was part of the nastiness now.[50]

When asked, in his 1958 *Cahiers du Cinéma* interviews,[51] whether he viewed Quinlan as a "man of genius who isn't able to restrain himself from doing evil," Welles replied, "It's a mistake to think that Quinlan finds any favor in my eyes. To me, he's hateful. There's no ambiguity in his character. He's not a genius…. The most personal thing I've put in this film is my hatred of the abuse of police power…. Certainly, Quinlan is a 'moral' character, but I detest his morality."[52] When asked to clarify whether he meant that "Quinlan has been right in spite of everything, since the young Mexican is guilty," Welles answered, again alluding to his Chandleresque *noir* ending, "Who cares about knowing whether [Quinlan] was mistaken or not?"[53] The interviewers, surprised, asked: wasn't this fact "important?"[54] "That depends on your point of view," Welles answered:

> Personally, I believe in everything that's said by the character played by Heston. I'd be able to say everything Vargas says.

He speaks as a man of dignity, according to the tradition of classical humanism, which is absolutely my tradition as well…: It's better to see a murderer go free than for a policeman to abuse his power. If you have a choice between the abuse of police power and letting a crime go unpunished, you have to choose the unpunished crime. That's my point of view. So, let's accept the fact that the young Mexican is really guilty. What exactly is his guilt? That does not really concern us. The subject of the film is elsewhere. …So they've trapped the guilty party. But it's a purely anecdotal event, it's not central to the theme. *The truly guilty one is Quinlan.*[55]

The interviewers, sophisticated film critics who admired Welles and *Touch of Evil* enormously, were astonished by Welles's expression of these sentiments, these passionate ideals. But once we place Welles's cinematic masterpiece into its cultural and political context of a crisis of values between the cult of personality and the burden of responsibility, between apparent "identity" (mass cultural manipulation) and core human ideals (the same idealism that Quinlan ridicules in Vargas!), we are able to appreciate the audacity and courage of Welles's vision. We are able to perceive the artistry and the idealism as part of one expansive cultural project. Welles took a great deal of effort to be precise with these interviewers:

I want to be clear about my intentions. What I said in the film is this: I firmly believe that in the modern world we need to choose between the morality of the law and the morality of simple justice; which is to say, between lynching someone or letting him go free. I'd rather have a murderer be free than have the police arrest him by mistake. Quinlan does not want to submit the guilty ones to justice so much as to assassinate them in the name of the law, using the police for his own purposes; and this is a fascist scenario, a totalitarian scenario, contrary to traditional law and human justice as I understand them. Thus, for me, Quinlan is the incarnation of everything I struggle against, politically and morally speaking. I'm against Quinlan because he wishes to arrogate the right to judge; and that's what I detest above all, men who wish to judge by their own authority.[56]

If I have been persuasive in this critical essay, then Welles's work may be seen as being of a piece with his life. Instead of the myth of the eccentric boy genius running afoul of the practical Hollywood film industry, we see a

visionary idealist, struggling with only partial success to integrate his humanistic values with a progressive artistic cultural vision. His Wellesian style, his distinctive artistic qualities, these are not isolated quirks: they must be understood in the context of his time…and ours. For we still live in what Welles termed the "modern world," and its flaws and challenges and shortcomings and aspirations are ours as well. In a world in the midst of every sort of crisis, where do we go that is home? For Welles, his home was his dream of fusing a moral artistic vision with a world that was fallen and crucially flawed. That his art still challenges and inspires us, that his best work—such as *Touch of Evil*—still casts light on our shadows, sheds insight on our nightmares, and combats human frailty with a grand vision of human transcendence: this is his legacy, and we are all the richer for his labor and his life.

Notes

[1] Orson Welles, director and screenplay. *Touch of Evil*, restored edition DVD. Universal City, CA: Universal, 2000.

[2] Joseph McBride. *What Ever Happened to Orson Welles?* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 93.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Barbara Leaming. *Orson Welles*. (New York: Penguin, 1986), 333.

[5] Ibid., 333-335.

[6] Ibid., 335.

[7] Ibid., 334.

[8] McBride, 94. Leaming, 402-404.

[9] McBride, 94.

[10] Leaming, 404.

[11] Leaming, 403.

[12] Leaming, 404-405.

[13] Leaming, 507.

[14] John Stubbs, "The Evolution of Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* from Novel to Film." *Cinema Journal* 24.2 (Winter 1985). Rpt. Terry Comito, editor, *Touch of Evil, Orson Welles, Director*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 175-193.

[15] Orson Welles, director and screenwriter. *Touch of Evil*. Edited by Terry Comito. (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 51.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 52.

[18] Ibid., 54.

[19] Ibid., 59-60.

[20] Ibid., 79.

[21] Ibid., 59.

[22] Ibid., 65.

[23] Ibid., 73.

[24] Ibid., 74.
[25] Ibid., 91-92.
[26] Ibid., 96.
[27] Ibid., 106.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 102.
[30] Ibid., 72.
[31] Ibid., 81.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 81.
[34] Ibid., 77.
[35] Ibid., 84.
[36] Ibid., 120.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 120-121.
[39] Ibid., 122.
[40] Ibid., 146.
[41] Ibid., 155.
[42] Ibid., 157.
[43] Ibid., 159.
[44] Ibid., 160.
[45] Ibid., 165.
[46] Ibid., 167.
[47] Ibid., 169.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Raymond Chandler. *The Big Sleep* (1939). In *Stories and Early Novels*. (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 763-764. James Naremore makes this association (to address a different emphasis) in his *The Magic World of Orson Welles*. (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 155-156.
[51] "Interview with Orson Welles." Rpt. In Comito, 199-212.
[52] Ibid., 204-205.
[53] Ibid., 205.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 206.

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Advocating Incredulity: Orson Welles, Film Noir, and the Suspension of Belief

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Orson Welles's film *Touch of Evil* ends with a character asking, "What does it matter what you say about people?" As the film shows, it does matter, especially when the person saying it wields power within a community.

Although *Citizen Kane* arguably uses the cinematic style of film noir, Welles's films, *Touch of Evil* and *The Lady from Shanghai,* both of which are based on "hard boiled" genre fiction, engage the narrative conventions of film noir.[1] These films explicate the dangerous power wielded by adept storytellers over those who believe their narratives.

The Lady from Shanghai remains a cinematic enigma. After the notorious failure of his first feature film, *Citizen Kane,* Welles struggled to raise the capital to produce others. He wanted to make a film version of *Carmen* and the plot of Sherwood King's novel, *If I Die Before I Wake,* allowed him to tell Carmen's story through the genre conventions of popular film.[2] However, Welles's treatment of King's work does more than just retell the *Carmen* story in the style of "hard-boiled" crime films. Much like *Citizen Kane, The Lady from Shanghai* discloses a web of different storytellers struggling to control the narrative and, like *Kane,* the film leaves it to the viewer to weave together a coherent story from the tangled threads, a daunting task since this web has no center. The film depicts a dream-like narrative that never reveals its central mystery and constantly creates distance between the film and audience; *The Lady from Shanghai* deliberately confounds its viewers. *Touch of Evil,* released by Universal in 1958, depicts the downfall of a corrupt policeman in a seedy border town. The film explores the problematic ethics of storytelling by

depicting the power of a man able to frame others as criminal by fabricating evidence to verify his story.

Attempting to extend the narrative boundary into the audience, in order to work against the passive nature of film consumption, both films use "shock effects" to elicit a response. The ubiquitous use of mirrors and glass (which ultimately become fragmented) alludes to the unstable frames of reference experienced by the film spectator and figuratively disrupts the spectacle of cinematic narrative. These films cross the boundaries of the camera frame, attempting to engage the audience in the ethical quandaries depicted by implicating the viewer in the storytelling process. We are all guilty of believing stories. Both films induce a sense of being lost in a bewildering labyrinth and they continually remind the audience that it watches a movie, framing it in the narratives' themes of passive complacency. The central instability of the narratives remains unresolved, leaving the viewer lost in a story with no center and no exit. This may be the central lesson of the films.

Treating film narrative as a waking dream (as Welles does with all of his work), these films attempt to awaken the audience, to engage viewers in an investigation of stories, storytelling, and the "poetic faith" in narrative called by Coleridge "the willing suspension of disbelief."[3] Storytelling becomes a sinister act; morality dominates the narratives. Belief in stories can turn people into passive victims like Michael O'Hara. Jean-Paul Sartre observes:

> For the most trivial event to become an adventure, all you have to do is start telling about it. This is what deceives people: *a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through these stories; and he tries to live his life as if it were a story he was telling.*[4] (italics mine)

Sartre advocated against this kind of existence and considered it a distancing from the actual experience of life. At the end of *The Lady from Shanghai,* after being framed for a murder that he did not commit, O'Hara attempts to leave the story in which he is implicated behind him and live in a narrative of his choosing, but, like Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," he seems doomed to repeat the telling of his tale endlessly. Agency remains elusive. *Touch of Evil,* using frames and the act of framing as a central motif, depicts frames within frames, a distraction that destabilizes interpretation of the story. The use of deep focus and multiple, over-lapping character spaces within shots further complicates the narrative frame. The story of Vargas and his wife becomes overwhelmed by Hank Quinlan, the film's central storyteller and anti-hero.

Believing his own narrative, Quinlan loses control over the story he tells and it destroys him. The film dwells on the veracity of narratives and the

power of those who can frame events to tell their version of a story. In *The Lady from Shanghai,* Michael O'Hara becomes the "fall guy" by believing the stories of several disreputable storytellers. Both narratives' incomprehensibility deliberately prevents clear and easy answers to the problems that they represent. Like all of his other work, Welles leaves these narratives open to interpretation, begging the audience to reflect on their themes. The confusing plots were further obfuscated by the films' producers after Welles finished editing them. Fortunately, in the case of *Touch of Evil,* the film was "restored" by Walter Murch following a fifty-page memo penned by Welles. Also, as pointed out by Joseph McBride, "Welles did not consider films to be finite works." McBride compares him to a painter, and, like many painters, "he believed his work as an artist was always a work in progress." [5] Considering this sentiment, it seems apropos that Welles's film would continue to evolve even after his demise.

Welles renders *The Lady from Shanghai* as a morose meditation resembling Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.*[6] More than just a story of violent events and deception, it becomes a discourse on the danger of storytelling, hinting at the sentiment that Welles later depicts in *F for Fake*: all storytelling is implicated in deception and illusion and, as such, should never be trusted.[7] Quoting Andre Bazin, Clinton Heylin argues that this film "is paradoxically the richest in meaning of Welles's films in proportion to the insignificance of the script [precisely because] the plot no longer interferes with the underlying action."[8] Although he diverges from the plot as outlined in the novel, Welles's script attempts to portray the bewilderment of its protagonist visually.[9] While completely altering the structure of King's narrative, Welles keeps the ridiculous plot that lures the protagonist to his doom. As a twist on the usual insurance policy scam used in many novels of this kind, Grisby hires Michael to "kill" him, so that Grisby can collect his own life insurance and flee to South America. Michael never questions how Grisby will collect the insurance once everyone thinks that Grisby is dead; he blindly goes along with the scheme. The narrative feels like a fantastic nightmare. Indeed, although King's novel includes a campy dream sequence involving fog, fantasy and dream become central motifs in the film.[10]

In *The Lady from Shanghai,* the competing storytellers attempt to frame Michael, using him as a tool against each other. In *Touch of Evil,* the twin ideas of frames and borders as defining enclosures dominate the narrative in both its text and presentation. Indeed, the very location that Welles chose to place the action speaks to this theme. A border town exists between borders and encloses nothing, as a mirror and a door, just like the name of the motel in the film, the Mirador. Among the OED's definitions of "frame" are: "A surrounding structure," "a supporting structure," and the older meanings of "mental or emotional disposition," "adapted or adjusted condition," and "a

formula in logic."[11] All of these ideas describe the frame as a structuring principal, whether logical, psychological, or architectural. A frame structures and encloses, thereby supplying reference and stability. Frames supply context; the act of framing in these films involves creating a narrative context that convinces others of the role of another character within that narrative, much like the machinations of Tartuffe or Iago.

The Lady from Shanghai begins with a credit sequence over a shot of ocean waves, which sets up the nautical theme that Welles added to King's narrative as well as hints at the depth of the mystery that the narrative represents. Indeed, since the last shot depicts the film's protagonist walking towards the ocean, the narrative can be said to be framed by the sea. Critic Peter Cowie sees a kind of foreboding in this shot, as "the evil in *The Lady from Shanghai* lurks beneath the surface . . . for much of the time . . . everybody and yet nobody seems guilty."[12] Welles argues against moral ambiguity in his films. He stated, "I believe I have never made a film without having a solid ethical point of view about its story."[13] In the film, Elsa argues that the "whole world is bad"; O'Hara calls it a "bright guilty world." His guilt consists of believing stories. The film argues for narrative skepticism.

With *Touch of Evil,* Welles's camera angles and use of space explore the use of frames and the act of framing by complicating notions of foreground and background, importance and triviality. In her analysis of the film, Brooke Rollins argues that "both Quinlan and Welles strategically frame images and events so that they are perceived by their intended audiences in specific, deliberate ways."[14] I would argue, however, that Welles's use of deep focus and simultaneous action often complicates the way in which the audience views a scene, deliberately confusing perception and frustrating interpretation. The film bewilders a viewer by presenting multiple scenes with multiple frames of reference simultaneously within the same shot, which Welles often highlights by literally framing a scene within something like a window or mirror frame. This happens on many occasions, such as when Vargas telephones Susan in a little shop owned by a conspicuously blind woman. At one point in the scene, as he talks to his wife, we can see another scene play out behind him through the window. He then misinterprets his wife's coquettishness on the telephone. He confuses frames of reference. This scene is itself framed in the narrative timeline by the interrogation scene that begins before it and then follows it, a scene that concludes with Quinlan's framing of the shoe clerk. All of these frames overlap and reference action that they fail to enclose, complicating context and interpretation.

As Vargas flirts with his wife on the telephone, the viewer knows that simultaneously a man faces the violent treatment of a racist policeman out of sight. Sex masks brutality and the telephone conversation seems like a deliberate distraction from the story, although the distance between the

married couple becomes a central element of the narrative. Critic Terry Comito argues that this film is "cut loose from its moorings, from the frames of reference by which we habitually seek to stabilize our situation in it."[15] The film frustrates interpretation by presenting a visual and auditory field that surpasses the viewer's ability to rationally understand the relation of each frame to another. The narrative refuses to make sense, inviting the viewer to make sense of it.

The *Lady* in *The Lady from Shanghai*'s title represents the central mystery and illusion in the narrative. Although already enhanced by Welles's adaptation of the novel, Elsa's role in the film became even more central due to producer Harry Cohn's interference. He not only required more screen time for Rita Hayworth, they named the movie after her character. Karen Radell argues that "Welles, ordered by Columbia's boss, Harry Cohn, to shoot several close-ups of Hayworth as they were considered essential to any 'star' vehicle, responded 'by making the close-ups of [her] the most banal and emptily glossy things in the film.'" (qtg. Higham)[16] A scene between Elsa and Michael contains a radio commercial playing in the background selling a product called "Glosso Lusto," referring to the artificial gloss that drives Michael's (and the viewer's) lust for Elsa (also referring to the over-arching gloss of cinematic narrative).[17] Richard Jameson argues that this film "is an exciting and, in its way, harrowing excursion into illusionism."[18] The OED defines "gloss" as "superficial luster" or "deceptive external appearance," but also as "a comment, an explanation, an interpretation, a paraphrase."[19] This gloss of glosses and all that glisters treats not only Elsa's story, but the beautiful spectacle of Hollywood movies in general.

The Lady from Shanghai is a story about the consumption of stories. Film viewers consume stories. J.P. Tellotte examines the way that Michael spends most of the film "swallowing" stories.[20] Michael becomes increasingly confused by these conflicting narratives and the audience shares his bewilderment. The narrator admits, "You gotta swallow whole all the lies you can think up to tell yourself." Tellotte argues that "Michael has been swallowed up by a world where the lines simply cannot be clearly drawn; he is consumed by a realm of deceptive images."[21] By drawing attention to cinematic artifice, the film attempts to show viewers that they have also been "consumed by a realm of deceptive images."

Michael's shark story represents an attempt to maintain his autonomy in the narrative through a meta-narrative device, a story about the story (as opposed to his role as narrator, which exists "outside" of the narrative and does not actually tell the story so much as comment on it). His poetic fable acts as an allegory of the narrative he and the other characters enact in the film. Like the way Welles snidely comments to the viewer in *F for Fake,* this scene addresses the audience, letting it in on the joke. The last piece of

narration at the film's end, when the narrator explains that he will try to forget Elsa, causes the story to consume itself. The act of narrating this story, as an act of memory, implicitly prevents forgetting. Like an Ouroboros, the narrative becomes a never-ending cycle of storytelling and forgetting. It consumes and creates itself at the same time as it disintegrates on screen in the film's climax.

In the conclusion of the narrative, Michael hurtles through what can only be called a nightmare. Welles painted the fun-house sets himself. Drawing from German expressionist film, the scene was intended to be disorienting, highlighting the fact that, as in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* the film is the dream of a madman.[22] Cohn considered the scene too bewildering and ordered it cut down to a fraction of its length.[23] All that exists of some of these sets are photographs taken while Welles assembled them. The scene now extant does however contain several important narrative elements from Welles's intended sequence. Twice Michael sees a sign stating, "Stand Up or Give Up." Attempting to engage the film viewers in critical discourse and to politicize aesthetics, Welles addresses the audience with these signs, giving them the same choice offered Michael. The first time that we see this message it seems to be woven from a network of strings which connect to hands in the periphery of the sign. I read this as an indication of the multiple narrative threads manipulating Michael coming from conflicting storytellers. To film viewers, the sign indicates the power of stories over them; they are urged to distrust the storyteller, to stand up and cease being a passive puppet on a string.

The mirror sequence destroys all of the illusions engendered by the film's narrative, many of which are Hollywood clichés. All of Welles's films depict glass as a framing device and figure of discourse, at times suggesting transparency, distortion, or reflection. Callow argues that the characters in *The Lady from Shanghai* both effectively and figuratively live in a glass house that they shatter at the film's end in their attempt to destroy each other. He observes: "Again and again in *The Lady from Shanghai* people are glimpsed through glass, sometimes shattered, often at an odd angle."[24] These shots also represent a subtle reference to the lens of the camera and the cinematic experience. Welles told Peter Bogdanovich in a conversation about teaching new film directors, that the student should "hold a mirror up to nature—that's Shakespeare's message to the actor. . .. how much more is it true, to the creator of a film?"[25] But Welles follows this observation with a caveat that reasserts the authorial control of the director: "the *angle* at which you hold that mirror. . .. what the mirror has to show back at you."[26] While denying that he follows Brecht in his style of directing, Welles does allow that he has "always made a terrible effort to recall to the public, at each instant, that it is in a theatre."[27] The constant reference to glass and frames reminds the audience that it participates in a shared fantasy controlled by the camera.[28]

Mirrors represent self-reflection, but also illusion and duplicity; mirror images are not what they depict. Heylin argues that mirrors "continue to reinforce the idea that illusion and duplicity are all that Elsa and her kind represent."[29] He calls it an "ivory tower of illusion." Michael's flaw, by this argument, consists in "failing to see the world for what it is." Heylin elaborates that, "even after his first shattering moment, during the fight with the court bailiff in the judge's chambers, when he throws a statuette at the camera itself, thus challenging *us* to see this world for what it is, one built on artifice, he remains an innocent abroad."[30] Mirrors also indicate the reflexive and reflective quality of the narrative itself. Mikhail Bakhtin notes:

> A second participant is implicated in the event of self-contemplation, a fictitious other, a nonauthoritative and unfounded author: I am possessed by someone else's soul. . . vexation and a certain resentment, with which our dissatisfaction about our own exterior may combine, give body to this other—the possible author of our own exterior.[31]

The mirror impels us to see ourselves as an "other." Likewise, films act as distorted mirrors, allowing us to see ourselves *in* others. As it disrupts this relationship, the mirror scene in *The Lady from Shanghai* depicts one of the most obvious "shock effects" in the film.

The collage of images in this scene consists of much more than just reflections in a hall of mirrors. James Naremore dissects the action in great detail:

> Not satisfied with the simple phenomenon of reflections in mirrors, Welles complicates the spectacle with a split-screen: we see two images of Arthur Bannister and his cane at either side of the frame, in between them two gigantic portraits of Elsa's blonde head. In a later shot, two Bannisters are superimposed over Elsa's eyeball. Toward the climax, Bannister lurches to the left and produces three images of himself; the camera pans and three more Bannisters approach from the opposite direction, the two converging groups separated by a single image of Elsa holding a gun; Bannister now takes out his own pistol, and as he points it his "real" hand enters the foreground from offscreen [sic] right. All this time the actors are delivering crucial speeches—in fact, so much happens so rapidly that only a studied analysis can lead to a full understanding of the sequence.[32]

The scene deliberately resists comprehension. The understanding of the failure of understanding acts as an important lesson for both the protagonist of the narrative and the viewer of the film. The shattering of the camera's frame at the end of the sequence reveals the artifice of cinematic discourse, impelling viewers to reflect on the fragility and instability of cinematic narratives.

This scene contains one of the very few lines of dialogue taken directly from King's novel, although the context has been changed, imparting to its meaning a further depth of significance. Bannister, before shooting at Elsa, says, "Of course killing you is like killing myself, but frankly, I've become tired of both of us." When these characters kill each other, their demise signifies a death of what they represent. Cowie argues that the mirror shoot-out "embodies the destruction of a myth, the myth of the good-hearted heroine in American films." He opines that "Welles destroys the glamour surrounding her with a remarkable ease and subtlety."[33] I would argue that, beyond a simple assassination of the myth of the glamorous heroine, the scene attempts to destroy the myth represented by the glamour of film narrative itself. At the end of gunshots and shattered mirrors, the glass framing the shot has been shattered and the camera pans with the shards of glass moving within the frame, as if the very frame of the film image has been breached or fractured. The film itself underwent a further fracturing at the hands of its producer, creating a contest in the narrative between Cohn's and Welles's authorship, which serves to further obfuscate and confuse.

The final sequence of *Touch of Evil* depicts more frames within frames within frames. The oil derricks that Vargas must traverse like a contorted labyrinth serve as frames for American society, both structuring the capitalist system and enclosing it in a cycle of exploitation. The disjointed jump-cuts of this sequence depict a perceptual maze for the viewer. Vargas has now become Quinlan's stalker; he wants the "truth on tape." According to Welles, "I tried to make it seem that the listening apparatus is guiding [Vargas], that he's the victim of that apparatus."[34] Technology victimizes and frames the film's subjects and, as noted by Rollins, "stolen and used to condemn him, [Quinlan's] once powerful and controlling authorial voice is now contained by layers of plastic and a thin strip of magnetic tape."[35] The apparatus takes his authority away. The "all-knowing author" is destroyed by a ploy that tricks him into framing himself. Quinlan argues that he was doing his "dirty job." He opines, "All lawyers care about is the law, when a murderer's loose my job is to catch him." He concludes that the blame lies with the "starry-eyed idealists making all the real trouble in the world." The final scene is played on a bridge over a canal, an interstitial space that frames and supports the action. Killed by his own partner in a Shakespearean tragic ending, Quinlan falls into the canal, surrounded by society's garbage, the idea of justice complicated and left unresolved.

The Lady from Shanghai serves as a model of the narrative trap from which Michael and the audience can never escape nor fully understand, a "mystery without a solution and a labyrinth without an exit."[36] The narration acts as a reminder that Michael's attempt to make sense of his own actions leads to aporia. Heylin thinks that this film "raises more questions than it answers."[37] I argue that these questions are left unanswered to impel the audience to think about them. The last stanza of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" reads, "He went like one that hath been stunned,/And is of sense forlorn:/A sadder and a wiser man,/He rose the morrow morn."[38] This passage adequately describes the state of mind of a viewer watching this film. Cinematic narrative is shown to be a fractured, distorted reflection of an illusory world with no stable frame of reference. Welles's mastery of narrative devices keeps the film together despite the interference of destructive editing, surprising and shocking the viewer into contemplating the nature of cinematic narrative and urging the audience to consider the implications of Elsa's last lines, when she tells Michael that "the world is bad" and you "have to come to terms with it." In the face of a world implicated in fantasy and illusion the viewers must decide whether to stand up or give up; they must come to terms with it, something that Quinlan never does.

Described as a "great detective," he is also "a lousy cop." He can read signs of violence and tell a good story about it, but lacks an appropriate moral compass because he supplies some of the signs himself. In his single-minded blindness, his oblivious enmity, he cannot let a guilty murderer escape, so he manipulates the criminal's fate by defrauding the criminal justice system. The film poses the question of whether the criminals' guilt justifies Quinlan's fabrication of evidence to convict them. The line between guilt and innocence seems tenuous and frail. In the famous memo that he wrote to the studio after they butchered his film, Welles explained:

> As I planned it, after Quinlan was shot and Schwartz had turned on the recording device, there were to be two or three very significant lines coming through the little speaker: the accusing echo of the dead Menzies, and finally Quinlan's hoarsely repeated cry, "Guilty, guilty, guilty…" The tinny little voice of condemnation was meant to be a general comment on the story itself.[39]

The meaning we are to take away from this guilt becomes further complicated by Tanya's question, "What does it matter what you say about people?" In other words, no frame can adequately contextualize or define contingent truth such as guilt or innocence. Much like Charles Foster Kane, Quinlan remains a mystery that Tanya aptly yet indistinctly describes as "some kind of a man."

Frames and framing were a significant part of American culture in the 1950s. Since this film was released soon after the recent travails of the House Un-American Activities Committee, it suggests that society shares in the guilt of such injustice, not to mention the guilt of a racism that was beginning to move to the foreground of American culture in a "bright guilty world." Storytelling, this most human of activities, can, and often does, lead to inhumane actions by those who believe the story. These films advocate critical skepticism not only of cinematic narratives, but the dominant narratives of American mythology.

Notes

[1] *Citizen Kane.* Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Joseph Cotton, Dorothy Comingore, Agnes Moorehead, Ruth Warrick, Ray Collins, Erskine Sanford, Everett Sloane, William Alland, Orson Welles. RKO, 1940. Film.
The Lady from Shanghai. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Orson Welles, Rita Hayworth, Everett Sloane, Glenn Anders, Ted de Corsia. Columbia, 1948. Film.
Touch of Evil. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Charlton Heston, Janet Leigh, Orson Welles, Joseph Cajjeia, Akim Tamiroff, Marlene Dietrich, Zsa Gabor. Universal, 1958. Film.
[2] Clinton Heylin, *Despite the System: Orson Welles Versus the Hollywood Studios.* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2005), 202-203 and Sherwood King, *If I Die Before I Wake.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938.
[3] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria.* Black, Joseph, Leonard Conolly, Kate Flint, Isobel Grundy, Don LePan, Roy Liuzza, Jerome J. McGann, Anne Lake Prescott, Barry V. Qualls, Claire Waters Eds. *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature* Vol. 4 The Age of Romanticism. (Toronto: Broadview, 2006), 314.
[4] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre.* Ed. Robert Denoon Cumming. (New York: Vintage, 1965), 58.
[5] Joseph McBride, *What Ever Happened to Orson Welles? A Portrait of an Independent Career.* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2006), 23.
[6] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Two Other Stories.* London: The Folio Society, 1997.
[7] *F for Fake.* Dir. Welles, Orson. Perf. Orson Welles, Oja Kodar, Elmyr de Hory, Clifford Irving. Films de l'Astrophore/Saci/Janus Film, 1973. Film.
[8] Heylin, *Despite the System,* 205.
[9] Because of the dark subject matter, Welles had difficulty writing a version of the script that passed the censors, who were very sensitive to a female antagonist who has no redemption at the end of the film (instead dying alone in a dark room). Even a noir film like *The Big Sleep,* made around the same time and released two years before *The Lady from Shanghai,* has one of the bad girls from Raymond Chandler's narrative renounce her ways and fall for the detective, contrary to the novel's ending.
[10] Making this film at all was a journey into fantasy. Welles biographer Simon Callow notes, "To assume that the machine of Columbia studios would put itself behind [Welles] and attempt to realize his highly idiosyncratic vision was to surrender to fantasy. It is fascinating to find, then, that the central character of *The Lady from*

Shanghai is just such a figure, a dreamer, a romantic, who explicitly associates himself . . . with the figure of Don Quixote."
Simon Callow, *Orson Welles Vol. 2: Hello Americans.* (NY: Viking, 2006), 365.

[11] "Frame." *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles Fifth Edition.* 2002.

[12] Peter Cowie, *A Ribbon of Dreams: The Cinema of Orson Welles.* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1973), 107.

[13] Morris Beja, Ed., *Perspectives on Orson Welles.* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co.-Simon & Shuster Macmillan, 1995), 51.

[14] Brooke Rollins, "'Some Kind of a Man': Orson Welles as *Touch of Evil*'s Masculine Auteur." *The Velvet Light Trap.* No. 57, Spring 2006. 32-41. 39.

[15] Terry Comito, *Touch of Evil: Orson Welles, director.* Ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1985), 11.

[16] Karen Marguerite Radell, "Orson Welles: The Semiotics of Focalization in *The Lady from Shanghai.*" Beja 245-252. 245.

[17] Speaking of the use of cosmetics in the nineteenth century, Baudelaire argued:

> Woman is quite within her rights, indeed she is even accomplishing a kind of duty, when she devotes herself to appearing magical and supernatural; she has to astonish and charm us; as an idol, she is obliged to adorn herself in order to be adored. Thus she has to lay all the arts under contribution for the means of lifting herself above Nature, the better to conquer hearts and rivet attention. It matters little that the artifice and trickery are known to all, so long as their success is assured and their effect always irresistible. By reflecting in this way the philosopher-artist will find it easy to justify all the practices adopted by women at all times to consolidate and as it were to make divine their fragile beauty.

If the use of cosmetics transforms a woman into an abstract "divine" beauty, how much more so does the use of lighting and cinematic close-ups? This film depicts just how fragile this beauty is.
Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* Second Edition. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2010), 680-690.

[18] Richard T. Jameson, "An Infinity of Mirrors." *Focus on Orson Welles.* Gottesman, Ronald, Ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1976), 76.

[19] "Gloss." *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles Fifth Edition.* 2002.

[20] J. P. Telotte, "Narration, Desire, and a Lady from Shanghai." *South Atlantic Review,* Vol. 49, No. 1 (Jan. 1984). 65

[21] Tellotte, "Narration," 69.

[22] Heylin argues:

> The hallucinatory quality that Welles required to make something "come alive" would run through all incarnations of *The Lady from Shanghai. . ..* Hence, as Michael enters the Savoy Ballroom kitchen, in the *Black Irish* [an earlier script of the film] offers as an aside, "His nightmare never seems to end." And when he awakes from his

ordeal, though he is no longer drugged, he still finds himself "in one of the queerest rooms ever built by man. . .. The floor is raked at an angle of the sheerest vertigo, the walls and ceiling are pure *Cabinet of Caligari* . . . He rises from the little pallet that's been fixed for him, blinks his eyes, shakes his head and wonders—as we do—where the hell he is. For . . . Hell itself couldn't be a stranger place to look at. He staggers over to a cock-eyed door, and stumbles out," only to find himself in the hall of mirrors. (Heylin, *Despite the System,* 207.)

[23] Brady, Frank. *Citizen Welles.* New York: Scribner's Sons, 1989. 401.

[24] Callow, *Orson Welles*, 371.

[25] Orson Welles, *This is Orson Welles.* With Peter Bogdanovich. Ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum. (New York: De Capo Press, 1998), 258.

[26] Welles, *This is Orson Welles,* 259.

[27] Beja, *Perspectives,* 48.

[28] Welles planned many more shots of mirrors and reflective surfaces leading up to the fun-house scene, but they were either not shot or lost to the cutting room floor. Using the shooting script for his source on Welles's intended film, since there is no extant Welles "authorized" cut, Heylin relates:

> Welles intended the viewer to share the hero's increasing disorientation leading up to the hall of mirrors. Mirrors and mirrored surfaces constantly refract reality when the drugged hero is on the run, seeing everything through distorted vision. When he slips into the Savoy Ballroom to escape the police, we see the bottles on the bar reflected by a vast mirror. A close shot catches Michael viewing "the faces of the people around him reflected many times. The magic Mirror seems to push the walls back and reflects the light from the ceiling. The illusion in the magic mirror fascinates him as he gazes into it. (Heylin, *Despite the System,* 207.)

Clearly, Welles intended to use far more mirror and glass imagery in the film than we now see. Notice in this description the notion of the mirror distorting reality. *The Lady from Shanghai* ends with a depiction of reflection as distortion, a vision in a glass darkly.

[29] Heylin, *Despite the System*, 220.

[30] Heylin, *Despite the System*, 220-221.

[31] M.M. Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity." *Art and Answerability.* Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, Eds., Trans. Vadim Liapunov. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 33.

[32] Naremore, James. "Style and Theme in *The Lady from Shanghai.*" *Focus on Orson Welles.* Gottesman, Ronald, Ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1976), 130.

[33] Cowie, *Orson Welles*, 104.

[34] Comito, *Touch of Evil,* 212.

[35] Rollins, "Some Kind of Man," 40.

[36] Graham, Mark. "The Inaccessibility of *The Lady from Shanghai.*" Beja. 161.

[37] Heylin, *Despite the System,* 233.

[38] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Black 303-314. Lines 622-625.

[39] Heylin, *Despite the System,* 288.

Black Widow, Gender Criticism, and the Narrative Agency of the Femme Fatale

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Film scholars tend to treat the history of film noir by dividing it into distinct periods. The first of these periods takes shape during World War II when the hardboiled novels of the Great Depression find their way onto the screen. In surprisingly short order, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and its paradigmatic detective, Sam Spade, inaugurate a cycle of films that, once darkened by innovations borrowed from German Expressionism, encompasses the crime thriller, domestic melodrama, and even the stray Western. As Frank Krutnik observes, the "'tough' thriller"—his overarching designation for such hardboiled narrative—"center[s] upon the exploits of a male hero who is engaged either in the investigation or commission of a crime."[1] Such a character traverses the indifferent city streets and is caught in a web of corruption whose outlines he struggles to ascertain. On his travels he often encounters a woman whose attractiveness masks a predatory ambition. Exciting his desire, the femme fatale will compel him to cheat and murder someone to whom she is attached. At issue, for an array of critics devoted to the film adaptations of works by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain, is less romance as such or the conflict between protagonist and antagonist, hero and fatal woman, than the prowess of the private detective. That hardboiled figure will command "a narrative formula" which is the "contemporaneous embodiment of the drama of heroic quest that has appeared in so many different cultures in so many different guises."[2] Despite his tawdry circumstances, then, the mid-century hero achieves mythic status by reducing those he contests to being a part of his larger narrative.

In the two decades following *Touch of Evil* (1958), film noir was often characterized as being exhausted.[3] With American households focused on television programming, film-viewing as a whole languished. Not until *Chinatown* (1974), a luminous treatment of noir themes, and the arrival in the eighties of such films as *Body Heat* (1981) and *Black Widow* (1987) did neo-noir experimentation gather new energy. Unsurprisingly, the postclassical period in the noir tradition recalled the private detective, and his textual variants, to action; but his return coincides with a difference: film would henceforth grant greater weight to women characters. Freed from the Production Code, which deemed that criminal activity be punished, the femme fatale could now contribute to narrative in ways both violent and self-affirming. With *Black Widow*, Bob Rafelson offers an Other-specific homage to the classical period of film noir. It focuses on two women—a serial killer and an investigator—and the ways they advance their interests while negotiating gender identity. In keeping with the noir tradition, *Black Widow* foregrounds the plotting of the femme fatale. Having established her pre-diegetic command of time and movement, it turns to an FBI agent who, working independently, investigates the femme fatale by plotting in ways that are no less determinative. Taken together, the two characters mark their distance from the hardboiled tradition while underscoring the possibilities of new stories and different kinds of critical agency for women.

The *Black Widow* credit sequence starts with the sound of a jet engine that builds in volume. The screen shifts from black to a choker close-up of a young woman's face. As she uses an eyeliner pencil to define the lower lashes of her left eye, viewers see three contrasting spaces within the frame. The left edge of the screen is dark and objectless. The center image shows the bridge of a nose, a tuft of brow, and an eye pitched at an oblique angle. The right side of the frame shows her left hand. As she turns slightly, the tripartite image resolves into a split screen. Misaligned and marked by contrasting color values, the halves of her face look above, not at, viewers. Satisfied by the self-appraisal, she dons sunglasses, covering her handiwork. Rafelson returns to the credit sequence proper by naming his stars, Debra Winger and Theresa Russell, and the film's title, which he sets in black and red letters against a dark background. The initial sequence of images shows a woman "putting on her face"—an everyday event, a prosaic performance. Her features are cold rather than warm, exotic more so than common. The tripartite and split screens, the oblique angles, the incompletely-sutured image, and the two-sided imago excite our interest, however brief the sequence may be. In all, the image displays a mysterious, split self, which suggests that the person in question will pose problems of interpretation for others. The film's title extends this suggestion by alluding to the femme fatale, a commanding presence in the noir tradition.

But which of the two stars will be the fatal woman? Who, in the language of the film's advertising slogan, will "mate" and "kill?"

Echoing the work of Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane observes that the femme fatale "harbors a threat" which the cinematic apparatus represents as "a secret, something which must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered."[4] Secrets are past events which, if made public, would have an outsized effect on a person's present circumstances and identity. To cloak her identity and activities, the femme fatale characteristically limits what others may know about her. Towards this end, the central figure in *Black Widow* is self-contained. Rafelson foregrounds her visibility during the credits not because he wants to reveal her character, in service to exposition, but because he too would control what is known about a woman with an enigmatic, even fluid identity. Complicit with the femme fatale's project of self-protection, his diegesis shows her to be calculated and wary. To those qualities he adds mobility and wealth once she exits the plane, attended by a male aide; crosses an icy tarmac; enters a helicopter with a second male attendant in tow; and is dropped off at a private landing strip, where she steps into a limousine. By the time a uniformed doorman helps her from the vehicle, a pattern of gender inversion is set: Mrs. Catherine Petersen (Theresa Russell) is important on her own, not merely her husband's, terms. She is self-directed rather than other-directed, mobile not inert. Those with whom she interacts serve her rather than the reverse.

To speak as if *Black Widow* is the work of its director or to say that he controls its diegesis is reassuring, as conventions of scholarly address often are, but somewhat dated. Films noir are routinely set in motion by a villain—in this case, by a femme fatale. Their plots grow complicated, twist, cross, and double-cross because of what she does in service to her ambitions. Miss Wonderly/Miss LeBlanc/Brigid O'Shaughnessy is the force to contend with in *The Maltese Falcon*. Characteristically unwilling to play a part in someone else's plot, she steals the talismanic black bird, arranges for it to be shipped to San Francisco, hires detectives, kills Miles Archer, sets her fellow thieves against each other, lies to the police, and sleeps with Spade. Despite being a fixture of the domestic sphere, Phyllis Dietrichson seduces Walter Neff, convinces him to kill her husband, disposes of the body, shoots her lover-partner, and remains free until the penultimate scene of *Double Indemnity* (1944). Helen Grayl compels Moose Malloy to take the fall for a crime she committed, changes identity, marries a much-older man, betrays him sexually with men and women, invents a crime that does not occur, kills one man and wounds another with a sap, pockets $8,000 of her husband's payoff money, outwits blackmailers, and keeps a determined investigator at bay until the climax of *Murder, My Sweet* (1945). Detectives of all stripes react to the machinations of the femme fatale, and she plots and reacts to them in turn. Her agency,

frequently passed over in favor of a hero's investigations, brings a measure of continuity to hardboiled crime drama itself.

Viewers usually enter the femme fatale's narrative universe nearer to a plot's midpoint than its beginning. Catherine, we learn, has been traveling. While she was away, her husband died in his sleep. Called to his deathbed, doctors study the body and assure his sister Sara (Lois Smith) that Sam Petersen's demise from Ondine's Curse was painless. "You couldn't have done anything," Sara says to Catherine, by way of explanation. Her statement suggests that death was inevitable and that Catherine, in her role as wife, would have wanted to do something but had been helpless, because feminine, to prevent the loss of her husband. Impassive behind dark sunglasses, Catherine listens without commenting. Of course, Sara is incorrect. The unstated irony is that Sam has died because Catherine is agentic, not helpless, and so a husband expires because of something that a wife did. The death is an effect of action joined to deception. Catherine's behavior is of interest in itself but also as a sign of how a femme fatale negotiates reality by plotting. As Peter Brooks has observed, plot "is the very organizing line, the thread of design, that makes narrative possible because finite and comprehensible."[5] Seen in these terms, the femme fatale plots so that she might assert her will in the world.

Marking the endgame of a careful plan, Sam's death occurs in good measure because of what femmes fatales have done historically. Hewing to their example of personal and erotic freedom, Catherine sets out to meet an older man so that she might marry him and inherit his wealth. Like her predecessors in classical Hollywood cinema, then, she knows that being a rich wife is not the same as being rich. To sever her gender dependency—to become Other to what a woman may be under patriarchy—she occupies the domestic sphere to learn her husband's rituals, deliberately exploiting his drinking with poison. For his part, Sam is a character as well as a member of an esteemed group. Viewers might read a husband as a synecdoche of a social order that compels a femme fatale's "containment in marriage and domesticity."[6] Death thus occurs within the home and in unstated but real opposition to domestic ideology. Compounding the affront, the murder is misdiagnosed by authorities who identify its absent cause: the failing of a part of the brain which makes breathing continuous. Cleaning up after her crime requires Catherine to empty a decanter and rinse it. As domestic gestures go, it is at heart heartless.

Despite being a widow in mourning, Catherine sees that the estate is settled efficiently. A blonde given to three-quarter-length fur coats, she moves to Dallas, where she marries Ben Dumers (Dennis Hopper), a toy manufacturer. Catherine's reemergence as "Marielle" is dramatic; her husband is its primary, and rapt, audience. He approves of her bright red hair, Southern accent, and hip-swinging, Neiman-Marcus-clad way of entering a room.

Attending to business may have made him rich, but being attended to erotically by Marielle makes him happy. As a black widow, Catherine/Marielle is quick to ascertain what men desire and is sufficiently versed in femininity to provide it on demand. Expecting her to have a "character," as Ben does, misconstrues the extent to which a femme fatale views identity as a performance-effect. Of two minds about gender, she knows that persons practice femininity until their actions become unpracticed, since that is what she does throughout the noir tradition. As Judith Butler observes,

> The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.[7]

The femme fatale also knows that the body may be stylized in ways that are not mundane. It follows that gestures may be feminine and compliant—in a word, normative—but also expressive and excessive. An excessive performance, Catherine's mourning for Sam is self-possessed to the point of indifference. Marielle's provocative gestures and lilting accent, by extension, signify she is "Southern" in a way that a Southerner would deem stagey. Femininity can thus be taken up, taken down, put on, put off, masqueraded, or made fabulous. Caught up in the spectacular effects that the femme fatale's actions generate, Sam and Ben relax their guard and revel in a domain where a young woman performs as their sexed companion. They see her as a person but also as an abstract sign of their enduring vitality, and therefore they become vulnerable to a threat they do not associate with femininity. We might say that Catherine and Marielle's selves are (un)abidingly gendered and all the more instrumental as a result.

With Ben dead from poison, Marielle changes cities. Rather than settle in Charleston, as she promised her grieving in-laws, she heads west. We meet her next incarnation at a capacious bookstore. Quietly if expensively dressed in a silk scarf and grey blazer, Marielle has taken the name of a woman who studied anthropology at Mount Holyoke. As "Margaret," she surveils her domain from a poorly lit corner of the building. Characteristically self-possessed, she is in her element: the storied world of knowledge and plots. Margaret has selected William McCrory (Nicol Williamson), a museum curator and one of the wealthiest men in Washington, to be her next husband. She is studying his interests—Japanese cooking, rare Italian coins, and northwest coast indigenous art, among them. Her goal is to meet him on his terms. "My primary interest is in totem poles," she tells an employee who delivers books to her. "What are you," he asks, smiling, "cramming for a game show?" True to type, Margaret

does not tell him what she is (a femme fatale) or what she might be doing with such focused research (forming an incipient identity). She does not protest or point out the employee's error. Her lucid silence indicates that he has misread her due to the gendered assumptions that mediate his views of women.

For the first time, *Black Widow* shows Catherine/Marielle/Margaret at work. Her approach is dispassionate and methodical. Dispassionately, Margaret chooses a mark and studies his personal and professional background. She next gathers the information she will need to speak knowledgably with him. As she commits scholarship across an array of fields to memory, she resembles a graduate student, not a murderer on the make. Her desire to meet, wed, and kill is sublimated into the task of preparing to be someone she is not. A femme fatale may be ambitious and ruthless, as scholars assert, but Catherine/Marielle/Margaret is humble and disciplined too.[8] Diction, dress, makeup, posture, training—all must be determined in advance of meeting the man she will compel to love her. Planning is thus what she does first; identity-formation, second; mating and killing, last. Rafelson gives us no sense, as he cuts to continuity across several scenes, that Margaret plots with anything less than careful deliberation.

Here as elsewhere the femme fatale exhibits a command of story, beginning with her own. Born in trauma and held in secret, her storyline is grounded in an assessment of her circumstances. What a femme fatale from the classical period of Hollywood cinema has—a job, a middle-class life, a husband, a home, some wealth—is insufficient; what she wishes to have is more,[9] perhaps by an order of magnitude. She is doubly ambitious because she would profit at another's expense and outstrip what a woman might reasonably expect to possess under patriarchy. Her character's story can thus be construed as a closely held long game, complete with opening moves, intermediate steps, a violent climax, and a discrete resolution.

Inevitably, the femme fatale inserts herself into someone else's story as well. Her role in it is shaped by how a fellow character understands and responds to her self-presentation. To be blunt, she is not to be read as an ordinary woman who is subservient to a more powerful man. Rather than be herself (whatever that might be), Margaret performs a youthful femininity. In the process, she evinces a subjective fluidity that enables her to act in the most feminine of ways while harboring what society would deem the most masculine, because violent, of ambitions. Attempting to understand her shifting, tactical identity leads to uncertainty and outright errors of interpretation because the femme fatale intends to be seen differently by the men who, self-satisfied with their authority, desire her. A protean figure, she presents herself to their gaze at times to signal a compliant, interested femininity. At other times she does so to arouse and compromise how a man thinks.[10] A command of spectacle, in her hands, is thus put in the paradoxical

service of narrative misdirection rather than erotic contemplation.[11] Under these circumstances, the story a husband tells himself about his wife or that man tells himself about his lover or even that a detective recounts about his client is a gender fantasy. The femme fatale's power thus resides in the considerable disparity between what she keeps secret, while plotting, and what a lover unwittingly makes public about his feelings for her.

Black Widow becomes a double plot when Alexander (Alex) Barnes (Debra Winger), a data analyst for the Department of Justice, learns that a second man has died of Ondine's Curse. The two men lived in different parts of the country and held different jobs; they had in common wealth and much-younger wives. Alex hears of Ben's unlikely demise when her assistant, Michael (D. W. Moffett), interrupts her late-evening work and proposes a dinner date. The establishing shot for their scene is of a single floor in a federal office building. The windows are filmed in a green paint whose sagging texture blocks light. The many desks are so jumbled that privacy, much less concentration, is precarious. Alone and intent on work, Alex passes on dinner because Michael is her co-worker, and co-workers do not date. For six years she has put her job first, crunching numbers, seeking patterns in a welter of data. In her spare moments she has read obituaries and dreamed of unearthing a mob hit to investigate first-hand. Despite her ambition, she is bound to a desk and a pink-collar occupation.

With unruly hair, husky voice, and loose clothing that masks the contours of her body, Alex appears indifferently feminine. Her apartment, to cite a stereotypical example, is untended; her cooking, unskillful. Rafelson positions her as someone who can banter with male friends during weekly poker nights and keep their amorous intentions at arms' length. Michael's casual revelation about a new death from Ondine's Curse brings Alex up short, and she foregoes dinner to return to her terminal. "Let's round up some photos," she says. "Shouldn't be hard," Michael replies, disappointed. "They were prominent guys." "Not the men," Alex gruffly states. "The wives." While "women" is the antonym to "men," Alex has not made a mistake; her lexical shift construes the subject in terms of gender role subordination. Thus she implies that a woman's identity is contingent upon the roles she fulfills, whether as daughter, sister, friend, girlfriend, lover, wife, mother, worker, or other woman. In the tradition of the noir hero, Alex senses what the law does not: a femme fatale is on the loose. She comes to this conclusion because she is attuned to gender in a way that her assistant, a gentle man, or a hardboiled detective, is not.

Unfortunately for Catherine/Marielle/Margaret, rich men lead public lives, and so publicity can encircle their wives. Catherine and Marielle have been photographed with Sam and Ben, respectively, and the men have been featured in magazines and memorialized in obituaries. Alex takes the photographs

Michael has gathered home to view privately, reminding us that her work and personal lives are conjoined. Her goal is to see if two men were married to one woman. She sets up a slide carousel in her living room and sits before a wall where its images are projected. The first picture shows Sam and Catherine; the second, Ben, with Marielle, as he receives an award from another man. The husbands face the camera proudly. The wives stand with them but present their faces at a one-quarter turn. In response to the disparity, Alex moves closer to the wall, casting a shadow across the images. The projector pauses and superimposes the two photos, as if a dissolve had been arrested at its midpoint. The women are the same height but otherwise differ. Sam's wife wears an off-the-shoulder dinner dress and looks adoringly into her patrician husband's eyes; she exudes the confidence that attends the well-born. Sporting a dress with a plunging neckline, Ben's wife gazes directly off-screen. Her curly hair lofts over her forehead and hangs disheveled elsewhere, a look that Ben earlier called "skag," without defining what he meant. Alex stands before the women, touching their necks and the side of Marielle's face in a wedding photo. The first image of Marielle then recurs. In it, her right hand spans her upper thigh. Turning her back to the wall, Alex covers the hand and the dress' labia-like folds with her fingers. As our indifferently feminine protagonist surrenders to erotic contemplation, her image too is subsumed by the cinematic apparatus. Where once two women looked out from the screen at a photographer who arranged them in space, now there are three who do.

Breaking the moment, Rafelson quick-cuts to the bathroom where Alex stands before the mirror taking an inventory of her desirability. Represented in a deft, over-the-shoulder shot, the image shows Alex in the tain of the mirror and her reflection, now inverted, on film. The double reference recalls the credit sequence and its singular woman with a two-sided face. Intent on her own image, Alex brings the hand that touched Marielle to her face. Quietly, she looks in the mirror to determine how she would appear if her hair were off of her forehead, pulled into a ponytail, or shortened. She tries out different looks before the mirror so that she might grasp the variability of address that a woman might initiate. Her doubled image and quiet performance suggest that Alex is self-alienated, a condition that might be traced to the tension between her intelligence and the requirements of femininity. Unlike Catherine/Marielle, however, she is desk-bound, alone, and no black widow.

The story leaps forward when Alex's boss, Bruce (Terry O'Quinn), responds to her photographic evidence skeptically. "These the best pictures you have?" he asks. "She doesn't want pictures," Alex replies. "She knows the camera is there. She turns away. I can tell." Bruce asserts that Marielle is thinner and five or more years younger than Catherine. Alex disagrees, saying that difference is established through "makeup, hair, attitude." "Look," he interrupts, "the whole m. o.—a complex series of seductions and murders.

That's not something you see a woman do." Her color rising, Alex asks, "Which part do you think a woman isn't up to? The seduction or the murder?" Here "part" means action as well as distinct behavior in a larger "series." The femme fatale performs successfully because she knows femininity's standard and nonstandard roles. What critics have seen as her deviance, read against the grain, is often an accomplished borrowing of traits associated with masculinity. As Hilary Neroni observes, "Outbreaks of violent women in film—such as the femme fatale—occur at moments in history when a clear difference between the genders ceases to be operative."[12] For the black widow, then, dichotomous gender is a field of restraint and possibility with a permeable boundary between its halves. Here, Alex is angry because Bruce disagrees with her premise but also because his views restrict women's agency to simple plots rather than "complex" ones, a single seduction, and certainly not multiple "murders." Bruce does get one-half of the formula right: such behaviors are "not something you see" a femme fatale doing. Her plotting is done in the shadows, within the home, in a domain where the doctrine of separate spheres historically granted women a measure of power over children, a husband, and servants.[13] Alex understands femininity as occurring within a public domain long traversed and dominated by men. Sexual identities are thus situated, for villain and heroine alike, and a matter less of being than of acting.

By this point, Margaret has joined William on the board of a Seattle museum, having made an unsolicited million-dollar contribution to it, and insinuated herself into his work-life. He is wary of her sudden appearance, thinking she is "too good to be true." Once a background search confirms Margaret's resume, his suspicion wanes. The scenes which follow reveal how a femme fatale works on others by performing in ways that elicit their self-recognition and desire. Grounded in research, her behavior is tentative, soft-spoken, but engaged; she correctly sees those traits as ones he possesses. Indeed, she plays her victim by playing back what she records of his personality. His affection for her is thus a form of self-affection. In the process, Margaret listens strategically to William. He reveals himself to her and, in no hurry to reply, she picks her phrases with care. Sensing when he is reticent, Margaret is slightly less reticent in response. She turns his speech to subjects new to her, learning why, for instance, he never married, and what quirks of personality compromised his relationships. Middle-aged and unattached, he will not be won over easily since, if he had been emotionally available when younger, someone would likely have married him. Exploiting the similarity in the temperaments as well as the disparity in their ages, Margaret thus performs a kind of retrograde femininity that men of William's age would appreciate. She is rewarded for her demure efforts by the sheen in his eyes and his appreciative posture when gazing at her. Made secure by his insecurity, she broaches the topic of making love in a joke. It signals that sex is

on her mind as well. William is relieved to hear that but alarmed by the strength of his affection for her. As they make love for the first time, a medical alert insignia he wears on a chain around his neck strikes Margaret's tooth. Her pleasure in learning that he is allergic to penicillin is stronger than her response to being naked with a new fiancé.

A decisive turn in the narrative occurs when Alex demands a field assignment to investigate Catherine/Marielle. Bruce agrees, provided she does so on her own time. In short order, she contacts the attorney who handled Sam's estate and learns that he "received instructions to convert the entire estate into cash" after the funeral. Apparently Catherine left New York for Europe to create a Swiss bank account. Alex meets as well with Sara, who defends Catherine's travels using the language of a dependent femininity: "She was destroyed by his death. They were very devoted." Despite an awkward moment during the interview, Alex is at ease navigating the public sphere and gathering information. When she visits Ben's sister, she learns that Etta (Diane Ladd) hired a detective to investigate Marielle. His only discovery was that she and her people were not from Charleston. The stories Catherine/Marielle have told are little more than stories. No one knows her background or where she is now. The femme fatale's appearances and disappearances occur on a rhythm she establishes. Calling her a mastermind would be apt if the term were not so insistently gendered.

The challenge for Alex is temporal: she must find the femme fatale after she marries a rich older man but before he dies. Six such marriages have occurred, been publicized, and are known to her. Over her boss' objections, she leaves for Seattle with a name, Margaret McCrory, and a face to evaluate. Upon arrival, she stalks her on a Seattle ferry. As the person who surveils others is surveilled, a reversal occurs. Having crossed a permeable boundary of her own, Alex enters the strategic domain of the femme fatale. She affirms this crossing by going to where William and Margaret work and, borrowing further from the femme fatale's repertoire, presents herself as a married newspaper reporter who is researching the lives of powerful Seattle women. The identity collapses when William, interested in the story idea, questions her. Caught lying, Alex explains she is actually a stringer who thought the story might be sold to "*Cosmo* or *Women's Wear Daily*." Her second lie too shows an awareness of genre and gender bias. Impressed by "Mrs. Tally," William promises to ask his wife if she will be interviewed.

Alex's investigative inexperience is underscored, however, when she visits the police and puts forth her case. The pictures of Catherine and Marielle invite ridicule, and Alex leaves the station rebuffed. When Margaret learns that William spoke to a reporter, she grows suspicious and drives to the reporter's lodgings. Alex, to her credit, has left one hotel and waits outside of a second. Her subtle ruse brings the femme fatale out of the home and into the open.

Unable to find the reporter who so haplessly sought her, Margaret grows furious. Sensing that she may have been exposed, she improvises, shortening the timetable for killing William. The rapidity with which she moves up her plan is impressive. Margaret, remobilized, dispatches William and flees. Alex will not catch such a deft antagonist by investigating part-time. Turning her back on both her domestic life and career, she quits her government job and flies to Hawaii in pursuit.

Its central characters poised for face-to-face conflict, *Black Widow* turns to its final act. The risk exists that audiences, used to highly masculine, hardboiled investigations, will find an unemployed and indifferently feminine woman to be an unconvincing narrative agent, a mere foil to an experienced black widow. But their desiring the return of a detective-hero is unlikely to occur for three reasons. First, Hollywood has long granted the femme fatale a masculine command of plot, and thus she may serve as an unlikely model for a new kind of detective-hero(ine). Second, classical film noir built plots around women who became amateur detectives when their employers or husbands were imperiled or unable to investigate. Finally, as the Russian Formalists have demonstrated, plot functions can be performed by different character-types without harming narrative integrity. Film noir should thus be amenable to change from within. The extended conclusion of *Black Widow* delivers on the neo-noir promise that a crime thriller can result from a web of plots crafted by a femme fatale and a femme detective alike.

In Hawaii, Alex assumes a second identity as "Jessica Bates." On vacation from Chicago, Jessica is kin to Catherine/Marielle/Margaret because she performs as part of a larger plot to deceive. When she wishes to be anonymous, she goes into the public sphere as Jessica. When she wishes to exert authority, she self-identifies—dishonestly—as a federal agent. The face or imago she holds up to the public depends on what she needs to do and with whom she interacts. Learning from the femme fatale's behavioral repertoire is one part of Jessica's strategy. The second part involves not going it alone. Recalling the tradition of film noir, she hires a private detective to find what she tells him is a missing person. H. Shin (James Hong) takes a mere six weeks to turn up Catherine/Marielle/Margaret who has become "Renee Walker." The quiet intellect and demure femininity that Margaret deployed to seduce William are gone. In their place stands a wealthy, suntanned party girl who hikes, drives a jeep, and scuba dives. Renee has a new victim, Paul Nuytten, an owner of hotels and established man about town, and has refashioned herself as an athlete to appeal to him.

In Seattle, Margaret could assume that she and her crimes were unknown. Renee now suspects that someone—a reporter or worse—is pursuing her in Hawaii. Months have passed since William's death, and so she has had time to lose herself in a new identity. As importantly, she has had time to prepare

herself to be found. She is biding her time until she learns if her antagonist is still in pursuit and, if so, what she might know of Catherine /Marielle/Margaret's secrets. The freedom the femme fatale prizes and the aggression she uses instrumentally are now in play. Fittingly, Renee welcomes Jessica when they meet during scuba-diving training. Inviting her up for a drink, she calls her Jessie, for short, and the two become friends. That is odd because a femme fatale is by temperament friendless; her relationships, when they exist, are with men. Renee is again charming for purposes she is loath to divulge. Charm, in this sense, has an elusive face value.

With its primary men either dead (Sam, Ben, William) or off-stage (Michael and Bruce), *Black Widow* is emptied of overt masculinity and becomes an open field for its women protagonists. Jessie and Renee play across it— diving, picnicking, and attending parties. As they do, Jessie notes Renee's beauty and takes to wearing her clothes and using her hairstylist. Doubly made-over, she becomes more feminine than viewers might have anticipated. The trope of shared clothing speaks to the performances required of femininity as well as to skin-to-skin proximity. Viewers cannot tell if Jessie, the faux investigator, is being taken in by Renee, or if Renee, the real femme fatale, is being drawn out and toward what a character like her desires. What we can know is that the performances are intertwined. As Chris Straayer observes, "The *femme fatale* of contemporary film operates as an independent agent, always signifying but no longer contained by film noir."[14] At issue, then, is what two performers are intent on doing, separately and together, and what viewers may conclude about their uncontained plots.

Throughout this interim, Renee holds Paul off, despite his stated affection for her. She cites his many lovers, saying that he only cares about her because she is unavailable to him. Viewers are in the midst of another calibrated performance, a visible extension and contraction of the self. The emotional terrain grows more complicated when Renee, noting the growing attraction of Paul and Jessie, tells her friend to pursue him. It would be too late in a classic noir to introduce a love triangle, but this one serves neo-noir purposes because, as an experiment, it reveals new facets of the femme fatale for audiences to interpret. Specifically, Renee has arranged for Paul and Jessie to be together so that she can break into Jessie's apartment, in search of her actual identity, and hire Shin to photograph the man she calls her fiancé being unfaithful. Again, the femme fatale sublimates her desire, displacing its energy into a complex of plots. Renee thus double-crosses Jessie and Paul by creating the conditions for them to sleep together, an encounter Shin captures. She crosses them again by seducing Paul shortly thereafter. When Paul asks Renee to marry him, the desires of Jessie, Renee, and Paul converge and separate.

The beauty of Renee's plotting with Shin is that it positions her fiancé to appear unfaithful and for Jessie to look as if she were now a spurned lover

intent on revenge. Beauty is perhaps the wrong word for the further double-cross that Renee will soon enact by putting poison in Paul's brandy as well as Jessie's decanter. Should Paul die suddenly, Jessie is in line to be framed for the crime. Renee, as his new wife, will thus be enriched. If Paul and Jessie die simultaneously, the black widow will have also taken out a federal agent intent on arresting her. Hence Renee is doing more than playing the angles: she is demonstrating extraordinary cognitive abilities. A narrative agent, she controls time and assesses her opponents so that she might impose her will on circumstances.

Black Widow moves toward its conclusion when Jessie gives Renee a piece of jewelry at her wedding to Paul. "A black widow," Renee says, looking at the present. "She mates, she kills. But does she love?" Mating, marrying, loving—all are performances for the femme fatale. If a defining characteristic of film noir is its "singular concern with or awareness of the nature of narration,"[15] then the most transgressive aspect of the femme fatale's agency may be her relation to narrative desire, since her actions—seemingly about money or sex—are also about developing access to time in ways that have been denied women. Refusing the active/passive and masculine/feminine divisions of narrative authority, the femme fatale works through guile and misdirection to tell and shape her stories. If the femme fatale is no political agent as such, she can nevertheless be a political example to her audiences. Historians of film noir have been too eager to downplay the contributions of femmes fatales, contented, for the most part, to concur with the Production Code and see them as pathological seductresses. By so doing, they displace the attention that the deliberations of the femme fatale deserve so as to elevate the contributions of the detective. It follows that as she is justly punished, he becomes the central figure in a quest narrative. In a double erasure, her contributions to plot create the conditions for his ascension.

But neo-noir, as its prefix implies, need not work in the way that classical noir did. As *Black Widow* begins its concluding scenes, viewers are poised for a change in narrative authority. It is time for the detective, whose understanding of the crime is belated, to catch up to what the femme fatale is doing and unmask her aggressively. At this juncture, s/he is poised to take control of the plot and, narrating in her place, ascribe guilt. But Jessie has double-crossed the femme fatale. By spending a day with Paul and sleeping with him, she established their intimacy, much as a femme fatale would, and so he listens to her extraordinary account of Catherine/Marielle/Margaret/Renee's history. Alerted to the black widow's pattern of behavior by someone posing as a federal agent, the police then search his home and Jessie's apartment and find the poison that Renee has placed there. In the climactic encounter, Alex does not reveal Renee's guilt or speak for her. Rather, she brings Sara, Catherine's sister-in-law, from New York and Paul effectively back from the dead.

Stunned by their arrival, the black widow distractedly announces her guilt to those she has betrayed—and to viewers. The film concludes without giving the FBI special agent the last word. It ends, as it begins, with a palpable respect for the storied contributions of black widow and investigator alike.

Notes

[1] Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Place: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (New York: Rutledge, 1991), 24.

[2] John Cawelti, "*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 559.

[3] Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," in *Film Genre Reader IV*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 275.

[4] Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1.

[5] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 4.

[6] Jons B. Wager, *Dames in the Driver's Seat: Rereading Film Noir* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 20.

[7] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 179.

[8] Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 63, notes that "the femme fatale embodies a radical *ethical* attitude, that of not 'ceding one's desire,' of persisting in it to the very end when its true nature as the death drive is revealed." If the femme fatale has an ethics, it is informed by the death drive, put in the service of deception and murder, and directed at masculine authority figures.

[9] Janey Place, "Women in Film Noir," in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 56.

[10] For a contemporary account of how sexual arousal compromises masculine cognition, see Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (New York: Harper, 2008), 127.

[11] Larry T. Shillock, "Neither Noir," Philological Papers, 47 (2000): 50.

[12] Hilary Neroni, *Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 20.

[13] Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3.

[14] Chris Straayer, "*Femme Fatale* or Lesbian Femme: *Bound* in Sexual Differance," in *Gender Meets Genre in Postwar Cinemas*, ed. by Christine Gledhill (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 220.

[15] J. P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 12.

Cool Girls and Bad Girls: Reinventing the *Femme Fatale* in Contemporary American Fiction

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Seductive, dangerous, and ultimately unknowable, the *femme fatale*[1] has been a staple of the Western cultural imagination for centuries. As Kate Stables argues,

> The *fatale* myth is common to all cultures and her iconography is widely recognized as a result of a blanket of nineteenth-century European representations as well as earlier cinema incarnations. Woman = sex = death is an equation inscribed into mass consciousness around the world, common to the postmodern West and the pre-modern East.[2]

In 20th-century America, however, this broader archetype found her most lasting and widely recognized embodiment in the duplicitous lead female characters of the Hollywood *film noir* of the 1940s and 1950s. In films such as *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Detour* (1945), *Out of the Past* (1947), and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), the *femme fatale* figured again and again, tempting hard-boiled male protagonists to their doom (indeed, in *Kiss Me Deadly*, condemning the entire Los Angeles area to nuclear destruction). This particular, stylized, nightmare version of the *femme fatale*, with its roots in hard-boiled novels such as James M. Cain's 1934 *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and his 1936 *Double Indemnity*, has lingered in the American imagination well beyond the lifespan of the original *noir* cycle, which declined in popularity throughout the 1950s, finally ending somewhere around the *femme-fatale*-free *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959). In the decades since the end of the original *noir* cycle, the *femme fatale* has returned

with a vengeance, most often in neo-*noir* films such as *Body Heat* (1981), *Basic Instinct* (1992), and *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For* (2014), to name a few. Just as this version of the *femme fatale* originated in crime fiction, she has reappeared not only in film but also in contemporary American fiction. In this paper, I will explore two 2000s-era novels that perform interesting reinventions of the *femme fatale* archetype: Megan Abbott's 2005 *Die a Little* and Gillian Flynn's 2012 *Gone Girl*. Ultimately, I argue that Abbott and Flynn, in taking up the popular archetype, are by no means reinforcing or reinstating the misogyny traditionally understood to underwrite *femme fatale* portrayals; rather, the novels call attention to the logic by which women are labelled *femme fatales* and show how that logic itself is responsible for specifically gendered versions of the alienation so often thematized in *noir* fiction and film.

One of the few things, perhaps the only thing, that is consistent across virtually all *noir* texts, both novels and films, is a sense of profound social alienation. However, classic *noir*'s almost invariably masculine point of view—whether we are identifying with Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe or Walter Neff or Al Roberts of *Detour*—usually leads us only to identify with the alienation felt by the hard-boiled male protagonist. Traditionally, the female characters are regarded as objects—whether *femme fatale* or good girl—and rarely endowed with the same narrative control. Thus, in the context of classic *noir,* we rarely consider the ways in which social alienation can be specific to women. In these two contemporary novels, however, Megan Abbott and Gillian Flynn lead us to consider *noir* alienation from the woman's point of view by carefully situating their women characters with respect to the *femme-fatale*/good-girl binary.

The *femme fatale* in classic *noir*

To begin, I will sketch a critical history of the idea of the *femme fatale*, in order ultimately to show how Abbott and Flynn deconstruct it. The notion of the *femme fatale* or dangerous woman has been linked to *noir* from the very beginning of *noir* criticism. Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, the two French critics whose 1955 *A Panorama of American Film Noir* was the first book ever published on the phenomenon, describe the *femme fatale* thus in their introduction: "Frustrated and guilty, half man-eater, half man-eaten, blasé and cornered, she falls victim to her own wiles." [3] They immediately understood how the *femme fatale* embodied *noir*'s twin obsessions with sexuality and violence:

> This new kind of woman, rubbing shoulders with and
> masterminding crime, tough as the milieu surrounding her, as
> expert in blackmail and "vice" as in the use of firearms—and

probably frigid—has left her mark on a noir eroticism that is
at times merely an eroticization of violence.[4]

Although later criticism would focus more on the *femme fatale*'s sexuality than
her link to criminality *per se*, Borde and Chaumeton were certainly right about
the *femme fatale*'s status as a new (in a way) archetype. Borde and Chaumeton
also clearly saw how this female character type was unique to *noir* and helped
to distinguish it from other cycles or types of films: "We're a long way from
the chaste heroines of the classic Western or the historical film."[5] [6] Borde and
Chaumeton, writing over a decade before the advent of second-wave
feminism, do not devote much more concentrated analysis to the figure of the
femme fatale herself, but feminist criticism in the ensuing decades would do
plenty to explore this element of *film noir*.

One of the first major articles to discuss *noir* from a feminist perspective
was Janey Place's "Women in Film Noir," which was anthologized in the 1978
first edition of E. Ann Kaplan's collection *Women in Film Noir*. In this essay,
Place identified two opposing archetypes that *noir* tends to place women
within: the "spider woman," another name for the evil-but-interesting *femme
fatale*; or "the nurturing woman," a well-behaved, obedient servant of the
patriarchy. Given its tendency to slot its most interesting female characters
into the role of *femme fatale* (or, perhaps, the tendency of critics to do so), Place
says that *noir* is

> hardly "progressive" [but that] it does give us one of the few
> periods of film in which women are active, not static symbols,
> are intelligent and powerful, if destructively so, and derive
> power, not weakness, from their sexuality.[7]

Although the *femme fatale* is of course treated as a villain, she is also crucial to
the *film noir*'s appeal, casting her dark enchantment for a couple of hours
before being killed or otherwise contained in the last three minutes:

> the myths of the sexually aggressive woman (or criminal man)
> first allows sensuous expression of that idea and then destroys
> it. And by its limited expression, ending in defeat, that
> unacceptable element is controlled.[8]

Appearing as it did near the end of World War II and in the subsequent years,
noir's obsession with dangerously ambitious women can at least partially be
explained in concrete historical terms because, as Julie Grossman writes,
"[f]antasies of women are sociohistorically based and thus affected by the
position of women in any given historical moment."[9] As American soldiers

began to return in large numbers from their combat duties overseas in Europe, they found a world different from the one they had known. Women, who by and large had previously been confined to the home, were now part of the workforce in unprecedented numbers, having taken over the jobs left behind by the soldiers, in a historical phenomenon encapsulated by the famous Rosie the Riveter posters. This newfound professional ambition on the part of the women they had left behind proved disturbing to the returning soldiers, and this disturbance is reflected in the *femme fatale*:

> Often the original transgression of the dangerous lady of film noir … is ambition expressed metaphorically in her freedom of movement and visual dominance. This ambition is inappropriate to her status as a woman, and must be confined.[10]

Having taken jobs and perhaps lovers that they would not have taken before, postwar women must have sometimes seemed like *femme fatales* to their returning boyfriends or husbands; hence the psychological need to both see the *femme fatale* on screen, and to ultimately see her contained.

In opposition to the *femme fatale*, *film noir* juxtaposes the figure of the nurturing woman, or what I will refer to as the good girl. As Place argues, this archetype of "woman as redeemer"

> offers the possibility of integration for the alienated, lost man into the stable world of secure values, roles and identities. She gives love, understanding (or at least forgiveness), asks very little in return (just that he come back to her) and is generally visually passive and static.[11]

If the *femme fatale* stood in for what returning soldiers, and postwar men in general, feared their women had or might become, the good girl represented everything they wanted her to become, or remain. These good girls, as exemplified by Sue (Claudia Drake) in *Detour* or Katie (Jocelyn Brando) in *The Big Heat* (1953), are representatives of patriarchy's feminine ideal: sweet, kind, straightforward, and above all passive and submissive in their prescribed gender roles. She offers the sort of consoling, comforting portrait of womanhood that 1950s culture would promulgate through, among other things, family-centered sitcoms such as *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. These sorts of characters tend to be confined to domestic spaces, and never display any serious resistance to the men in their lives or to the broader patriarchal culture.

However, the overall situation of the portrayal of women in *film noir* is actually more complex than this *femme-fatale*/good-girl dichotomy makes it seem. While the *femme fatale* does tend to dominate collective memories of and gender-centric critical debates about *film noir*, there are also many women characters in *noir* who do not necessarily fall into either archetype, and many *noir* films have managed to do without a *fatale* altogether. Julie Grossman rightly argues that an overstated "fixation" on the *femme fatale* has "stalled further understanding of the ways in which class and gender function as crucial factors in representations of women in noir."[12] Indeed, as Grossman further claims, "very few 'femmes fatales' really fit the strict 'femme fatale model' of evil, opaque woman who 'cannot be humanized' " and "[i]n fact, most 'femme fatale' figures are distinctly humanized within the films."[13] Because the critical response has been overly reductive in simplifying the women characters in *noir* into one of two polar opposite types, we have not yet achieved a full understanding of the roles of women in classic *noir* films themselves. The women in *film noir* become understood as objects, not subjects:

> In the end, the opaque powerful woman persists in objectifying female experience: the "femme fatale" is a symbol of fears about absolute female power, not a representation of complex female experience.[14]

It is not the goal of the present study to rectify this problem in our understanding of classical *noir*; instead, I note the problem now in order to show later how Abbott and Flynn implicitly address and overcome this critical and cultural oversimplification.

The *femme fatale* in neo-*noir*

Neo-*noir* has proven to be a surprisingly long-lived phenomenon, dating back at least as far as Robert Altman's subversive 1973 version of *The Long Goodbye* and continuing right through popular contemporary texts such as the *Sin City* films, *Drive* (2011), and *True Detective* (2014 -), as well as David Fincher's 2014 film adaptation of *Gone Girl*. By now, neo-*noir* has officially lasted more than twice as long as the original run of *film noir*, and it shows no signs of exhausting itself anytime soon. Neo-*noir*, which tends to update the themes, conventions, and iconography of classic *noir* for a contemporary audience, is on the whole a much more self-conscious phenomenon than classic *noir*.[15] Along with the new version of *noir* we thus get a new version of the *femme fatale*, one who reflects new gender anxieties much as the original *femmes fatales* reflected specifically postwar problems:

> Like her predecessors, exemplified in the "spider woman" of classic noir, the new fatale represents and uniquely reflects current discourses around "woman." She is a timeless fantasy, a cross-cultural myth, but also a historical construct, whose ingredients vary according to the time and climate of her creation.[16]

Appearing as she does after the collapse of the Production Code allowed cinema to become much more explicit in its depictions of sexuality and violence, the new *femme fatale* is more openly sexual and seductive than ever before while remaining equally unknowable; as Helen Hanson explains,

> New incarnations of the *femme fatale* in neo-*noir* combine an increasing centrality of active sexuality with character elements of deception and/or disguise, in ways that both explicitly show an active femininity and leave motivation cloaked in mystery.[17]

Thus, while the new *femme fatale* is reflective of both a sharp decline in censorship and a certain degree of feminist progress, she can also be a weapon deployed by the patriarchy to indict that progress. Whether we read any given contemporary *femme fatale* as evidence of a misogynist text or a progressive one, it is clear that she is an important barometer of cultural attitudes about gender:

> In an important sense, then, the *femme fatale*'s currency for feminism is precisely in her resistance to stable meanings of femininity. Her presence within crime narratives upsets patriarchal mastery, both in the sense of narrative control and of the containment of female sexuality within the social institutions of the family, to which she is frequently opposed.[18]

As we will see below, both Abbott and Flynn write their *femmes fatales* in brilliantly sophisticated and self-aware ways to critique the patriarchal gender roles assigned to women.

Some critics and intellectuals have read the neo-*noir* resurgence of the *femme fatale* as evidence of 1980s-era resentment against the feminist movement. Susan Faludi, in her *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, writes in a chapter discussing the *femme fatale* of Adrian Lyne's 1987 *Fatal Attraction*:

> The backlash shaped much of Hollywood's portrayal of women in the 1980s. In typical themes, women were set against women; women's anger at their social circumstances was depoliticized and displayed as personal depression instead; and women's lives were framed as morality tales in which the "good mother" wins and the independent woman gets punished.[19]

In Faludi's reading, the *femme fatale* of neo-*noir*, or at least of a late 1980s neo-*noir* film such as *Fatal Attraction*, can be read as a scolding of second-wave feminists in much the same way that the *fatale* of classical *noir* had reflected anxieties about newly independent postwar women:

> Hollywood restated and reinforced the backlash thesis: American women were unhappy because they were too free: their liberation had denied them marriage and motherhood.[20]

Helen Hanson agrees that portrayals of independent women in contemporary cinema are important to understandings of contemporary gender politics, arguing that, in the contemporary period,

> representations of the "liberated woman," cultural ambivalences to feminism, and post-feminist negotiations about the meanings of femininity and notions of identity-as-performance, take on a particular purchase.[21]

Of the contemporary *femme fatale* in particular, Hanson asserts,

> New versions of the *femme fatale* that arise in this period, and their placement and treatment in neo-*noir* narratives, are interesting in the questions that they ask about the difficult interrelationships between sex and power that circle around a set of representations of contemporary femininities and … commodifications of female identity.[22]

Thus, even unambiguously regressive *femmes fatales* such as the one Glenn Close plays in *Fatal Attraction* offer us very valuable insight into contemporary gender relations. Judging from Faludi's account of men shouting things like "Punch the bitch's face in" and "Do it, Michael. Kill her already. Kill the bitch" during a theatrical screening of *Fatal Attraction*, it seems that the film's retrograde portrayal of a castrating woman played quite well to certain segments of the audience in 1987.[23]

At least in some instances, however, the new *femme fatale* has arguably been boldly transgressive in terms of gender politics. As Kate Stables notes, one of the most interesting ways in which the contemporary *femme fatale* differs from those of the 1940s and 1950s is her ability to triumph in the conflicts of the narratives she appears in:

> Perhaps the most fascinating new feature of the *femme fatale* is her ability to *avoid textual suppression*, to win on her own terms … This seems to utterly subvert the classic noir procedure with the *fatale* in which the power of the strong sexual woman is first displayed, then destroyed, in order to demonstrate the necessity of its control.[24]

In film, a contemporary *femme fatale* such as Catherine Trammell (Sharon Stone) in *Basic Instinct* is remarkable not simply because of how much time she spends naked on screen, but because she completely escapes punishment. In fact, at the twist ending to *Basic Instinct*, it is the male lead (Michael Douglas) who is unwittingly surviving at her mercy. Linda Ruth Williams summarizes this key difference:

> if noir femme fatales presented positive images only so long as they remained alive (paying the price for their oversexed greed in the final reel), their neo-noir counterparts have spectacularly evaded patriarchal/moral retribution, escaping, sexually satisfied, with their ill-gotten gains. The neo-femme fatale is not (often) punished for her crime.[25]

Although much of neo-*noir* may not escape the binary logic that characterizes women as either *femmes fatales* or good girls, many neo-*noir* narratives such as *Basic Instinct*, *The Last Seduction* (1994), and *Jackie Brown* (1996) do at least let the *femme fatale* win in a way that had been unavailable to her in classic *noir*.

Breaking down the dichotomy in *Die a Little*

Megan Abbott's novel *Die a Little*, published in 2005 but set in the mid-1950s, tells the story of two women who, at first glance, would seem to fit right into the spider-woman/nurturing-woman binary that Place identified as being central to portrayals of women in *noir* narrative. The novel's narrator is Lora King, a Los Angeles schoolteacher who is very close with her brother Bill, a young investigator working for the district attorney's office. After Bill is in a minor car accident with a mysterious, intense, attractive young woman named Alice Steele, he quickly falls in love with her and marries her. Although

Lora helps Alice, who reveals very little about her past, to get a job teaching at her school. Lora grows increasingly suspicious of Alice's history, especially after meeting some of her mysterious friends, including Lois, who is constantly being beaten up by various men. As Lora learns more and more about Alice's past, she becomes both more horrified of, and more fascinated by, the scandalous nature of Alice's secret life. We eventually learn that Alice recruits prostitutes for a criminal organization; she used to use her former position working in the wardrobe department of a Hollywood studio to select eager young starlets and lure them into prostitution for Joe Avalon, the pimp and drug dealer for whom she works. After Lois dies under mysterious circumstances, Lora begins assisting a police investigation into the prostitution ring, one that culminates in Alice's running away from town and, eventually, ending up dead in Santa Ana under a fake name. Although, on the surface, the problems Lora faces at the beginning of the novel are resolved and her brother is saved from Alice's influence, it is hard for either her or the reader to take any satisfaction in what happens.

To begin with, we should note that Abbott herself is intensely aware of the hard-boiled/*noir* tradition; she received a Ph.D. in English from New York University in 2000, and her first published book was not this novel but a 2002 critical study, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir*. In this critical work, Abbott notes that "[t]he debate over whether the femme fatale is merely a misogynist projection of male fears of female agency, or whether she represents a profound power that is of use value for feminist theory has been brewing for over twenty years" and explicitly references Place's article.[26] Abbott's own demonstrated mastery of the critical discourse around *noir* allowed her to write *Die a Little* with similar critical concerns in mind. In fact, one of the main thrusts of the gender politics of *Die a Little* is an attempt to trouble the binary Place described. Lora, whom we slowly discover to be something of an unreliable narrator, would insist that she herself is the perfect good girl and Alice the wicked *femme fatale*; but, as it becomes clear to the reader, Alice can at least convincingly play the good girl, and Lora has more of the *femme fatale* in her than she is willing to admit. By giving us two characters who initially seem to reconfirm the familiar binary, but who eventually reveal themselves to be more complex, Abbott shows us how the traditional *noir* categories are too reductive and constricting.

In addition to an awareness of the critical work around the tradition she is joining, Abbott is also powerfully influenced by *film noir*'s specifically cinematic dimensions. The entry on Abbott in *100 American Crime Writers* states that "Abbott began watching film noir as a child, long before she read crime fiction, and she has stated that she pictures noir actors when she writes," a very revealing insight into Abbott's cinematic influences.[27] Her first significant description of Alice in the novel immediately makes Alice into a fetishized

visual object much like Barbara Stanwyck or Janet Greer's *femme fatale* characters before her. Lora introduces Alice by describing a photograph Alice accidentally appears in from a party:

> She is wearing a demure black silk cocktail dress with a low-cut V in the back, and her alabaster skin is spread across the frame, pillowing out of the silk and curving sharply into her dark hair. The jut of her shoulder blades and the angular tilt of her cocked arm draw the eye irresistibly. So like Alice. She didn't even need to show her face or have a voice to demand complete attention.[28]

By immediately describing Alice in visual terms—in a photograph, no less—Abbott associates her with the long tradition of fetishized, photographed *femmes fatales*. Even the cover art for the hardcover edition of the novel evokes the iconography of *noir*: the character of Lora looks a lot like Marilyn Monroe, perhaps in *Niagara* (1953), while Alice's pose and demeanor evoke Rita Hayworth's famous entrance in *Gilda* (1946). Other elements of the novel, such as the Hollywood setting and occasional references to real-life movie stars (we are told that "Alice had accumulated quite an array of repaired clothes, the most glorious being a dress Claudette Colbert had worn"[29]), remind us that we are reading a cinematic novel.

Before the reader learns the full depths of Alice's *femme fatale*-ness, however, we first see how easily she is able to play the role of the ideal 1950s housewife, of *noir*'s good girl. Early in the novel, just after Alice and Bill have married, Lora tells us at length how energetically and adroitly Alice seems to adapt to the life of a housewife. We are told that:

> [d]espite all her prewedding glamour, Alice quickly became the most quiet, the most demure of a quiet and demure set of junior investigators' wives. She was the first to bring the tuna noodle casserole to the new family that moved in, or to the household with the sick mother.[30]

Lora then lists, for nearly two full pages, all the various housewifely consumer goods Alice buys and all the many dishes she learns to bake and serve at all the many parties she has. At the end of the passage, Lora tells us, "Soon, she had no rival. In the neighborhood and among the investigators' wives, she set all the trends, and everyone else followed. It was as though she had waited her whole life for this."[31] Alice's quick mastery of her position as housewife and good girl reveals it for what it is: an artificial role that can be assumed by doing the right chores, buying the right things, and cooking the right foods. Thus,

the nurturing woman is not quite the essentialized type she seemed to be in Place's essay; rather, she is simply a performance that anyone, even an ex-*femme-fatale*, can put on. Moreover, our understanding of Alice's adoption of the role of housewife is modified by a plot revelation late in the novel: Lora learns that Alice is addicted to Benzedrine, which is suggested to have been the source of her excessive wifely energy:

> I think about Alice, about her manic hostessing, her frenzied housework, her rabid energy, and her occasionally surging speech. And I think about her days in bed with "migraines," her disappearances from school, the thin enamel of sweat that often gleamed off her body.[32]

Thus the novel makes the perverse suggestion that the best way to fulfill the expectations of a housewife is to be on drugs—a "mother's little helper" if you will. Thus, a vice of the sort Borde and Chaumeton associated with the *femme fatale* turns out to be part of the good girl performance.

Just as Alice the *femme fatale* is able to master the role of good girl, so does Lora, our ostensible true good-girl narrator, inadvertently reveal herself to have tendencies she herself would ascribe only to a *femme fatale*. Throughout the novel, Lora seems to occasionally let things slip through the filter of her narration that suggest she is not being totally honest with the reader. For example, over the course of the novel Lora becomes involved in a romantic relationship with Mike Standish, an old friend of Alice's. Her evolving relationship with Mike forces her to reckon with the incongruity of her self-perceived goodness and her darker impulses. In a passage that opens after an implied sexual encounter with Mike, Lora is unable to square her self-image with her own behavior:

> Looking in Mike Standish's mirror at 2:00 A.M., my face, neck, shoulders still sharp pink, my legs still shaking, I see something used and dissolute and unflinching. How did all this happen so quickly?
> And it has nothing to do with him at all. It is as if this girl in the mirror has slipped down into some dark, wet place all alone and is coming up each time battle-worn but otherwise untouched.[33]

Clearly, Lora's gazing into the mirror here encapsulates much of the internal psychological drama she works so hard to suppress elsewhere in the novel. The objective image of herself she sees in the mirror is closer to the *femme fatale* than she wants to admit; the "dark, wet place" she goes to "all alone" is her

own enjoyment of things she knows are forbidden to "good girls" like the one she wants to be. Later in the novel, when she is asking Mike about the nature of his friendship with Alice, Mike becomes insulted and begins to mock her, pretending he had divulged all the sordid details of their relationship to Alice:

> "I told her how I had you in my bed within three hours of meeting you. I told her how you'd come by my place for a late-night fuck after you'd been on dates with other men. I told her how you liked to be flipped in bed and how you like it when I push your face into the pillow. I told her how –" before Lora cuts him off by saying "You're a real bastard."[34]

Mike's dialogue here is interesting because it reveals a sordid quality to their relationship that Lora had hitherto disguised from the reader. She had mentioned her relationship with Mike, and even implied that they had had sex, but never went into such explicit detail, because it would not fit with her portrayal of herself as a good girl.

Indeed, one of the darkest and subtlest threads running through the novel hints at a sickness underlying Lora's self-image: the possibility that she has incestuous feelings for her brother, feelings which motivate her jealousy and suspicion of Alice. Abbott almost never provides any explicit evidence for this reading, but the cumulative effect of everything we learn about how close Lora and Bill are, and how obsessed with him she seems to be, does lend itself to dark, perverse readings. Something of this potentially incestuous jealousy can be detected at the beginning of the novel, when Lora describes Alice and Bill's return from their honeymoon:

> They came back floating on a cloud of their own beauty, their own gorgeous besottedness. It felt vaguely lewd even to look at them. They seemed to be all body. They seemed to be wearing their insides too close to the surface of their skin.[35]

This description hints at a suppressed, unseemly dimension to Lora's psychological attachment to her brother; the thought of him having sex with another woman seems to make Lora uncomfortable, too painfully aware of her brother's body. Another hint at Lora's possibly unhealthy relationship with her brother slips past her narration when she is talking to Mike very late in the novel, after Alice has disappeared. Lora says that Alice's sudden departure has been hard for her brother, to which Mike replies:

> "I'm sure it has. But, you know, I bet you're taking awfully good care of him."

> "I'm trying to," I say, ignoring something strange in his
> tone.[36]

What is the "something strange" in Mike's tone that Lora ignores? Lora is not telling, but Abbott seems to imply that Mike thinks Lora harbors incestuous desire for her brother, especially given the fact that Mike revealed details earlier in the novel about his own relationship with Lora that Lora herself had been less-than-forthcoming about with the reader. There is also a similar clue in the letter Lora receives from Alice near the very end of the novel, in which Alice is finally honest with Lora. Regarding their respective relationships with Bill, Alice writes:

> Try to understand. You must know you can't possibly give
> him what I can. And you know damn well why.
> I won't say what I want to because you won't believe me. You
> can't see it and wouldn't see it. Not even when I showed it to
> you.[37]

What is it that Lora cannot see that Mike and Alice and perhaps the reader can see? Again, the implication is that Lora's incestuous feelings are obvious to others but never to herself, due to the way she has so thoroughly internalized the good-girl/*femme-fatale* dichotomy. If this incest theme is indeed buried within the novel (and Abbott seems to want to give us reason to believe it is), then there seems to be something just as dark and disturbing at the heart of the tame good girl as there is at the heart of the more obviously devious *femme fatale*.

Finally, Abbott makes her deconstruction of the division between the good girl and the *femme fatale* most explicit in the novel's closing passage. The scene is a flashback to a night of drinking Lora shares with Alice and Mike in which Alice indirectly confronts Lora about her suppressed *femme-fatale* tendencies. When they are both thoroughly drunk, the following dialogue ensues:

> "It's okay. You don't have to pretend with me."
> "Pretend what?"
> "That you don't like it. All of it and more still. Darker still."
> "I never think about it," I said, even as I didn't know what
> she meant, or what I meant. "I don't like it. I never thought
> about it once."[38]

Alice then draws close to Lora and tells her, "'You don't have to talk about it, but it's something we both have, Lora. It's something we've both got in us,'"

to which Lora replies three times verbally and twice more mentally, "'I don't have it in me.'"[39] The final lines of the novel are Lora's internal monologue: "*I don't have it in me. Not at all.*"[40] What is this dark "it" that Lora so strenuously (and unconvincingly) denies having? It is that which, in her own eyes and those of her society, would make her a *femme fatale*: illicit sexuality and a desire to escape the good girl role into which she has cast herself. By the end of the novel, we feel that Abbott has thoroughly broken down the strict dividing line that *noir* had long maintained between its two categories of women characters: the *femme fatale* can master the art of being a good girl, and the good girl has more than a little of the *femme fatale* within herself.

Cool/*fatale*

The good-girl/*femme-fatale* binary becomes the inspiration for a playful yet deadly serious critique of contemporary gender norms in Gillian Flynn's 2012 *Gone Girl*. Rather than blurring the lines between the good girl and the *femme fatale*, Flynn offers us Amy Elliott Dunne, an unapologetic *femme fatale* who uses her devious brilliance to manipulate the people around her according to the very dichotomous thinking that produces such gender roles in the first place. Amy might seem a hard character for readers to sympathize with, but her intelligence and insight into the way contemporary American society constructs gender expectations allows Flynn to critique the system that produces those expectations, rather than simply present Amy as an essentialized vision of female evil. She is not a mysterious evil "other," but rather an unflattering mirror held up to millennial gender roles.

Gone Girl tells the story of Nick and Amy Dunne, a seemingly picture-perfect example of a contemporary married couple, in order to expose the dark undercurrents to their marriage. Amy is a beautiful, intelligent, wealthy woman whose parents have made her a minor celebrity by basing their *Amazing Amy* series of children's books on her; Nick is a journalist who has recently lost his job due to the 2008 financial crash. They meet and get married while living in New York City, but soon move back to Nick's hometown of Carthage, Missouri. On the day of their fifth wedding anniversary, Amy suddenly goes missing, and there appears to have been a break-in and kidnapping in their house. As the police investigate the case, Nick becomes the target of suspicion for the possible murder of Amy, drawing attention from the national news media. The first half of the novel alternates between Nick's present-tense point of view beginning the day of Amy's disappearance, and diary entries that seem to have been written by Amy over the course of their marriage and courtship. In the novel's big twist, Flynn reveals that Amy is alive and well, having faked her own murder and deliberately left behind an elaborate trail of evidence designed to implicate Nick, whom she wants to see executed as punishment

for his infidelity. The diary entries we have been reading throughout the first half of the novel are fabrications, written specifically to be found by the police and designed to paint Amy in the best light possible and Nick in the worst. After a robbery by a couple of rednecks ruins Amy's plans, she is forced to turn to her high-school ex-boyfriend, the uber-wealthy Desi Collings. When it becomes clear that Collings intends to hold her captive rather than simply helping her, Amy seduces and murders him. She then returns to Nick, who, despite knowing that Amy has attempted to frame him for her murder, is forced into resuming a sham of a marriage with her for the sake of appearances, as well as to care for the child who will be born as a result of Amy's having secretly impregnated herself with his sperm.

Gone Girl is a novel deeply influenced by cinema. Flynn, in an interview, reveals how she was thinking cinematically she was writing the novel, with David Fincher himself as one of her main influences:

Even when I was writing the book I'd think, "Fincher should direct this." It's a rather grand notion to have to think having a great filmmaker [like him] would direct your book. But there were so many scenes in *Gone Girl* that I'd see through his lens. I thought he'd understand the sense of tension and dread."[41]

Critical theories such as Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" thesis attempt to account for the influence between authors within literature; what does it mean when a writer of novels begins to be influenced by film directors? A full consideration of that question would no doubt require a separate, more theoretically sophisticated essay than the present one, but the point remains that *Gone Girl* is a novel already influenced by cinema. Indeed, at one point in the novel, Nick waxes philosophical about the impact of visual media on the contemporary psyche:

> I don't think that we are actually human at this point, those of us who are like most of us, who grew up with TV and movies and now the Internet. If we are betrayed, we know the words to say; when a loved one dies, we know the words to say. If we want to play the stud or the smart-ass or the fool, we know the words to say. We are all working from the same dog-eared script.
> It's a very difficult era in which to be a person, just a real, actual person, instead of a collection of personality traits selected from an endless Automat of characters.[42]

Broadly speaking, this passage suggests the mighty influence that cinema and television wield over contemporary consciousness and, thus, contemporary

literature. If everyone is playing a role inherited from one medium or another, then it seems that Nick and Amy have inherited the roles of the *homme fatale* and the *femme fatale*, respectively, from their experience with *film noir*.

Indeed, *Gone Girl* makes no attempt to hide its debt to *film noir*, as the characters occasionally make explicit references to it. In one of her fake diary entries, Amy tells us about her husband's Internet habits: "His search history gave me the latest: noir films and the website of his old magazine and a study on the Mississippi River."[43] Although this information comes from one of her suspect diary entries, we learn soon after that Nick really is a fan of *noir*. His young mistress Andie says of their situation after Amy's disappearance, "'God, it's like some bad noir movie,'" and Nick tells us, "'I smiled. I'd introduced Andie to noir – to Bogart and *The Big Sleep*, *Double Indemnity*, all the classics.'"[44] Much later in the novel, after Nick has hired the famous defense attorney Tanner Bolt, Nick notes that the detective who works for Tanner is "a wiry, clean-cut guy, not the boozy noir gumshoe I'd hoped for."[45] At the beginning of a chapter after she has been robbed, Amy begins angrily, "I am penniless and on the run. How fucking noir," perhaps thinking of the character Vera from *Detour*.[46] Given the fact that Flynn has both Nick and Amy refer to *noir* when discussing their own situations, it makes sense that many of the tropes of *noir*, including the *femme-fatale*/good-girl dichotomy, would be part of the characters' common cultural backgrounds.

One of the book's most famous moments is Amy's Cool Girl monologue, in which she goes on a three-page rant about the contemporary cultural stereotype she thinks Nick wanted her to conform to, and which she had indeed been performing as for the reader throughout the first half of the novel. The passage is far too long to quote in its entirety, but it is undoubtedly one of the most striking passages in the novel. Just after the reveal that she is still alive and has faked her own death, Amy gives us a piece of her mind on how she played to patriarchal gender stereotypes in her courtship with Nick:

> … I was playing the girl who was in style, the girl a man like Nick wants: the Cool Girl. Men always say that as *the* defining compliment, don't they? *She's a cool girl.* Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping … Cool Girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want. *Go ahead, shit on me, I don't mind, I'm the Cool Girl.*[47]

Compare Amy's description of the Cool Girl archetype to Place's aforementioned description of *noir*'s nurturing woman: "She gives love,

understanding (or at least forgiveness), asks very little in return (just that he come back to her) and is generally visually passive and static."[48] Juxtaposing the two descriptions side by side, it becomes clear that the Cool Girl is simply the *noir* good girl updated for the 2010s. Both the Cool Girl and the good girl are defined by their tendency to always defer to their men and never offer any resistance; both are idealized by men in their respective eras because they facilitate patriarchy. Amy admits that even she has been seduced by the archetype: "But it's tempting to be Cool Girl. For someone like me, who likes to win, it's tempting to want to be the girl every guy wants."[49] As long as Amy is happy to play the role, her marriage to Nick goes smoothly. Eventually, however, she discovers that she has grown tired of the role:

> So it had to stop. Committing to Nick, feeling safe with Nick, being happy with Nick, made me realize that there was a Real Amy in there, and she was so much better, more interesting and complicated and challenging, than Cool Amy … Can you imagine, finally showing your true self to your spouse, your soul mate, and having him *not like you*?[50]

Although playing the role of the Cool Girl had served Amy's purposes temporarily, she found it to ultimately do more harm than good because it had concealed her true self from the man she married. (That her true self turns out to be a murdering psychopath does not fully blunt the force of Amy's critique.)

Indeed, as we learn, Cool Girl was just the latest of many roles Amy has played over her life without really committing to any of them. As she ponders how she will live her new life after the faked murder, she tells us,

> I'm not sure, exactly, how to be Dead Amy. I'm trying to figure out what that means for me, what I become for the next few months. Anyone, I suppose, except people I've already been: Amazing Amy. Preppy '80s Girl. Ultimate-Frisbee Granola and Blushing Ingenue and Witty Hepburnian Sophisticate. Brainy Ironic Girl and Boho Babe (the latest version of Frisbee Granola). Cool Girl and Loved Wife and Unloved Wife and Vengeful Scorned Wife. Diary Amy.[51]

The effect of the repetitive structure and the constant capitalization is to show just how alienated Amy is from society that has prescribed such roles for her. Indeed, one significant character thread throughout the novel is Amy's resentment of her parents, who have profited by basing the *Amazing Amy* series not on the real Amy, but on the Amy they want her to be. This

resentment comes through even in the falsely happy diary entries by "Diary Amy":

> And yet I can't fail to notice that whenever I screw something up, Amy does it right: When I finally quit violin at age twelve, Amy was revealed as a prodigy in the next book … That my parents, two *child psychologists*, chose this particular public form of passive-aggressiveness toward *their child* was not just fucked up but also stupid and weird and kind of hilarious.[52]

All her life, people have been casting Amy into roles she did not want to play; and the cumulative result of all those years of constraining expectations is that she finally refuses the good-girl/Cool-Girl role and becomes a full-on *femme fatale*. Ironically, the resentment bred by years of people wanting Amy to fit culturally "good" stereotypes has led her to adopt the worst stereotype of all, the vicious *femme fatale*, even as she continues to fool almost everyone by playing the Cool Girl or Amazing Amy. Classic *noir*'s tendency to cast women into either the *femme fatale* or good girl stereotype is of course a symptom of American culture's impulse to cast women into rigidly defined roles more generally. Amy, as a sort of meta-*noir* character who sees through both the tropes of *noir* and the cultural mindset of the people around her, uses her awareness of that very categorizing tendency as the basis for her plans. Amy might indeed be a vicious psychopath, but it is her correct assessment of contemporary gender roles that allows her to get away with what she does.

   Gone Girl, especially with the release of the film adaptation, has sparked a great deal of debate and commentary within the popular media. Websites such as *Slate* and *The A.V. Club* ran multiple articles and reviews about the novel and the film. Much of the popular debate has centered around the novel's gender politics; indeed, Eliana Dockterman of *Time Magazine* published an online article titled, "Is *Gone Girl* Feminist or Misogynist?," a question to which Dockterman relies, "The answer is it's both, and that's what makes it so interesting."[53] Wesley Morris of *Grantland* argues:

> The movie doubles as a snide contradiction of the serious conversation Americans have been having lately about men, women, exploitation, and violence. *Gone Girl* isn't complicating that conversation. It gets off on thumbing its nose at it, using a vengeful false accusation to exploit an old trope of the terrifying femme fatale.[54]

While the film version admittedly does not make room for some of the more complex passages in the novel that I have discussed above, I do think one

problem with readings of the novel or the film as misogynist is that such readings require us to understand Amy as being somehow representative of "woman" writ large. I think both versions of *Gone Girl* work to make us aware of Amy's exceptional status: she is rich, she is mildly famous, she proves irresistible to just about every man she meets. Even before we learn how the full extent of her manipulation and subterfuge, it is clear that Amy is the exception, not the rule. Additionally, the novel supplies at least two significant strong female characters—Nick's twin sister Margo and the police detective Rhonda Boney – who clearly are not *femmes fatales* but also avoid the weak-willed good girl stereotype. In this case, one genuine *femme fatale* does not indict her entire gender; rather, her success is more of a condemnation of the social world around her. She proves that we should be suspicious, not of Cool Girls themselves, but of the system which leads women to play such simplistic roles.

Abbott's historical revisionism implicitly argues that *noir*'s alienation has always already had a gendered dimension, having always effected both women and men in ways specific to their gender roles. Flynn's uber-contemporary setting, full of references to recent events and contemporary popular culture, reminds us that such gendered alienation has not gone away in the present. Where classic *noir* tends to essentialize women as either *femmes fatales* or good girls, Abbott and Flynn use the figure of the *femme fatale* to critique, not women themselves, but *noir*'s own gender logic, and by extension that of American society in general. If, as Abbot shows, the good girl is not always so good; and if, as Flynn shows, the *femme fatale* may have a point; then the true problem lies in our urge to reduce women to simple, absolute categories. The original title of the 1950 *film noir Gun Crazy* was *Deadly Is the Female*. We might now respond, *Deadly Are the Gender Roles*.

Notes

[1] There seems to be no absolute agreed-upon rule in *noir* criticism on whether or not to italicize the terms "*femme fatale*" and "*film noir*," and similarly no agreement on how to pluralize either. In my own writing, I will try to stay self-consistent, but will quote other authors with their original formatting.

[2] Kate Stables, "The Postmodern Always Rings Twice: Constructing the *Femme Fatale* in 90s Cinema," in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: BFI Publishing, 1998), 167.

[3] Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir*, trans. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002), 9.

[4] Borde and Chaumeton, *Panorama*, 9.

[5] Borde and Chaumeton, *Panorama*, 9.

[6] I hesitate to call *noir* a "genre" even though Borde and Chaumeton refer to it as such because I have become convinced that, as Steve Neale argues in *Genre and Hollywood*, *noir* was not really a genre in the proper sense. That is a whole critical debate probably best left aside for the moment, however.

[7] Janey Place, "Women in Film Noir," in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: BFI Publishing, 1998), 47.

[8] Place, "Women," 48.

[9] Julie Grossman, *Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir: Ready for Her Close-Up* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3.

[10] Place, "Women," 56.

[11] Place, "Women," 60.

[12] Grossman, *Rethinking*, 2.

[13] Grossman, *Rethinking*, 47.

[14] Grossman, *Rethinking*, 5.

[15] For example, while Billy Wilder would not have said he was making *Double Indemnity* as a *film noir*, Roman Polanski would certainly say that *Chinatown* is a neo-*noir*.

[16] Stables, "The Postmodern," 165.

[17] Helen Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 168.

[18] Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines*, 166.

[19] Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1991), 113.

[20] Faludi, *Backlash*, 113.

[21] Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines*, 151.

[22] Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines*, 165-166.

[23] Faludi, *Backlash*, 112.

[24] Stables, "The Postmodern," 171, emphasis original.

[25] Linda Ruth Williams, "A Woman Scorned: The Neo-Noir Erotic Thriller as Revenge Drama," in *Neo-Noir*, eds. Mark Bould, Kathrina Glitre, and Greg Tuck (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 170.

[26] Megan Abbott, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 138.

[27] Diana Powell, "Megan Abbott," in *100 American Crime Writers*, ed. Steven Powell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 17.

[28] Megan Abbott, *Die a Little* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 3.

[29] Abbott, *Die*, 9.

[30] Abbott, *Die*, 21.

[31] Abbott, *Die*, 23.

[32] Abbott, *Die*, 182.

[33] Abbott, *Die*, 84.

[34] Abbott, *Die*, 179.

[35] Abbott, *Die*, 3.

[36] Abbott, *Die*, 235.

[37] Abbott, *Die*, 238.

[38] Abbott, *Die*, 241.

[39] Abbott, *Die*, 241.

[40] Abbott, *Die*, 241.

[41] Bryan, Brooks, "'*Gone Girl*' Writer Gillian Flynn Talks Opening the NYFF and Revisiting Nick and Amy Dunne." *Film Society Lincoln Center*, September 26, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.filmlinc.org/daily/gillian-flynn-interview/ .

[42] Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (New York: Broadway Books, 2012), 73.

[43] Flynn, *Gone Girl*, 140.

[44] Flynn, *Gone Girl*, 151.

[45] Flynn, *Gone Girl*, 309.

[46] Flynn, *Gone Girl*, 319.

[47] Flynn, *Gone Girl*, 222.

[48] Place, "Women," 60.

[49] Flynn, *Gone Girl*, 223.

[50] Flynn, *Gone Girl*, 225.

[51] Flynn, *Gone Girl*, 236.

[52] Flynn, *Gone Girl*, 27.

[53] Eliana Dockterman, "Is *Gone Girl* Feminist or Misogynist?" *Time Magazine*, October 6, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, http://time.com/3472314/gone-girl-movie-book-feminist-misogynist/ .

[54] Wesley Morris, "If U Seek Amy: The Grim Grossness of David Fincher's '*Gone Girl*.'" *Grantland*, October 3, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/david-fincher-gone-girl-movie-review/ .

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Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* Trilogy as a Noir View of American Social Tensions

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American popular culture faced a lot of darkness at the start of the twenty-first century. Americans dealt with multiple traumas, both global and domestic, ranging from a contested presidential race; the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent global "War on Terror"; domestic surveillance scandals; Enron and other corporate scandals; bank failures and the Global Financial Crisis; multiple recessions; high unemployment; mass shootings; racial tensions; and police brutality, among others. At the same time Americans dealt with these issues in the political realm, their entertainment preferences shifted to stories with archetypal heroes, especially those from comic books— more comics-based films were released between 2001 and 2010, in fact, than in all previous years combined.[1] This trend is not unusual, Shaun Treat points out, because archetypal heroes flourish in times of national trauma. The predominance of comic book heroes, however, is unprecedented. Comic book scholars such as Treat and Liam Burke have attempted to explain this particular choice for heroic material, suggesting that current popularity stems from the traumas of 9/11, in which Americans desire cultural heroes who provide nostalgia for simpler times, escapism from current woes, and wish fulfillment for trauma resolution. Other likely reasons are timely advancements in digital technology that allows more efficient and faithful adaptations, as well as producers' recession-time preference to invest in projects with already-established fan bases and franchising opportunities.[2] Whatever the reasons, Americans increasingly turned to comics-based movies at the start of the twenty-first century.

American tastes during this period did not, however, gravitate towards light-hearted fare. Instead, twenty-first century Americans gravitated towards darker fare in a manner parallel to mid-twentieth-century Americans, who were drawn to dark films—or *film noir*, as French critic Nino Frank labeled them—for similar reasons: traumas of World War II and the Cold War; timely technological advances in cameras, film, and lighting and production techniques; and studio preferences for investing in projects with already-established fan bases, such as films that fit the "Red Meat Crime Cycle" that started with 1944's *Double Indemnity*. Comics-based films have appeared in the top 10 box office results every year since 2002, with the "darker" franchises topping the charts.[3] In particular, Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* trilogy—arguably the darkest franchise from this period—has been popular, with *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) currently occupying the 5th and 9th spots on the all-time domestic box office list.[4]

In this essay, I look at *The Dark Knight* trilogy and its engagement with cultural darkness at the beginning of the twenty-first century. I suggest Nolan's trilogy offers a dark view of America in which crime reveals ongoing geopolitical and domestic social tensions. Popular reviews likewise examine Nolan's films' engagement with social tensions. Reviews for *Batman Begins* (2005), for example, understand it as a liberal democratic exploration of crime as a social ill.[5] Reviews for the trilogy's final two movies focus on engagements with specific political issues. Starting with Andrew Klavan's *Wall Street Journal* article, *The Dark Knight* (2008) has been read as affirmation of the Bush Administration's War on Terror counter-terrorism tactics.[6] Reviewers for *The Dark Knight Rises* likewise read the film as partisan, though reviews are split on how it treats Occupy Wall Street (OWS): as Benjamin Winterhalter shows, reviewers on the left "recoiled" from "dangerously caricatured" representation of OWS's concerns, while those on the right saw the film as both a "wonderfully accurate depiction" of potential left-wing violence, as well as justification for a strong military state.[7] Academics led by Martin Fradley and Mark Fisher, however, were not only skeptical of partisan readings, but were contemptuous of Nolan's inclusion of multiple political perspectives, which Fradley and Fisher assume is an attempt at increased profits.[8] Regardless of their readings, critics and scholars have focused on the trilogy's films as individual allegories on specific American political issues.

I read *The Dark Knight* Trilogy as a unified project, rather than as discrete political allegories. While each film has a separate political issue at its center, approaching them as a unified project allows a view of the common tensions underlying the all three films' prominent issues. It is unsurprising that critics and reviewers dismiss Nolan's insistence that his films are apolitical—whether because they see their own partisan ideologies reflected in his work, or because they see an ambiguous mixture of partisan solutions. I read this multiplicity of

solutions as a strength, rather than a profit-based weakness, because it allows the trilogy to function as what Alex Evans calls a "fault line text," where cultural hegemony can be met with resistant readings.[9] I am less interested in any particular solutions the films offer when Batman defeats his antagonists, and more interested in the social tensions background to conflicts Batman resolves. As Nolan tells *Rolling Stone,* the trilogy contains a variety of background tensions his villains take advantage of in crimes that reveal the "cracks of society."[10]

These cracks allow *The Dark Knight* trilogy to provide a dark view of America that—like films from the classic noir period—indexes, organizes around crime, and engages with the domestic tensions within and caused by uncertain geopolitical circumstances. Also like films from the classic noir period, *The Dark Knight* Trilogy indexes and engages with widespread paranoia, xenophobia, corruption, flawed systems of protection, and class melodrama. I argue that *The Dark Knight* Trilogy goes beyond 9/11 traumas to show a view of noir America within the neoliberal world order. Nolan's trilogy offers a noir view of the cracks, fault lines, and fissures in social relations, showing that social tensions not only have not been overcome by the promises of neoliberalism, but have perhaps been perpetuated by it. Viewing this trilogy through a noir lens may not solve social tensions any more than Batman can, but it can highlight areas in American political, economic, and social order that need further examination.

The Dark Knight Trilogy as a Noir Interrogation

In crime fiction, crime is not only a part of everyday life, but is the very center of social organization. The state's rule of law provides the justice that protects individual freedom and maintains social order. In the noir tradition, however, the state's institutions of law have failed, extralegal justice is required to restore order, and domestic social tensions are part of the order that is restored. *The Dark Knight* Trilogy shows precisely this world view, though, for many, it would not pass a Justice Potter Stewart test for determining noirness: we might not be able to define noir, but we know it when we see it. Noir, in fact, is notoriously difficult to define; ever since Frank used the term to describe WWII-time American films, we have debated whether noir is bound to a particular time period, whether it is a genre or movement, and whether it can be defined through aesthetics, themes, or whether it requires a combination of the two. Thanks to Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward, Silver and James Ursini, Janey Place and Lowell Peterson, and Paula Rabinowitz, we at least agree that noir is a visual representation of a darker view of life.

A wealth of scholarship situates noir on particular forms of darkness. Influentially, Paul Schrader argues that noir's pessimism was centered around

post-war disillusionment and a desire for an honest and harsh view of American life. Its aesthetics, he argues, were heavily influenced by German Expressionism's use of contrasting light and dark, while its themes were borrowed from American hard-boiled crime fiction.[11] Equally influential, Robert Porfirio suggests noir's harsh view stems from the Existentialist philosophy globally dominant in the post-WWII period. For Porfirio, the hallmark of noir's Existentialism is an outlook from the point of view of a "disoriented individual facing a world he cannot truly accept, that places an emphasis on man's contingency in a world with no transcendental values or moral absolutes."[12] Nolan's Batman is such a disoriented individual in a world without absolutes.

Nolan's portrayal demonstrates influences from this tradition, even if, as the Film Noir Foundation's Jason Ney suggests, this trilogy is not "pure" noir.[13] Nolan's trilogy obviously cannot fit definitions of classic noir, those modernist texts from between 1941 and 1958 that interrogate American national needs in new and uncertain geopolitical relationships with fascism and communism. Neither does it neatly fit definitions of the neo-noir films from the 1970s through 1990s, those postmodern interrogations of tensions between the emerging neoliberal order and the state, especially when those tensions are situated around twentieth-century circumstances. Nolan's trilogy perhaps fits best as what Mark Bould calls post-noir, which are twenty-first century texts that engage with global capitalism, even if their critiques are not overt.[14] But as Bould also suggests, noir always exists relative to general filmmaking trends and cultural norms.[15] Whether it can be situated within this "post-noir" period, the view *The Dark Knight* trilogy offers is a noir view in its relative darkness to other comics-based films.

Ultimately, the definition of noir does not matter as much as the critical cultural work the films can accomplish. The most important critical cultural work of Nolan's trilogy is in providing a grammar of possibilities for exposing undersides to the American way of life, even as the films' solutions are read as affirmations of that way of life. As I show, those solutions do not resolve the system's underlying social tensions, which both precede Batman's conflicts and remain after he has restored justice. In particular, this trilogy indexes and engages with xenophobia and paranoia—which exist mostly in reviewers' Orientalist readings of terrorism within the films—as well as corruption, flawed systems of protection, and class melodrama. These particular tensions are hallmarks of noir, and provide the means for Nolan's noir view.

Domestic Tensions Within and Caused by America's Geopolitical Circumstances

Treating the three films as a unified project, rather than as separate political allegories, allows them to be read as a noir interrogation of America's social and political systems, rather than as partisan engagements with particular political issues. Individual issues can be overcome when Batman defeats adversaries, but the social tensions that cause or exacerbate these issues persist as long as political and social systems remain unchanged—a political fact Nolan's trilogy demonstrates. In order to see how the trilogy's noir view illuminates these persistent social tensions that permeate American political and social systems, it is necessary to start with the globally dominant political ideology American systems engage with: neoliberalism. Looking at neoliberalism's underlying logic is useful for isolating tensions within American social relations Batman cannot eliminate when he restores order to Gotham.

In the early twenty-first century world Nolan's Gotham inhabits, democracy's primary antagonist has shifted from fascism and communism— the alternative ideologies over and against which 20th-century American democracy defined itself—to global terrorism. Though each film deals with issues democracy faces—whether external terrorism, or internal class-based social conflict—reviewers treat those issues as isolated within *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*, respectively. Reading the two as part of a unified project, however, allows a view in which these issues are connected and their common underlying tensions are made visible. Both issues are connected by neoliberalism's foundational premise that market freedom is not only the most important freedom, but also the freedom that guarantees all others and that eliminates social tensions through profit expansion.[16] Nolan's trilogy, however, indexes and engages with the idea that the neoliberalism promise has failed. Moreover, it narrativizes a common argument from neoliberal scholars: neoliberalism actually fosters social tensions through its modes of facilitating market freedom.[17]

The Dark Knight Trilogy indexes and engages with persistent global tensions American democracy faces by representing two particular modes of market expansion and protection in the service of greater market freedom. These two modes have both global implications that also impact domestic social situations. The first is military intervention, which helps expand markets and protect foreign interests; global terrorism is, in some ways, a response to militarized globalization. The second is what neoliberalism expert David Harvey calls "the financialization of everything," which the trilogy represents and engages through its characters' financial machinations.[18] Both methods for promoting global neoliberalism factor into conflicts with many of Batman's primary adversaries: financial corruption inaugurates Ra's al Ghul's crusade

against America, while stolen military technology facilitates his attack;[19] Bane's financial machinations crash the city's economy and encourage class-based conflict;[20] and a stolen nuclear reactor aids Miranda Tate's attempt to destroy the city.[21] Despite the fact that these threats are external to the domestic relations, their violence occurs within national borders, offering a noir view of how neoliberal global tensions collide with underlying domestic tensions.

Another primary tenant of neoliberal thought is that the state's role is limited to protecting market freedom—and thus, it is thought, all other individual freedoms—through a strong rule of law. The state's challenge, Nikhil Pal Singh suggests, is in maintaining domestic order while promoting that freedom.[22] This challenge is exacerbated, however, not only by the impacts of global tensions, but by the effects of limiting the state's role to just a strong rule of law: social services are cut, capital flows upward, inequality grows, and class power is restored. These effects lead to greater domestic social tensions that make maintaining order more difficult even without external threats, and that leave fissures even when the rule of law restores order. Nolan's trilogy provides a view of this scenario: Batman eliminates threats to Gotham's social order as caused by external threats: stolen military technology is recovered or destroyed, and the economy rebounds—at least in *Batman Begins*, though there are indications it might also recover in *The Dark Knight Rises*. The cracks in American domestic social relations remain even after external threats are mitigated, however—orphaned boys have a better group home to live in, for example, but poverty has not been eliminated.[23] Neither have the tensions that lead to or stem from poverty been dealt with. This is only possible if those cracks existed before and separate from external threats.

Nolan's trilogy indexes and engages with precisely this fact: external forces only exacerbate the domestic tensions that come from promoting market freedom through the state's limited role. These tensions permeate and inform action before any superhero or super villain emerges. In fact, those social tensions make both the hero and the villains' emergence possible: cut services and greater inequality led to the desperation that caused Joe Chill to rob—but did not excuse his murder, he admits—of Bruce's parents.[24] This desperation not only led to the violent act that created Batman, but to the situation that calls Batman into being, where Carmine Falcone, Sal Maroni, and other organized crime figures are able to increase their power by bringing crime, drugs, and other social tensions to the city.[25] Moreover, as Gotham's economic situation declines, the growing inequality and upward flow of capital facilitated an increase in tensions Bane is able to exploit to incite class-conflict—tensions that were there before Bane, and could have conceivably progressed to violence under other circumstances.[26] The tensions contribute to a general sense of chaos that underlies Gotham, where crime is an everyday event, and the political system, itself, is in need of repair. Such a view is distinctly noir,

and illuminates one particular area in the American political, economic, and social order that needs more attention: the inequalities within neoliberal capitalism that foster tensions independent from external threat.

Nolan's Noir: A View of Cracks in the American Social System

Detective fiction—including noir—is inherently conservative, in that its crime resolutions organize society around the state's strong rule of law needed to promote and protect market freedom. Even when there are holes in the state's ability to maintain law and order, an archetypal heroic figure emerges to fill those holes—like Batman in Nolan's Gotham—without ever suggesting alternatives to market-freedom-based social order. Batman, then, is a conservative figure, even when he transgresses the law. However, the sheer multiplicity of crimes committed within the trilogy—as well as the fact that the world spins on even when Bruce retires as Batman, a supposedly *happy ending* several commentators suggest makes this film hard to read as noir—allows for a reading beyond Batman's justice in which the order this justice restores is, itself, part of the problem.

Nolan's Gotham is a noir city, where crime is an everyday issue, social tensions permeate all action, and restoring order only perpetuates tension. Society, itself, is corrupt. Through this noir city, Nolan's trilogy interrogates typical noir themes: societal corruption, flawed systems of protection, and class melodrama. Each of these tensions build upon the others—in fact, it is often impossible to separate them. The underlying problem for all of these themes, however are economic. "Gotham," the stand-in for Ra's al Ghul tells Bruce, "is a breeding ground for crime and corruption," mostly because of economic tensions caused by market expansions, whether through Falcone and Maroni, or through financial speculators like John Daggett.[27] As a noir view, *The Dark Knight* trilogy's interrogation of American social and political order reveals underlying economic tensions that Batman cannot change by restoring order, but that we must continue to interrogate.

Interrogating Social Cracks through Corruption

Typical of a noir city, Gotham is rife with corruption. Its citizens are morally corrupt, not only pursuing illicit desires like drugs and prostitution, but also allowing the crimes that stem from illicit desires to go unchecked. Legal scholar John Ip argues that Nolan's Gothamites demonstrate a lack of popular courage by not standing up to crime;[28] I suggest that Nolan's noir view also demonstrates the systemic shortcomings of focusing only on combatting crime after the fact, rather than by mitigating the underlying social tensions that lead to crime, especially those related to economic inequality.

In a typical noir fashion, the trilogy demonstrates the fault lines and fissures in American social order through economic desires, namely through greed and the desperation market freedom causes those who fall behind. The global North's greed and the global South's desperation is why Ra's al Ghul targets Gotham. Greed and desperation also allow the mob to gain power in Gotham;[29] inspire the mob to turn to the Joker when Batman and the Gotham Police go after their money;[30] and inspire John Daggett to hire Bane as private security in South African mines, as well as to bring Bane to Gotham in order to facilitate a hostile takeover of Wayne Industries.[31] Greed, desperation, and the corruption they cause, also underlie Bane's appeal to the masses—rhetoric that is difficult to read as only a skewed take on OWS given that corruption caused by greed and desperation permeates all three films. In short, *The Dark Knight* trilogy's noir view demonstrates cracks in the American system that cannot be eliminated by only a strong rule of law because the market freedom that dictates the state's role in combatting crime is the very cause of the crimes it tries to combat. Restoring order also restores the underlying social tensions that leads to disorder.

Noirish greed, desperation from inequality, and corruption are, in fact, the reasons Gotham needs an archetypal hero like Batman to restore order: not only have these tensions fostered crime, but they have weakened the only way the state, in its reduced role, can combat crime. Corruption mars every level of Gotham's political and legal institutions. Some of this corruption stems from external forces: the real Ra's al Ghul claims that the League of Shadows has "infiltrated every level of Gotham's infrastructure," which expands beyond the political and legal to include the economic when al Ghul's daughter, Miranda Tate, gains control of Wayne Enterprises.[32] Most of the corruption, however, is internal, and stems from greed: as Gotham's District Attorney Carl Finch quips, the mob have "half of the city bought and paid for."[33] This noir view shows institutions as unable to protect the strong rule of law when the people who inhabit them are corrupted by greed.

The most obvious example of the extent to which greed and corruption pervades Gotham's institutions and inhibit their ability to maintain a strong rule of law comes when Bruce meets Carmine Falcone at Falcone's private bar, where two city councilmen, a union official, off-duty cops, and Judge Faden— who had just moved Chill's hearing to open court to facilitate a Jack-Ruby-like execution that prohibits Chill from testifying against Falcone—are in attendance. There seems no limit to the extent of Falcone's influence, beyond the few honest individuals, such as Jim Gordon, who refuse bribes. Even after Falcone's incarceration, mob influence through greed and desperation remains pervasive, allowing them to both anticipate and avoid bank raids, as well as to kidnap Harvey Dent and Rachel Dawes.

Police, too, are corrupt in Nolan's Gotham. The films focus this corruption on Gordon's partner, Detective Flass, who is not only corrupted by greed—encouraging Gordon to "get wise" and "take the taste" of his bribes—but who also abuses his police power to steal from Gothamites, moonlights as a low-level enforcer for the mob, and offers to kill for money.[34] Flass, while representative of the issue, is not the only corrupt cop; Gordon laments he cannot report Flass's activities because corruption likely pervades the upper levels of police authority, too. Even after Batman and Gordon clean up the force, police corruption remains. Police are corrupted by greed, such as Detective Wuertz, who kidnaps Dent. Police are also corrupted by desperation, such as Detective Ramirez, who kidnaps Rachel because of family medical bills, an example of a crack in the system where cut state services foster social tensions.

Ultimately, Batman and Gordon root out corrupt police and political and legal officials, and restore order by eliminating external threats and reducing internal organized crime. The trilogy does not, however, provide a view in which the sources of these threats have been eliminated; only specific threats have been overcome. In fact, the underlying social tensions that either created those threats or helped them grow, remain—especially those related to economic inequality. Noir typically shows that societal corruption is unaffected even as corrupt individuals meet justice. *The Dark Knight* trilogy's noir view, however, helps draw attention to the fact that social corruption cannot be resolved through a strong rule of law, or even by exceptionalist heroes who fill holes within the law's ability to maintain order. Every crime within the trilogy either stems from problems of desperation caused by reduced state roles and services, from the problems of greed that stem from market freedoms the state protects, or by taking advantage of those who are either greedy or desperate. Restoring order stops that moment of crime, but does not address the inequality, greed, or desperation that caused these crimes, and will continue to cause crimes the state must overcome to protect market freedom.

Interrogating Social Cracks through Flawed Systems of Protection

In noir, even institutions of law and order uncorrupted by greed are unable to protect citizens. This is true in Nolan's trilogy, as well: as Batman and Gordon root out government, legal, and police corruption, they increasingly run into adversaries those institutions are unable to protect citizens from, whether super villains, terrorists, or even everyday criminals. This is especially true for the films' criminals who need psychiatric care—another crack Nolan's noir illuminates by showing that reduced state services make the state's rule of law both more difficult to enact and less effective. These cracks beyond corruption are organized around breakdowns in government and legal

protection that follow this trajectory of *too difficult* to *entirely ineffective*. In *Batman Begins*, no one dares go after Falcone, even though they know where to find him. In the subsequent films, however, legal institutions have lost fear's inhibitions, but are equally unable to enact justice; they no longer will not or cannot act, but what actions they take are ultimately ineffective. The trilogy's noir view shows that, even as corrupted individuals are removed from the strong rule of law, the strong rule of law cannot protect society from its own corruption.

Gotham's police are unable to stop crime. Everyday crimes persist beyond the rogues gallery borrowed from the DC universe: drugs, prostitution, theft, and murder permeate the films. These crimes are impacted by existing social tensions that remain even after Batman restores order. The police are no more able to stop Chill or other small-time criminals than they can stop Ra's al Ghul, Scarecrow, the Joker, Two Face, Selina Kyle, Bane, or Miranda Tate. Moreover, Gotham's institutions cannot protect Gotham's citizens from these criminals, whether in the Narrows, in the hospital the Joker blows up, at the football stadium Bane blows up, or in the financial center Bane takes hostage. The police cannot even protect themselves, whether from the Joker's men who open fire at Commissioner Loeb's funeral, from kidnapping, or from their own their own incarceration, when Bane traps the entire police force underground. In this noir view, the institutions of a strong rule of law are unable to maintain order.

When the police are able to act against crime, their actions prove equally ineffective. Ip notes that the appearance of the Joker proves the criminal justice system's inability to handle threats.[35] The trilogy shows a criminal justice system unable to handle any threat, however. The Gotham police were less inhibited to go after Maroni and his co-conspirators than they were Falcone, but even when Gordon and his men arrest mob leaders, they are unable to secure convictions—either when trying Maroni as an individual, or when trying the entire mob under federal RICO statutes. At best, only the mid-level mobsters would serve jail time.[36] Even Gotham's Dent Act, passed to make incarceration more effective, is insufficient—and borderline illegal. Regardless of the legal framework or particular methods of incarceration employed, these films show a view wherein incarceration is an inadequate strategy for maintaining order. The prison system is so ineffective, in fact, that the Joker and Bane each actively seek incarceration in order to free other convicts necessary for their plans. Prison breaks are a unifying feature of all three films; escaped convicts fill the ranks of the mob, and the crews used by Scarecrow, the Joker, and Bane. In the trilogy's view of the American legal justice system, institutions' current methods for maintaining a strong rule of law can neither stop crime from happening nor protect average citizens.

The military in this Batman's world is similarly ineffective as a means of protection. This issue is most prominent in *The Dark Knight Rises*, though *Batman Begins* hints at problems protecting or supplying soldiers. For example, Batman's equipment comes from weapons that did not work as planned, such as the Batmobile and the Bat plane, or from equipment too expensive for individual soldiers, such as the Batman's suit or his surveillance equipment. In addition to flawed equipment and budgetary constraints, the films show flawed intelligence operations, as well as flawed special operations. The CIA unwittingly aids Bane's quest by bringing him to the nuclear scientist he needed to create a bomb. The military is then unable to find the bomb, to send special ops teams to disarm the bomb, or to organize air strikes to destroy the bomb. Moreover, the military in this movie puts Gotham's citizens directly in harm's way, blowing up the only avenue for escape from the imminent explosion. As with the police, the military of Nolan's Gotham is a flawed system that cannot protect its citizens through strength.

Flawed systems of protection abound in film noir. The fingerprint of this particular critique is strong in *The Dark Knight* trilogy, in which the state's institutions of protection are either unwilling to act, unable to act, or ineffective in their actions. Batman fills many of the holes in this system—demonstrating will, ability, and efficacy when dealing with the threats each film is organized around: the mob, terrorism, or violent uprisings. Despite the defeat of these threats, the underlying tensions that allowed each threat to flourish remains unchanged, and the system remains unchallenged except for suggestions for more strength to combat threats to order—suggestions the trilogy shows cannot work. As more state efforts are put into bolstering institutional strength, fewer resources are put into state services that could mitigate the social tensions leading to crime; the trilogy highlights fissures that show more strength will exacerbate problems of social order, rather than solving them.

Interrogating Social Cracks through Class Melodrama

Gotham's corruption and flawed systems are connected by the tensions from neoliberal capitalism's gross inequalities. Bruce Wayne is a billionaire of uncommon physical strength and intelligence, capable of solving state's problems of maintaining order. Through him, the films suggest a form of meritocracy often used to justify neoliberal class division. Outside of meritocracy, however, the films do not take a stance on class division, other than to suggest that some, like Daggett, attain wealth through chicanery, rather than merit. This does not dispel notions of merit-based wealth; rather, it perpetuates ideas that there is a "right" form of merit, raising—but never answering—questions of whether income inequality is a meritocratic issue.

Whether or not it is, all of the films' characters are impacted by social tensions caused through income inequality, which the trilogy shows has been made worse in the 21st century, despite claims to the contrary. As Rachel exclaims to Bruce: "people talk about the depression as if it's over, and it's not. Things are worse than ever down here."[37] In the trilogy's noir view, income inequality is the reason for social tensions that are not—and cannot be—solved by either Batman or a strong rule of law.

Thomas Malthus reminds us that the poor will always be with us, despite Adam Smith's claims that self-interest and specialization will make it such that even the poorest among us can afford a coat. In Nolan's Gotham, every character may have a coat—even if it was given by a young Bruce Wayne abdicating his identity—but inequality persists, and has been made worse by neoliberal policies that promote minimized state roles. Some of these tensions are from reduced services: the lack of unemployment benefits that drove Chill to armed robbery, the lack of healthcare services that drove Detective Ramirez to work for the mob, the reduced donations to boys' homes from Wayne Industries, or a lack of psychological treatment for the city's mentally ill. Whatever the cut benefits, desperation from those in need directly impacted Gotham's crime—the desperate filled the ranks for Scarecrow, the Joker, and Bane as much as did escaped criminals. The trilogy's noir view suggests that reduced services, or services tied only to economic output, are as large a crack in the social order as failures of institutional justice.

The upward flow of capital likewise fosters tensions in Gotham. While it is tempting to see Bruce's meritocracy as a moral justification for fighting crime—as some reviewers have—it also raises concerns about Lockean ideals that those with the most success in the system should lead it, especially considering Bruce loses his fortune. Moreover, the films provide a less-than-enthusiastic representation of the wealthy's civic leadership. In *The Dark Knight*, for example, Bruce throws a fundraiser for Harvey, assuring him that "one fundraiser with my pals, and you'll never need another." This choice for Gotham's future proves to be ineffective, however, as the Joker drives Dent to the crime, and the crime-fighting act in his name is semi-illegal and fascist. Bruce is understandably cynical, then, when he attends a fundraiser in *The Dark Knight Rises*, telling Miranda Tate that fundraisers are less about charity and more about "feeding the ego of whatever society hag has laid this on." He seems momentarily mistaken when he learns that Miranda sponsored the fundraiser and paid for the fundraiser out of her own pocket, though he is somewhat justified in his cynicism about her motives when she tries to detonate an atomic bomb within the city. The only case in which wealthy civic leadership actually helps the city is after Bruce's parents have been murdered.[38] Their success is short-lived, however, as the tensions that caused the Waynes' deaths resurfaced.

Regardless of the efficacy of their political participation, the wealthy are not a cherished institution in Nolan's Gotham. As state services are reduced and market freedom is promoted above all else, capital flows upwards and class power is restored, which becomes the crack through which Bane can wedge through to cause disorder. While some read Bane's rhetoric as either a perversion of OWS rhetoric, or as proof of that rhetoric's danger, this noir view shows that the class inequality he espouses is an underlying tension in the American social order—a reading Slavoj Žižek puts forward in speculating why Bane was a realistic (and occasionally sympathetic) villain.[39]

Even as Bane is defeated, his revolution is put down, and order is restored to Gotham, there is no evidence that inequality changes. The closest the films come to dealing with inequality are when the Joker burns half of the mob's money—"it's not about money," he tells them. "It's about sending a message"—and when the boys' home is moved to Wayne Manor, along with increased funds so boys can live there beyond age 16. While two forms of inequality are mitigated, and one social service is improved, there is no evidence that anything else in the city's social relations will change. Unless the underlying tensions are dealt with, the world will spin madly on—and it does. Even as Batman retires, another archetypal hero, Robin, takes his place. Nothing has changed with order restoration; that is part of the order restored. Society, itself, remains corrupted.

Conclusion: Imagining a World Beyond Noir

The Dark Knight trilogy does not take firm stances on most of the social issues that underlie Batman's quest for justice. Nor should we necessarily expect it to; as Fradley comments, it would be a "fool's errand" to expect a mass-market medium to enact radical political change. It is as if Theodor Adorno's worst fears have been brought to bear, Fradley suggests, when the trilogy's narrative arc "only reaffirms the logic of the capitalist system from whence it came."[40] It is possible that tales of crime and justice—whether or not mass media—cannot escape such affirmation; as Paik uses Žižek to argue, we are unable to imagine any alternative to the current order other than complete apocalypse because our historical imagination has been so eroded by the naturalization of the liberal democratic order as the best one possible.[41] This is the order archetypal heroes like Batman restore.

But noir interpretations allow readings beyond the restoration of justice, when the resolution not only creates more tensions than it solves, but does not address the underlying tensions that facilitated the break from order. Noir views draw our attentions to the cracks and fissures within this underlying social order. It becomes increasingly important to provide close readings of archetypal heroic films—whether or not dark—when Americans turn to them

during times of stress and crisis. Americans do not want polemic messages in their entertainment, as many have suggested, but are susceptible to hegemonic ordering in the entertainment to which they turn. This has implications, Raymond Williams suggests, when electoral politics are determined by public opinion;[42] the fact that critics and reviewers squabble over which partisan stances these films contain indicates the films' potential for shaping public opinion. And so, we must continue to point out what else is restored along with order, and how that order organizes social relations that continue to perpetuate particular social, political, and economic realities. Only a noir view can do that, and Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* trilogy provides just such a view.

Notes

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[2] Liam Burke, *The Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre.* (Oxford, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2015), 23-26.

[3] Treat, "How America Learned,"105.

[4] "All-Time USA Box Office," *Internet Movie Database*, 13 Dec 2015. 15 Dec 2015. www.imdb.com/boxoffice/alltimegross.

[5] Benjamin Winterhalter, "The Politics of the Inner: Why *The Dark Knight Rises* is Not a Conservative Allegory," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 48, no. 5 (2015): 1038.

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[7] Benjamin Winterhalter, "The Politics of the Inner: Why *The Dark Knight Rises* is Not a Conservative Allegory," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 48, no. 5 (2015): 1031.

[8] Martin Fradley, "What Do You Believe In? Film Scholarship and the Cultural Politics of the *Dark Knight* Franchise," *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2013): 19; Winterhalter, 1033.

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[18] Harvey, *A Brief History,* 33.

[19] *Batman Begins*, directed by Christopher Nolan (2005; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007), DVD.

[20] *The Dark Knight*, directed by Christopher Nolan (2008; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008), DVD.

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[23] *The Dark Knight Rises*

[24] *Batman Begins*

[25] *Batman Begins; The Dark Knight*

[26] *The Dark Knight Rises*

[27] *Batman Begins*; *The Dark Knight*; *The Dark Knight Rises*

[28] John Ip, "*The Dark Knight*'s War on Terrorism," *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* 9, no. 1 (2011-2012), 224.

[29] *Batman Begins*

[30] *The Dark Knight*

[31] *The Dark Knight Rises*

[32] *Batman Begins; The Dark Knight Rises*

[33] *Batman Begins*

[34] *Batman Begins*

[35] Ip, *The Dark Knight*'s, 227.

[36] *The Dark Knight*

[37] *Batman Begins*

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[40] Fradley, "What Do You Believe In?", 22

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Book Review

Leen Engelen and Kris Van Heuckelom, *European Cinema After the Wall: Screening East-West Mobility*. **New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014. 192 pp**.

Developments in cinema are undoubtedly influenced by technological advancements in filmmaking. Yet they are also determined by historical events. The latter sparked discussion among film scholars of post-Wall European cinema, who have asked, as Rosalind Galt puts it, "how the terrain of 'European Cinema' itself was acted on by the forces that were reshaping the continent."[1] These discussions have led to a number of edited volumes whose publications mark twenty-five years since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Michael Gott and Todd Herzog, for instance, examine how European cinema influences the dichotomies of East and West, national and transnational, and central and marginal that form a shared European identity.[2] Their focus on identity leads to an examination of how the shifting external borders affect internal boundaries and internalized borders. On the other hand, it is a discussion of *external* boundaries, of movement across borders, which runs through Leen Engelen and Kris Heuckelom's important collection.

European Cinema After the Wall: Screening East-West Mobility assesses the cinematic treatment of East-West migration. At the intersection of film studies and European studies, this book provides an interdisciplinary approach that will attract the attention of scholars of film and media, European studies, and migration and historical studies. Comprised of an introduction and ten autonomous essays, this book's key contribution is the way it places at its center those situated at the "periphery" of European cinema. The contributors present a broad understanding of mobility, addressing not only literal migration, but also allegorical and metaphysical migrations, and the *absence* of mobility in cinema. The essays vary in their approach, offering both textual readings of films and production based perspectives, either through a focused study of a single film, or through a survey of various films. Fittingly, as

mobility is the theme of this study, issues such as travel, gendered migration, transnationalism, and migrant labor flow through the "borders" of each chapter.

The opening essay, "West/East Crossings," examines the road movie from Francophone Europe. Michael Gott's contribution is intriguing for the parameters it uses in analyzing what he calls the "two sides of the European road movie coin."[3] Gott signals "positive cinematic voyages," typically eastward tourist traffic, and questions how they are distinguished (or not) from the more prevalent "negative cinematic voyages," generally one-way westward travel motivated by economic and political necessity. Travel within a different class of road movie is explored in Jennifer Stob's "Riverboat Europe." Stob raises questions of a transition from national to post-national identity, what she calls "interim occupancy," through an exploration of the Austrian film *The Danube* (2003). The allegorical reading presents the river boat as the European Union, and the Danube a marker of trans-historical trauma and an important trans-European lifeline for individuals between Western and Eastern Europe. Drawing on Michel Laguerre's notion of *subjective dediasporization*—neither assimilation nor relocation—Stob suggests that "transit is now the permanent and existentially constitutive characteristic of European identity—East, West and Central."[4]

The theme of transit is perpetuated in "Podonki in Albion," where Irina Souch explores the transmission of identity across cultures. This essay examines the representation of Russian identities in Western European cinema, through a textual reading of *Bigga Than Ben* (2008); a British adaptation of the Russian novel *Bol'she Bena* (2001). Drawing on multiple translation theories, notably Lawrence Venuti's notion that translation has a role in intercultural transmissions, Souch argues that Russian identities "undergo a process of cultural interpretation and (re)contextualization,"[5] simultaneously stressing that this is a mutual process that also involves British identities, especially as the film presents a "portrait of London that tourist guidebooks usually conceal."[6] Thus, the East-West travel discussed here is not only reciprocal, but perceptual as well as physical.

Agnes Kakasi's "Transcending the 'Poor Relative' Metaphor" builds on Gott's notion of "negative cinematic voyages" by highlighting the complexity of labor migration in contemporary Irish films. The selected films challenge the familiar portrayal of the disenfranchised economic migrant from Central and Eastern Europe (*The Grim Trials of Vida Novak*, 2009, for example) by stressing the less commonly represented high-skilled labor participation (such as in *Foxes*, 2009). In doing so, Kakasi also addresses the gendered role reversal of marginalized female immigrants working to support their families, introducing a theme of gendered migration that weaves through subsequent essays. For example, "The Panic over Motherhood" highlights what author Helga Druxes calls the "highly charged relationship" between migration and

the maternal figure in a trio of co-productions from France, Germany, Romania, Georgia, and the USA.[7] The essay raises questions of why directors of documentary and melodrama alike have chosen to portray the undocumented working mother in negative terms, as a "tragic figure" or "haunting spector." Meanwhile, Massimo Locatelli and Francesco Pitassio investigate the politics of more and less stereotypical representations of the "young, female Eastern European beauty" in contemporary Italian cinema and television (the *casta meretrix* / holy whore archetype, and the independent heroine, respectively). The authors denote that this "gendered metaphor" reflects the ambivalent attitude of the Italian public opinion toward European migrants as narrative figure, acting persona, and performer. The cleverly titled chapter, "Vesna Run Faster!" challenges this ambivalence. The young titular protagonist in *Vesna Runs Fast* (1996) becomes a metaphor for Italian cinema's limited involvement in transnational productions and discourse, "lead[ing] us to wish her and the present Italian cinema to run a good deal faster."[8]

A number of essays are especially intriguing for their focus on *lack* of mobility. In "Staying Home and Safe," Petra Hanáková examines how Czech cinema refuses to be transnational, as the very title indicates. Hanáková provides a survey of films in which the international travel motif is a "hard-to-find theme,"[9] contextualizing these productions by illustrations of how this "emotionally loaded and morally biased"[10] motif is embedded in Czech culture, despite the political changes post-Wall. A focused case study of *The Ride* (1994) highlights this trend of domesticity, as well as a second class of film in which international travel is attempted, though not successful, portraying a "fabricated dream of losers."[11] Klāra Brūveris perpetuates Souch's discourse on the refusal to be transnational in her essay, "The Latvian Accent," through a discussion of metaphysical migration in contemporary Latvian cinema. Brūveris analyses how *Vogelfrei* (2007), *The Dark Deer* (2006), and *The Hunt* (2009) highlight the tension between two distinct discourses of nation: liberal internationalism and agrarian nationalism. Referencing Hamid Nacify's "accented structures of feeling,"[12] Brūveris documents how characters in the films embody these discourses of nation, some occupying both at once in a process of "in-betweenness."

Labor migration, as touched upon in Gott, Kakasi and Druxes, is arguably the most widespread theme in this collection and is the focus of multiple essays. In "From Dysfunction to Restoration," Van Heuckelom, like Stob, explores allegorical potential, rather than social realism. The allegorical mobility here is one of "outsiders" and "insiders" in three films from France, Austria, and Sweden whose settings all depict the house under construction. The Polish immigrant workers remodel, reconstruct, and restore the buildings

that symbolize "fortress Europe," though they can only glimpse the interior and its (aging) inhabitants through scaffolds and windows. This chapter provides engaging discussion of these motifs: the scaffold a "social ladder" for emigrants, and the window screen a "vehicle to make the viewer aware of the critical condition of the house under reconstruction."[13] Likewise, in "Eastern Tales of Going West," Nicoleta Bazgan offers a micropolitical assessment of labor migration toward Western Europe in Romanian director Cristian Mungui's first feature-length film, *Occident (*2002). She seeks the "micronarratives" that reveal the intricacies of migration—the "affective impact" the imagined Occident has on the lives of the protagonists—before the event takes place.[14] Subsequently, Bazgan highlights the important role of the arbitrary and the accidental directorial treatment of these emigrants-to-be.

As the editors remind us, Bazgan's focus on the micropolitics of East-West migration—its ambiguities, contradictions, and subtleties—captures the very aim of this volume. As such, it is an apt conclusion, though this volume still lacks an afterward or formal conclusion that might have suggested ways in which these analyses could be further developed, either in different peripheral cinemas, or within other genres (the documentary and television, for example) as this publication only begins to do. Nevertheless, *European Cinema After the Wall: Screening East/West Mobility* is a valuable study that offers critical examinations of filmic representations of post-1989 migration.

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Notes

[1] Galt, Rosalind. *The new European Cinema: Redrawing the Map.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, 1.
[2] Gott, Michael and Todd Herzog. *East, West and Centre: Reframing Post-1989 European Cinema.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
[3] Engelen and Van Heuckelom, *European Cinema After the Wall*, 2.
[4] Ibid, 148.
[5] Ibid, 98.
[6] Ibid, 109.
[7] Ibid, 55.
[8] Ibid, 51.
[9] Ibid, 113.
[10] Ibid, 199.
[11] Ibid, 121.
[12] Ibid, 125, 128, 131, 137.
[13] Ibid, 79.
[14] Ibid, 165.

Book Review

Galen A. Foresman, *Supernatural and Philosophy: Metaphysics and Monsters...for Idjits.* **Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013. 202 pp.**

Those who teach introductory courses, either for majors or non-majors, often look for ways to engage their students without sacrificing rigor in content or structure.[1] Some instructors may opt for a "real world" approach, where assignments might include volunteering in their communities, as many Jesuit university courses require, while others may opt for pure fantasy as a means to introduce archetypal topics. Along this latter approach, professor Galen Foresman, known for his work with popular culture and morality,[2] has playfully utilized the WB television show "Supernatural" as catalyst for tackling a few classic questions of philosophy. In this text, Foresman has compiled fifteen essays from fellow scholars and fans of the show, which explore topics from morality to Marxism through the adventures of the demon-hunting brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester. The essays fall into four broadly themed sections, featuring subsections with cheeky titles that match the rock-and-roll inside jokes of the show. This combination of traditional discussion topics and a pop culture theme makes for a text that succeeds both as a means to interest undergraduate students, as well as a playful outlet for scholars to bridge their work and leisure.

Foresman begins with a breezy, jocular introduction, where he spoofs characters of the show to introduce the subject and worth of philosophy. Part One of the book, entitled "Of Monsters and Morals," opens with three rather similar essays by Nathan Stout, Foresman and Francis Tobienne, and Shannon B. Ford, which explore the definition of a "monster," and "what happens if that monster doesn't deserve to be killed?"[3] This idea translates well from the demons, werewolves, and vampires of the show to criminals and deviants that society may well refer to as "monsters." Stout's contribution specifically presents the concept of moral philosophy, while Foresman and Tobienne take

the opportunity to introduce Aristotelian metaphysics. Ford nicely broaches the ever-relevant topic of jus in bello (which also happens to be the title of an episode), supplying a goodly number of sources and further reading. The last essay of the section, by Devon Fitzgerald Ralston and Cary Applegate, also examines roles defined by monsters and the "hunters"[4] who pursue them. By invoking the ideas of Sartre, Hume, and Hobbes, the authors compare the larger obligations of hunters to society, and how those balance with the concept of free will.

The Part Two essays, from "Life, Liberty, and the Apocalypse," address the governing laws of the *Supernatural* world. Foresman raises the questions of who goes to Hell and why, as well as some salient points concerning the definition and perception of punishment from Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant, and American philosopher Joel Feinberg. Dena Hurst successfully compares the communities of angels and devils to the communities controlled by Hobbes' Leviathan. Karl Marx would disagree with the lives of the monster hunting protagonists, according to Jullian L. Canode, who does a fine job bringing the larger, community-level issues of labor down to a personal, if fictional, level. Patricia Brace and John Edgar Browning finish Part Two of the text. Browning thoroughly examines the concept of jus in bello by comparing the Supernatural episode of that title with the film Night of the Living Dead. Finally, Patricia Brace uses a Kantian objectification analysis of the feminine influences in the show, but is the first of a few selections that seem out of place. Her work, "Mothers, Lovers, and Other Monsters: The Women of *Supernatural*," would have been better paired with Stacy Goguen's contribution, "Masculinity and Supernatural Love," featured in the last part of the book. Indeed, gender issues would have made for an excellent section on its own, as Supernatural presents exactly the sort of popular culture influence that undergraduates may fail to recognize as one that advances male-dominant hegemony.

Daniel Haas opens Part Three, "Evil by Design," by deftly walking the reader through an introduction to the "logical problem of evil."[5] Here, he questions God's reality through the eyes of one of the protagonists, Dean Winchester. Similarly, Frederick Curry insists that even angels from Supernatural "can reasonably be atheists," as none of those featured in the show have empirical evidence of God.[6] Curry also provides a gentle and amusing introduction to the construction of a logical argument that many professors may find quite useful. Danilo Chaib serves as a kind of "tour-guide" to the standard names and discussions of the discipline, including Spinoza, Descartes, Kant, Berkeley, and Hegel in his discussion of the person of God. Chaib also provides one of the better reading lists of the collection at the end of his essay.

Foresman joins with James Blackmon to open Part Four, "It's Supernatural," which discusses the very meaning of the word "supernatural."

Their essay, "Naturally Supernatural," takes this a bit too far, spending time arguing about dictionary entries, where it might have usefully served as a clever introduction to the whole text. Goguen's previously mentioned essay then follows, where she dissects the awkward but fierce affection between the brother protagonists. Carefully weaving in Hobbes, Coke, and Nietzsche, she broaches the topics of freedom, identity, gender roles, and homophobia. The final essay in this section and book, by Joseph L. Graves, supplies one of the best. Presenting the familiar kind of academic happy hour conversation, Graves uses this pop culture vehicle to make well-crafted distinctions between the "natural" world and the "supernatural" one.

In reading Supernatural and Philosophy, students would need to have or gain a fairly intimate knowledge of the show for the essays to be meaningful. Clearly, these authors fall under "fangirl" and "-boy" status, referencing a multitude of episodes with high fluency. Since a number of essays discuss the same benchmark episodes, such as "Jus in Bello,"[7] "The Girl Next Door,"[8] and "What is and What Should Never Be,"[9] a college course could easily incorporate viewing those episodes as part of the curriculum. Such a class, with the winning mixture of academic rigor and campy television, can be enlightening and enjoyable, but also useful for building community in a freshman class or a group of discipline majors. A number of the authors, such as Chaib, Ford, Hurst, Brace, Blackmon, and Goguen obviously understood this text as an explicit opportunity for inviting students into the discipline of philosophy, though some purists may understandably blanch at invoking Marx through a Warner Brothers Entertainment, Incorporated vehicle. *Supernatural and Philosophy* should never supplant a standard survey text, nor does it aim to. It could, however, give an energetic boost to a philosophy club event, a summer elective, or freshman seminar.

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Notes

[1] Gilbert Allardyce, "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course," *The American Historical Review* 87 (June 1982): 695–725; J. Paul Hunter, "The Future of the Past: Teaching Older Texts in a Postmodern World," *South Atlantic Review* 59 (May 1994): 1–10; Richard H. Kohn, "The Practice of Military History in the U.S. Government: The Department of Defense," *The Journal of Military History 61* (January 1997): 121–147; and William Parente and Mickey McCleery, "Campus Radicalism and a Relevant Political Science: Channel Undergraduate Interests Constructively," *The Journal of Higher Education* 39 (June 1968): 316–325, all discuss the importance of

finding intriguing gateway topics and approaches for undergraduates in order to introduce more sophisticated materials and concepts.

[2] Dr. Foresman has chapters in similar texts, including "What's Wrong With Camping?" in *Halo and Philosophy*, ed. Luke Cuddy (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2011), 145–158; "Making the A-List," in *Supervillains and Philosophy*, ed. Ben Dyer (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2009), 23–30; and "Why Batman Is Better Than Superman," in *Batman and Philosophy*, ed. Mark D. White and Robert Arp (Hoboken: J. Wiley & Sons, 2008), 227–238.

[3] Nathan Stout, "Are Monsters Members of the Moral Community?" in *Supernatural and Philosophy*, ed. Galen Foresman (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 7.

[4] *Supernatural* nomenclature for those who make a vocation of killing demons, werewolves, vampires, *et. al.*

[5] Daniel Haas, "Dean Winchester and the *Supernatural* Problem of Evil," in *Supernatural and Philosophy*, 113.

[6] Frederick Curry, "Angels and Atheists," in ibid., 126.

[7] Ford's "Hunters, Warriors, Monsters," 26–36; Brace's "Mothers, Lovers and Other Monsters," 83–94; and Browning's "Night of the Living Demons and A Life Worth Living," 95–107, in ibid.

[8] Stout's "Are Monsters Members of the Moral Community?," 7–15; Ford's "Hunters, Warriors, Monsters," Brace's "Mothers, Lovers and Other Monsters," and Chaib's "Oh God, You Devil," 139–149 in ibid.

[9] Ralston and Applegate's "Team Free Will: Something Worth Fighting For," 37–46; Canode's "Hunting the American Dream: Why Marx Would Think It's a Terrible Life," 74–82; Brace's "Mothers, Lovers and Other Monsters," Blackmon and Foresman's "Naturally Supernatural," 153–168; and Goguen's "Masculinity and Supernatural Love," 169–178 in ibid.

Book Review

Sam B. Girgus, *Clint Eastwood's America*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014. xiii, 311 pp.

Legendary actor-producer-director, Clint Eastwood (b. 1930), is an iconic American symbol of masculinity with numerous recent books about him, notably: *Clint: A Retrospective* (2010), *Eastwood on Eastwood* (2010), *The Ethical Vision of Clint Eastwood* (2012), *Clint Eastwood: Master Filmmaker at Work* (2012), *New Essays on Clint Eastwood* (2012), *Clint Eastwood: Interviews*, 2nd ed. (2013), *Clint Eastwood: A Biography* (2014), *The Philosophy of Clint Eastwood* (2014), and now Girgus's *Clint Eastwood's America* (2014)[1] as part of a Polity Press series of textbooks.

Eastwood initially earned prominence as ramrod Rowdy Yates in TV's *Rawhide* before The Man With No Name and his other macho loner personas earned him international fame within Sergio Leonie spaghetti westerns, his *Dirty Harry* cop franchise, and numerous other genre films covering war, sports, comedy, religion, urban thriller, romance, biopic, crime, and American western. Therein the archetypal laconic actor displayed his virility, virtuosity, and vulnerability, but as Eastwood-the-Academy Award-winning director, he shines even brighter with his mature morality tales filled with insight and sensitivity whilst his protagonists exhibit rugged individuality, initiative, personal responsibility, redemption, and spiritual renewal. It is to Girgus's credit that he turned his critical eye upon selected Eastwood films through the psychoanalytic lens of Kristeva, Levinas, Ricoeur etc. to explore Eastwood's ethical and moral sensitivities set against contemporary American backdrops.

The book consists of the usual Contents, Acknowledgments, Abbreviations, Notes and References, Index, Introduction, plus five in-depth chapters of analysis. His "Introduction: Eastwood's America – From the Self to a World View"[2] identified *Unforgiven* as triggering "a series of major transformational films by Eastwood that engage the ethical and moral crises of our times,"[3] that marked a turning point in his artistic career as a "born-again

film-maker"[4] who "snuck in under the radar into the realm of greatness as a director."[5] Girgus subsequently identified the artistic phases of Eastwood's career prior to explicating Eastwood's "nonconformist rebellion"[6] and "existential revolt involving the ethical and social relationship to others."[7] Girgus also identified fourteen Eastwood themes,[8] namely: (1) The rebel and outsider, (2) Liminality, (3) Women and sexuality, (4) Family, children, and community, (5) Race and ethnicity, (6) Western and urban frontiers, (7) Failure, (8) Invincibility and vulnerability, (9) Humor and irony, (10) Religion, (11) Justice, (12) Love, (13) Ethics and redemption, and (14) Death and transcendence.

Chapter 1: The First Twenty Years: Borderline States of Mind[9] briefly examined Eastwood's early efforts, notably *High Plains Drifter*, *Pale Rider*, *Bronco Billy*, *The Honkytonk Man*, and *Play Misty for Me*. Girgus explored "the expression of the border state of mind"[10] that aimed towards "a greater understanding of his themes of transcendence and redemption"[11] as Eastwood experimented "with core values and attitudes about masculinity and identity."[12]

Chapter 2: *Unforgiven*: The Search for Redemption[13] examined his Oscar-winning western, "Eastwood's masterpiece…an extended search for moral and ethical meaning,"[14] "a story of death and defecation…a disturbing religious and psychoanalytical portrait of life as 'shit' and money as the epitomization of death in life."[15] Girgus dwells extensively upon the Munny (assassin)-Delilah (prostitute) relationship.

Chapter 3: *Mo Cuishle*: A New Religion in *Million Dollar Baby*[16] examined his woman's boxing film, "a classic of lasting significance"[17] which explored the *de facto* father-daughter relationship between Frankie and Maggie, and the "moment of absolute ethical and moral crisis"[18] concerning the crippled Maggie's request for euthanasia. Frankie, the "practicing Catholic"[19] who got "pleasure over tormenting the priest with questions about the Holy Trinity and the Immaculate Conception"[20] needed to make a life-death decision that paralleled Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.[21]

Chapter 4: Cries from Mystic River: God, Transcendence, and a Troubled Humanity[22] examined the multiple religious dimensions of *Mystic River*, "another triumph for Eastwood of both art and idea,"[23] but which "assiduously avoids any anthropomorphic rendering of God,"[24] but suggests "Jimmy as a Christ-figure"[25] and leaves the future of the murder unresolved.

Chapter 5: *Flags of Our Fathers/Letters from Iwo Jima*: History Lessons on Time and the Stranger[26] examined the World War II Battle of Iwo Jima from complementary American and Japanese perspectives. It made film history as "a time experiment, an ethical project, and a historical vision"[27] wherein "Eastwood unmistakably makes the inescapable point that atrocities and criminal acts as well as acts of kindness and mercy occur on both sides of war."[28]

Regrettably, there is no Conclusion, no list of stills, no Filmography (of all films), no actor-crew details of the five central films, and no plot synopses, which leaves neophytes (and readers with poor memories) greatly disadvantaged. Similarly, Girgus's referring to various psychoanalytic concepts without adequate preparation (or Glossary), coupled with dense academic language and extended philosophical quotes will leave neophytes feeling somewhat disorientated. For example: "Levinas's anarchic ethical time before synchronic time,"[29] "psychic *chora*,"[30] "mirror-stage narcissism,"[31] "*Verneinung and Verleugnung*,"[32] "sublimated anality,"[33] "Kierkegaardian subjectivity,"[34] "the synchronicity of the said,"[35] "'*il y a*' or 'there is,'"[36] "mediatic universe of the image,"[37] and "*Caritas*"[38] amongst many others. Furthermore, expecting readers to consult three academic textbooks to examine the history and meaning of psychoanalytic terms[39] is not very practical, even if well-intentioned.

The Index was very scholar-friendly and the many illustrative stills were delightful, but marred by the failure to label and reference them within the text; instead they provided additional film details making two parallel stories that disrupted the reading of the central explanatory narrative (astute marketing for the post-literate age?). Girgus's habit of quoting details from the nominated films' source books, notably Gerald Boyd/F. X. Toole's *Rope Burns: Stories from the Corner*, Dennis Lehane's *Mystic River*, and Bradley and Powers' *Flags of Our Fathers* to "explain" Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby*,[40] Eastwood's *Mystic River*,[41] and Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers*[42] instead of referring to the films directly is worrisome because they are *not* equivalent, interchangeable texts and should *not* be treated as such (other than as asides or interesting points of divergence noted within endnotes).

Since the book's premise was the ethical and moral explication of selected Eastwood films, it was extremely annoying to have this central idea repeated *ad nauseam* within Girgus's Introduction. For example, "films by Eastwood that engage the ethical and moral crises of our times,"[43] "film art and ethical consciousness,"[44] "Eastwood's artistic sensibility and ethical consciousness,"[45] "ethical and spiritual quest…ethical relationships,"[46] "intellectual courage and ethical imagination,"[47] "Artistic tensions and ethical relations,"[48] "films of artistic, intellectual, and ethical maturity,"[49] "moral and ethical responsibility,"[50] "Eastwood's ethical vision,"[51] "moral and ethical relationships,"[52] "his ethical vision,"[53] "a cinema of ethical and moral complexity,"[54] "Eastwood's…passionate ethical vision,"[55] "ethical and moral meaning,"[56] "ethical consciousness,"[57] "an ethical and philosophical proposal,"[58] "the ethical, moral, and social meaning,"[59] "increasing ethical complexity,"[60] "moral and ethical action,"[61] "ethical conflict,"[62] "mental crisis and ethical

challenge,"[63] "ethics, values, and human relationships,"[64] "ethical and social relationship,"[65] "ethical and moral order,"[66] "ethical and moral dimension,"[67] "moral and ethical sensibility,"[68] "moral and ethical superiority…the complexities of moral and ethical experience…moral rigidity…true ethical commitment,"[69] "moral and ethical crisis,"[70] "ethical assumptions and moral behavior,"[71] "ethics and the journey for redemption,"[72] "ethical and psychological drama,"[73] "ethical drama,"[74] "ethical consciousness,"[75] "values, ethics,"[76] "ethical priorities and meaning;"[77] all of which is unnecessarily repetitive and potentially suggestive of an attempt at intellectual indoctrination through repetition instead of clarity through succinctness.

Production-wise, the book is marred by a few annoying blemishes. For example, the film title "Mystic River" was not italicized within "Contents"[78] or in its Chapter 4 title,[79] within "Acknowledgements" the whole paragraph "Calista Marie Doll…Holly Scott"[80] is erroneously printed twice. Girgus's list of "Abbreviations"[81] is missing the "*RB*" entry[82] and the "*SO*" entry,[83] whilst the printing of small page numbers in an awkward font style makes the numbers 3, 6, and 9 look confusingly like 8 at first glance (or with poor eyesight).

Overall, the imperfections aside, there are many gems to admire in *Clint Eastwood's America*, which is academically insightful, emotionally engaging, and an intellectually challenging psychoanalytic exploration of Eastwood's major American movies; even if it exhibits a heavy emphasis upon religion behind Girgus's moral/ethical labels, and is more graduate thesis than hagiography, filmography or introductory. In future editions, one hopes for similar insightful analyses of Eastwood's *Changeling* (2008), *Gran Torino* (2008), *J. Edgar* (2011) etc. wherein America also dominates deeply. It certainly whets the appetite for further exploration, whether of man, theme or field, thus making Girgus's book a worthwhile addition to the ever-growing library concerning Eastwood, auteur analysis, and American popular film.

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Notes

[1] Girgus, Sam B. *Clint Eastwood's America*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014.
[2] Ibid., 1-23.
[3] Ibid., 1.
[4] Ibid., 6.
[5] Ibid., 11.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 13
[8] Ibid., 16-19.
[9] Ibid., 24-69.

[10] Ibid., 25.
[11] Ibid., 39.
[12] Ibid., 49.
[13] Ibid., 70-115.
[14] Ibid., 71.
[15] Ibid., 72.
[16] Ibid., 116-71.
[17] Ibid., 129.
[18] Ibid., 157
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 158.
[21] Ibid., 164-65.
[22] Ibid., 172-230.
[23] Ibid., 173.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 228.
[26] Ibid., 231-83.
[27] Ibid., 238.
[28] Ibid., 261.
[29] Ibid., 4.
[30] Ibid., 49.
[31] Ibid., 54.
[32] Ibid., 65.
[33] Ibid., 105.
[34] Ibid., 166.
[35] Ibid., 198.
[36] Ibid.,218.
[37] Ibid., 264.
[38] Ibid., 283.
[39] Ibid., 292, note 11.
[40] Ibid., 117-19, 121, 153.
[41] Ibid., 190, 226-27.
[42] Ibid., 234-35, 243, 246, 249, 251, 253, 254, 267.
[43] Ibid., 1.
[44] Ibid., 2.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 3.
[47] Ibid., 4.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 5.

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., 6.
[56] Ibid., 7.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 8.
[59] Ibid., 9.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 12.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., 13.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 16.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 18.
[73] Ibid., 19.
[74] Ibid., 20.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 21.
[77] Ibid., 22.
[78] Ibid., vii.
[79] Ibid., 172.
[80] Ibid., x.
[81] Ibid., xii-xiii.
[82] Ibid., 118, 119, 121, 153, 293.
[83] Ibid., 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 283, 298, 300.

Notes on Contributors

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Brian Hollins was born and raised in the United Kingdom. He pursued a technical education leading to a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Leeds before emigrating to California where he earned an M.S.E.E degree at Santa Clara University. He spent his career working in Silicon Valley, progressing over the years from engineering through executive management in the field of semiconductor manufacturing. Since retiring he has kept himself busy pursuing a number of activities and hobbies including cycling, winemaking and hosting an online movie location blog, reelsf.com,

discovering in the process the secret pleasures of film noir. Although an engineer at heart he has always been interested in music and the performing arts. His love of jazz motivated him to become a trustee of the San Francisco Jazz organization and he has for many years been an enthusiastic patron of San Francisco Ballet and San Francisco Opera.

Anton Karl Kozlovic earned a Ph.D. examining Cecil B. DeMille's biblical cinema and researches religion and film at Flinders University (SA) and Deakin University (Vic). He has published in numerous academic journals including *Australian Religion Studies Review*, *Comparative Islamic Studies*, *European Journal of American Studies*, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, *Journal of Religion and Film*, and *Kinema*.

Kenneth Lota is a doctoral student in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He specializes in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American fiction, and is currently working on a dissertation about the reinvention of *noir* tropes and ideas in the works of contemporary authors. Before attending UNC Chapel Hill, he earned a bachelor's degree in English from Tulane University and a master's degree in English from the University of Virginia. Kenneth is originally from New Orleans, Louisiana, and spent half of his senior year of high school in Houston, Texas after Hurricane Katrina flooded New Orleans. When he is not doing academic work, Kenneth maintains a movie review blog, on which he has reviewed over 1,300 films over the years.

Eddie Muller, a/k/a "The Czar of Noir," is a contemporary renaissance man. He writes novels, biographies, movie histories, plays, short stories, and films. His 2002 debut novel, *The Distance*, earned the coveted Best First Novel Award from the Private Eye Writers of America; he's also a two-time Edgar Award nominee from the Mystery Writers of America, and the author of four popular studies of film noir: *Gun Crazy: The Origin of American Outlaw Cinema; Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir; Dark City Dames: The Wicked Women of Film Noir;* and *The Art of Noir: Posters and Graphics from the Classic Era of Film Noir. Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star,* which he co-wrote with the actor, was a national bestseller. Muller has twice been named a San Francisco Literary Laureate. Muller is the founder and president of the non-profit Film Noir Foundation and has been a galvanizing figure in the rescue and revival of America's noir heritage.

Jennifer Nagtegaal is a graduate student in the department of Hispanic Studies at the University of British Columbia. Her research highlights contemporary Spanish and Latin American film and art as essential objects of study in culture, with a specific focus on animation for adult audiences and the graphic novel.

Austin R. Pidgeon teaches English at Brophy College Preparatory in Phoenix, Arizona. He is an M.A. of Literature candidate at San Francisco State University and has been a member of HERA for two years. He is currently completing a thesis titled *Orson Welles in Black and White*, a study of film noir through the lens of three of Welles' films: *The Stranger* (1946), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), and *Touch of Evil* (1958). This thesis offers an optimistic existential reading of films typically understood as unfortunately deterministic. Pidgeon has recorded and produced two albums, published creative works in various literary reviews, and plans to continue his work in American studies after earning his M.A. certificate. He currently lives in Phoenix, Arizona with his dog, Dirk.

Doré Ripley is a professor at California State University, East Bay. She teaches English, including comics, fantasy and science fiction, and short film and is a regular contributor to *Graphic NovelReporter.com*. Her comic work has been featured on *Truthout.org*, *20something reads.com* and *Interdisciplinary Humanities*. As a generalist, she publishes articles on genres ranging from fairy tales and comics to science fiction and medieval literature. She has written articles and given papers on noir issues in comics, films, and science fiction.

Patrick Kent Russell works in the University of Connecticut English Department. His research interests lie in American Studies, cultural studies, and ethnic studies; twentieth- and twenty-first century American literature and film; and the intersections of labor, class, race, gender, and sexuality. He is particularly interested in how entertainment informs our views of the world; how detective fiction interrogates the liberal and neoliberal state; and in how the state influences perceptions that come from fictive texts by extending or denying permissions to represent the state's institutions of law and order. Russell has published and presented on detective fiction, film noir, and transpositions of classic literary detectives—like Sherlock Holmes and C. Auguste Dupin—within the contemporary neoliberal world.

Larry T. Shillock is Professor of English and Assistant Academic Dean at Wilson College. He teaches courses in composition, critical theory, film, gender studies, and the history of literature. His recent publications include essays and book chapters on *Heart of Darkness*, *The Maltese Falcon*, and two cable television series, *Spartacus* and *The Walking Dead*. His administrative duties include overseeing program reviews and faculty development seminars. An avid outdoorsman, he divides his time between Chambersburg, PA, and Emigrant, MT, where he spends summers bird watching, camping, climbing mountains, fly fishing, and trying to keep up with his son Robin, who is studying economics and political science at Columbia University.

Monica J. Stenzel studies the histories of witchcraft and food and holds graduate degrees in History and Music History. Currently, she is

developing a project entitled, "From Boiled Babies to Gingerbread: Witches' Connections to Food, Harvest, and Cannibalism," and an interdisciplinary collaboration, "Strictly Off the Books" which will bring historical primary sources into the performing arts. She teaches history at Eastern Washington University and Spokane Falls Community College.

Steven Yu is an illustrator whose influences stem from science fiction and several genres of film including 1980s and early 1990s action flicks, neo-noir, and martial arts. His current project is a graphic novel about a vengeful orphan who hires a mysterious assassin to help find her mother's killer: a bio-engineered creature from an elite police unit known as "The Hybrids." The *Interdisciplinary Humanities* cover artwork was created with the use of hands-on and digital media. You can support Yu's work at www.patreon.com/sydstudio and check out his portfolio at www.cargocollective.com/stevenyu.

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