# BECOMING FILM NOIR

# Film noir adaptations of hard-boiled fiction, 1944-46

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**Abstract**

This thesis interrogates a number of issues that surround what critics have designated 'film noir' and its relationship to that branch of modern American literature identified as 'hard-boiled fiction'. Thus, the main subject matter for the thesis consists of selected films noirs from 1944—46, and the novels of Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, and Raymond Chandler. The thesis argues that the adaptation process is of central significance to the 'film noir' debate and to film noir itself. While it argues for a dialogic exchange between 'noir' and 'hard-boiled fiction', it proposes as well that there was also a fundamental incompatibility between the two modes. The thesis discusses the difficulties encountered by Hollywood studios in adapting Cain's work due to the candid representation of 'adult' themes, and how this conflicted with Hollywood censorship, carried out by the Production Code Administration (PCA). In order for Cain's fiction to be adapted, it is argued, Hollywood conventions regarding the representation of sex and violence and the PCA guidelines by which they were governed had to undergo radical change.

The critical and scholarly contexts for this argument include debates concerning influence, censorship, and the involvement of the PCA with the adaptation process, and the notion, as maintained by elements within the revisionist debate, that 'film noir' has no conceptual or theoretical basis. The thesis challenges revisionist arguments that 'noir' was 'invented' by French critics in 1946, and argues that although the genre was named retrospectively, generic practice was established by Hollywood producers in acts of 'applied criticism' prior to production, from around 1944 onwards. The thesis contextualises the generic practice of 'noir' within the history of film, while arguing simultaneously for historic changes in Hollywood film-making of the mid-1940s in terms of the representation of 'adult' themes, and the relaxation of the Production Code.

The thesis discusses how criticism has tended to privilege other media, such as the plastic arts and literature, over film, and argues that notions of artistic style and influence must give consideration to the immanence of the film production context. The notion that 'noir' was influenced by the artistic movement known as 'German Expressionism' has been questioned by the revisionist debate. The thesis examines and discusses key German films of the Weimar period, when the artistic movement 'Expressionism' flourished, arguing that

the Weimar influence is discernible in the generic practice of 'noir'. However, the thesis makes a case that this is, primarily, the legacy of Weimar cinema, and that the influence of 'Expressionism' should be discussed within this medium-specific context.

The thesis examines the connections between the work of a number of influential directors and the signifying practice of 'noir', including Murnau, Lang, Hitchcock and Hawks. It is proposed that certain 'noir' conventions can be traced back to the work of these influential directors. The thesis proposes a way of understanding 'film noir' as a genre, and argues that the adaptation process needs to be seen as a nexus for various discourses, including directorial style, screenwriting, cinematography, the studio system, and censorship, in addition to the relationship between the film and the novelistic text.

# DECLARATION SHEET

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# Contents

# Introduction

**Becoming film noir**

The primary focus of this study is the relationship between film noir and the 'hard-boiled' mode of crime fiction, in particular, the work of Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler. A number of acclaimed films noirs are adapted from hard-boiled texts, including several of the films analysed in detail here, namely *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Garnett, 1946), both based on novels by Cain, and *The Big Sleep* (Hawks, 1946), based on the novel by Chandler. The thesis argues that, in the main, the relationship between films and books is seen to involve a form of dialogic exchange. As Frank Krutnik notes 'Hollywood genres are not self-contained, for they are influenced by, and themselves influence, other modes of popular culture'.[1] This exchange accounts for certain shared elements, such as character types and narrative conventions.

The thesis examines various aspects of this dialogic relationship. For example, Chapter Two analyses and discusses *Double Indemnity*, Paramount's groundbreaking 1944 adaptation of Cain's 1936 novel. The studios had aspired to adapt the novel's 'adult' themes of sex and violence since the mid-1930s but the Motion Picture Production Code (or 'the Code') prevented them from so doing, that is, until Paramount produced a screenplay which satisfied the censors, the Production Code Administration (PCA). However, the screenplay was co-written by director Billy Wilder and Cain's fellow novelist, Raymond Chandler. Chandler is seen to make a significant contribution to the adaptation, both in terms of the use of innuendo which enabled Paramount to circumvent and effectively manipulate 'the Code', and by helping to create a 'moral centre' for the film, lacking in the novel, in the character of Barton Keyes. If the studios had wanted to adapt Cain's work for over a decade then it was another hard-boiled novelist, Chandler, who helped them to do it. Chapter Three, on the other hand, examines *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, MGM's 1946 adaptation of Cain's 1934 novel, to determine the way in which the film applies and consolidates generic practice established in earlier noirs such as *Double Indemnity*. The Chapter also includes an analysis of the intertextual relationship between novel and film in order to identify, and provide reasons for, the modifications made to the source text by the MGM production team, thereby focusing upon the specifics of the adaptation process.

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[1] F. Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.33.

A problem arises, however, from the basic premise of the thesis. Before one can discuss the relationship between noir and its hard-boiled literary sources, one must first recognise that defining film noir as a Hollywood genre has long been a problematic undertaking. Étienne Borde and Raymond Chaumeton, the authors of *Panorama du film noir Américain* (1955), the first, book-length study on the subject, commented 'The existence over the last few years of a "*série noir*" in Hollywood is obvious. Defining its essential traits is another matter'.[2] James Naremore begins his comprehensive study of the genre, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (1998), by proposing that '[i]t has always been easier to recognize a film noir than to define the term'.[3] In attempting to provide a synopsis, both of the films themselves and the critical response to them, Naremore also observes that 'no writer has been able to find the category's necessary and sufficient characteristics', while 'many generalizations in critical literature are open to question'.[4]

Indeed, the contemporary debate has gone so far as to question the very existence of the genre. As Andrew Spicer observes, if the term 'film noir' applies to 'a discursive critical construction that has evolved over time',[5] one must first acknowledge that it is a 'contested construction'.[6] If defining film noir is problematic, indeed, if the existence of the genre is disputed, this could render problematic an examination of the relationships between noir and its supposed influences, including hard-boiled fiction. The thesis therefore has a secondary purpose. In preparing the ground for the discussion of the hard-boiled mode and Hollywood, one must also address the questions regarding the existence of film noir. The title of the thesis, 'Becoming Film Noir', thus refers to the primary and secondary purpose of this study which considers not only how hard-boiled novels were transformed into a new and innovative type of crime thriller, but also how this series of films 'became' film noir, from its cinematic and literary origins to its conceptualisation as a genre.

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[2] Étienne Borde and Raymond Chaumeton, 'Towards a Definition of *Film Noir*', in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. by Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 2001), p.18.

[3] J. Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), p.9.

[4] Ibid., p.10.

[5] A. Spicer, *Film Noir* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), p.24.

[6] Ibid., p.24.

The film noir genre cycle, it is generally agreed, spans the years 1941-1958, starting with *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941) and concluding with *Touch of Evil* (Welles, 1958). However, the term 'film noir' was first used by the Italian-born French critic Nino Frank in August 1946 to describe a series of Hollywood films, mostly from 1944 but including *The Maltese Falcon*, screened in Paris that summer. This was later consolidated by Borde and Chaumeton in 1955. Thus, the circumstances surrounding the 'birth' of noir involve two discrete yet interdependent elements: Hollywood film production, commencing in earnest in 1944, and French critical reception, which did not get underway until 1946. The term 'film noir' refers simultaneously, therefore, to a corpus of work and a retrospective critical concept. To put this in context, when John Huston and Warner Brothers adapted Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* they did not know they were making a film noir. Further to this, in discussing film noir, one must necessarily consider the critical reception of the films concerned, in addition to their place within the history of Hollywood production, thereby engaging in a self-reflexive, or meta-critical discourse. In this sense, as Naremore observes, film noir belongs to 'the history of ideas as much as to the history of cinema'.[7]

However, as noted above, there are seen to be certain difficulties arising from this. For instance, what if the concept of film noir, as identified by French critics, was inextricable from, and only applicable to, the conditions of reception in Paris in 1946, and later in 1955? Would this not lead to endless, but nonetheless doomed, attempts to reconcile the notions of French critical reception with the facts of American production? Should the critical debate not concern itself with exploring alternative lines of argument, rather than attempting to link heterogeneous elements of certain American films back to a single unifying concept, as established by French film critics, more than seventy years ago? These are among the questions raised by the revisionist tendency within the critical debate. For instance, Thomas Elsaesser argues that 'film noir is a textbook example of how *not* to write film history', due to the fact that 'never have so many causes explained so few effects'.[8] Marc Vernet, on the other hand, proposes that 'the more elements of definition are

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[7] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.11.

[8] T. Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 423.

advanced, the more objections and counter-examples are raised, the more precision is desired, the fuzzier the results become'.[9]

As noted above, Naremore proposes that film noir belongs to 'the history of ideas as much as to the history of cinema'. Vernet, on the other hand, argues that '[a]s an object or corpus of films, film noir does not belong to the history of cinema; it belongs as a notion to the history of film criticism'.[10] He refers to the critical construct of film noir as the 'object of beauty' that allows us 'to see [film noir's] relation to German Expressionism and psychoanalysis', and to indulge in 'its faceless critique of capitalism'.[11] He also draws attention to what he refers to as the 'uncriticized list of heterogeneous criteria'[12] from which the 'object' is constructed, including hard-boiled fiction.

There is, thus, a need to address these questions before proceeding with the discussion of the adaptation process. While the primary focus of the thesis is the relationship between film noir and hard-boiled fiction, it also examines the intertextual connections between noir and two of the other 'heterogeneous criteria' which Vernet maintains are 'uncriticized', namely Weimar cinema (often referred to as 'German Expressionism'), and the Hollywood Gangster cycle. This is to enable a comprehensive discussion of the various discourses involved in the adaptation process, including cinematic as well as literary influences. It should also be noted that the thesis is concerned solely with films noirs produced between 1944 and 1946. Spicer argues that the evolution of film noir can be seen to occupy several distinct phases: 'The Experimental Period' (1940-43); 'Studio Expressionism' (1944-47); 'The Location Period and the Semi-Documentary' (1947-52); followed by a period of 'Fragmentation and Decay' (1952-58).[13] The reasons for focusing solely upon the 'Studio Expressionism' phase are given later in the Introduction.

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[9] M. Vernet, 'Film Noir on the Edge of Doom', in *Shades of Noir*, ed. by Joan Copjec (London and New York: Verso, 1993), p.4.

[10] Ibid., p.1.

[11] Ibid., p.1.

[12] Ibid., p.2.

[13] Spicer, *Film Noir*, pp.49-63.

The discussion now addresses the debate surrounding the existence of film noir. In summary, this involves a dispute concerning the French reception of Hollywood cinema, and whether or not film noir has any theoretical basis deriving from the facts of American production. The thesis supports the view, as proposed by Naremore, that film noir can be situated both within 'the history of cinema' and 'the history of ideas'. It is argued that both French critical reception and American industrial production were informed by broad cultural and political trends, for example, Freudianism, Surrealism, and a certain affinity with left-wing politics. The following explores this premise in more detail.

In his article '*Un nouveau genre policier: L'aventure criminelle*', published in *L'écran français* in August 1946, Nino Frank praised the 'young generation of Hollywood auteurs' who appeared to Frank to have rejected the 'sentimental humanism' of Frank Capra, John Ford and William Wyler, in favour of an exciting and innovative type of *policier* ('police story'), dealing with 'criminal psychology' and 'the dynamism of violent death'.[14] The four Hollywood films which whetted the appetite of Frank and his fellow Parisian critics for 'criminal psychology' and 'violent death' that summer were: *The Maltese Falcon*; *Laura* (Preminger, 1944); *Murder, My Sweet* (Dmytryk, 1944); and *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944). Naremore observes that a fifth film, Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend* (1945), was another of the Hollywood features exhibited in Parisian movie theatres in the summer of 1946, but that it has subsequently disappeared from the list.[15] As Spicer notes, besides the representation of violence, other aspects of film noir which appealed to Frank were the 'radical visual style', and the 'complex mode of narration', in addition to 'a pronounced interest in the characters' "uncertain psychology"'. In terms of the psychological element of the genre, Frank Krutnik, in his influential 1991 study *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, argues that the 'fascination with internal, subjectively-generated criminal impulses has widely been recognised as a crucial characteristic of 1940s film noir'.[16]

What is important to note here, with particular regard to the concerns of the revisionist debate, is that this fascination may have stemmed at least as much from the preoccupations

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[14] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.16.

[15] Ibid., p.15.

[16] F. Krutnik, 'Introduction', in *In a Lonely Street*, p.xii.

of French critics, for instance with Freudianism, as it did from the films themselves. However, the thesis argues that, in addition to the French fascination with 'uncertain psychology', this aspect of film noir can also be located in the context of an international cultural phenomenon, that is to say, the growing popularity of Freudian psychoanalysis. Krutnik observes that 'The incorporation of a psychoanalytic frame of reference served both to explicate and contextualise a growing interest in the excesses provoked through "psychical disturbance"'.[17] The study sets out evidence to support the view, as proposed by Krutnik, that a contemporary fascination with psychology was an international phenomenon, affecting both European critics and Hollywood film-makers alike.

In the process of providing the series of crime films with a name and a mature critical concept, it can be said that French critics, inclined to view film as art as opposed to mere entertainment, 'invented' film noir. Naremore proposes that '[i]n one sense the French invented the American film noir', arguing that 'they did so because local conditions predisposed them to view Hollywood in certain ways'.[18] With particular regard to these conditions 'postwar France possessed a sophisticated film culture, consisting of theaters, journals, and "cine clubs" where movies were treated as art rather than commercial entertainment'.[19] The French critical commentary on film noir can thus be seen to arise from the prevailing postwar trends in 'Left Bank' intellectual culture.[20]

There being no academic film culture in America at the time, Spicer argues that this left reviewers 'groping for the most appropriate label for these films', with the term 'psychological thriller'[21] being the most commonly used. Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that both the trade press and the industry had identified a newly-evolved type of crime movie before it was 'formally acclaimed'[22] by the French in 1946. For example, a 1945

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[17] Ibid., p.xii.

[18] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.13.

[19] Ibid., p.13.

[20] Ibid., p.17.

[21] Spicer, *Film Noir*, pp.1-3.

[22] S. Chinen Biesen, *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p.96.

trade review by Lloyd Shearer in the *New York Times Magazine* had noted of films such as *Double Indemnity* and *Murder, My Sweet* 'a trend in Hollywood toward the wholesale production of lusty, gut-and-gore crime stories', and 'movie murder ... with a psychological twist',[23] Shearer thereby recognising the innovations in the representation of sex, violence, and criminal psychology that were to so engage the French in 1946. Sheri Chinen Biesen provides a valuable insight into the origins of innovative new crime series, noting that:

> [T]he American film industry and domestic press recognized these *noir* pictures … before they were formally acclaimed in France in 1946. By 1944 Hollywood studio publicity and critics in the United States had already identified these innovative films as a bold new trend called the "red meat cycle".[24]

Described by Shearer in August 1945 as 'lusty, gut-and-gore crime stories' with a 'psychological twist', and prior to that by Fred Stanley in November 1944 as the 'red meat cycle',[25] this was the very series of films which French critics later endowed with a more mature critical concept, and, not to detract from Stanley's memorable reference to the 'red meat' of sex and violence, a much better name.

That is not to say that the series lacked a concept *per se*. If the press were quick to identify the trend, then Hollywood producers had already gone some way to defining the concept of film noir in what Altman refers to as acts of 'applied criticism'.[26] Hollywood genres, Altman proposes, 'begin as reading positions established by studio personnel acting as critics'.[27] It is argued that while Frank and his colleagues were the first to name and fully conceptualise film noir, it began as a 'reading position' adopted by producers such as Paramount's Joseph Sistrom and RKO's Adrian Scott, who realised the potential of representing the 'adult' themes of sex and violence from the 'skewed' perspective of, respectively, the murderous insurance salesman Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* and the embattled private detective

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[23] L. Shearer, 'Crime Certainly Pays on the Screen', *New York Times Magazine*, 5 August 1945, from *Film Noir Reader 2*, ed. by Silver and Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), p.9.

[24] Chinen Biesen, *Blackout*, 'Introduction', pp.2-3.

[25] Fred Stanley, 'Hollywood Crime and Romance', *NYT*, Nov., 19, 1944, in Chinen Biesen, *Blackout,* p.96.

[26] R. Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 2000), p.44.

[27] Ibid., p.44

Philip Marlowe in *Murder, My Sweet*. This is discussed in further detail below in relation to the changes in Hollywood film-making during the mid-1940s.

The intermingling of sex, death, and psychology which appealed to Hollywood producers of the 1930s and early-40s, which resided tantalisingly within the lurid covers of hard-boiled magazines, but which had been rendered 'unadaptable' due to film censorship, also possessed an allure for the artistic group, the Surrealists. Naremore identifies 'a residual Surrealism', which he argues 'is crucial for the reception of any art described as noir'.[28] The French critics' predilection for, and in some cases, direct involvement with Surrealism is not in dispute. For instance, *Panorama du film noir Américain* contains an introduction by Marcel Duhamel, a participant in the Surrealist Movement during the 1920s, who recalled watching Hollywood gangster movies with the author of the Surrealist Manifesto, André Breton.[29] Thus, when Borde and Chaumeton describe their reaction to the 'nightmarish, weird, erotic, ambivalent, and cruel'[30] qualities of film noir, in one important sense, this response can be located in terms of the legacy of Surrealism.

However, this study proposes that Surrealism and Freudianism can also be seen as important elements of the production of film noir. As discussed in Chapter Four, 'The advent of noir style: "Portraits and Doubles" and the "femme fatale"', the work of Fritz Lang is seen to be influenced by, and to be a commentary upon, Freudian psychoanalysis.[31] This is also seen to apply to the work of Hitchcock, for example, the proto-noir *Suspicion* (1941). In addition, the connections between Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1927), French Surrealist film-making, and film noir are also acknowledged.[32] This approach does not dispute the notion that, in theorising film noir, Frank and his colleagues were valorising aspects of French culture. Rather, it argues that these and other influences, including that of the left-wing coalition the Popular Front, were international phenomena.

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[28] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.17.

[29] Ibid, p.19.

[30] Borde and Chaumeton, 'Towards a Definition of *Film Noir*', p.18.

[31] Chapter Four: 'The advent of noir style: "Portraits and Doubles" and the "femme fatale"', p.173.

[32] Ibid., p.187.

To develop this point further, the term 'film noir' was first used by French critics during the late-1930s to refer to Popular Front films such as *Pépé le Moko* (Duvivier, 1936) and *Hotel Du Nord* (Carné, 1938).[33] Naremore observes how post-War French criticism drew comparisons with Popular Front films of the pre-War period, and how 'American noir' is seen to evoke for the French 'a golden age of their own cinema'.[34] Besides being purloined from pre-War French criticism, the term 'film noir' was also used by analogy with "*Série noire*" which Spicer notes was 'the label given to French translations of American hard-boiled fiction'.[35] The *Série noire*, published by Gallimard, was edited by Marcel Duhamel,[36] a fact which further underlines the Surrealist influence, if not necessarily upon the films themselves, then upon their French reception. The French fascination with American hard-boiled fiction is thus seen to precede the 'birth' of film noir. Besides its popularity amongst Surrealists like Duhamel, hard-boiled fiction was also celebrated by Existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, as discussed in further detail below.

The resurrecting of the term 'film noir' in relation to Hollywood cinema might indeed appear to suggest a rather self-congratulatory valorisation of French culture. However, these were international phenomena, as opposed to being indigenous to the French. The same is seen to apply to film noir's critique of capitalism which, the thesis argues, is attributable to other influences such as Weimar cinema and American hard-boiled fiction, besides the circumstances of its so-called French 'invention'. With regard to the Popular Front, for instance, this was an international coalition of leftist political groups. The involvement of many Hollywood film workers with left-wing politics during the 1940s, including the director of *Murder My Sweet*, Edward Dmytryk, is a well-documented historical fact, as is the blacklisting of the 'Hollywood Ten' by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

Dmytryk, who was jailed for contempt of Congress for refusing to answer questions on his Communist Party membership when he appeared before HUAC, directed the anti-fascist noirs *Cornered* (1945) and *Crossfire* (1947), in addition to the Chandler adaptation which

[33] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.15.

[34] Ibid., p.15.

[35] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.2.

[36] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.17.

drew the attention of French critics. He was part of a team of politically committed film-makers at RKO studios during the mid-1940s, led by producer Adrian Scott. Langdon argues that 'by 1939 [Scott] was running in the more radical circles of the Hollywood progressive community',[37] while Neve states that 'Scott and Dmytryk both joined the Communist Party late in the war years'.[38] Regarding the allure of hard-boiled fiction to members of the 'Hollywood progressive community', Langdon proposes that:

> For Scott … pulp fiction held enormous appeal: the frank sexuality, lust, and passion; the colliding worlds of the mean streets and the mansions of Los Angeles, a collision that exposed a gritty underbelly of greed, corruption, and class politics. A hard-boiled hero like Chandler's Philip Marlowe grappled with his desire to be a knight-protector for the innocent and downtrodden, while cynically recognizing the sordid realities of both human nature and capitalist power relations. Hard-boiled fiction combined realism and idealism in ways that resonated deeply with the political and moral vision of the Popular Front.[39]

Thus, prominent figures within the Hollywood industry, including Scott, the producer of the films noirs *Murder My Sweet*, *Cornered*, and *Crossfire*, were closely involved with the Popular Front. What is more, hard-boiled fiction, including Chandler's detective stories, but also Cain's realist tales of life in Depression-era America, which, it may be said, represent the 'sordid realities of both human nature and capitalist power relations', are seen to be conducive to politically committed film noir adaptations, and to resonate with 'the political and moral vision of the Popular Front'. The thesis thus argues for noir's critique of capitalism as being attributable to a variety of production factors, such as the left-wing leanings of RKO, as well as the egalitarian underpinnings of the hard-boiled source material, explored in further detail below in a separate section dealing with the hard-boiled mode.

To some, then, the 'incendiary' quality of the 'pulps' is seen to reside, not merely in the representation of sex and violence, but the way in which these so-called 'sordid realities of human nature' enable a critical commentary upon 'capitalist power relations'. It is argued that noir's representation of human beings ruled by their baser instincts, but also living

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[37] J. Langdon, *Caught in the Crossfire: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Americanism in 1940s Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p.21.

[38] B. Neve, *Film and Politics in America: a Social Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.95.

[39] Langdon, *Caught in the Crossfire*, p.70.

under capitalism and governed by world events over which they have no control, is partly attributable to the influence of hard-boiled fiction, in particular the work of James M. Cain.

If one were to subscribe to the compelling view, as held by Langdon, that film noir involves the flammable combination of 'frank sexuality, lust, and passion' with 'class politics', the question still remains as to whether this 'series', termed film noir, is substantively different from the Hollywood crime thriller *per se*, and whether or not it is a genre in its own right.

In response to the first of these questions, Krutnik locates noir's perceived 'subversiveness' in terms of changes within Hollywood film production during the mid-1940s regarding the aforementioned 'adult' themes. These, in turn, are seen to derive from negotiations between Hollywood studios and the Production Code Administration, the organisation responsible for the enforcement of 'the Code'. As Krutnik argues regarding the more explicit representation of 'adult' themes in the mid-1940s Hollywood crime thriller and the relationship with 'hard-boiled' fiction:

> Hollywood had largely avoided this type of fiction during the 1930s because its vicarious treatment of sex and violence was problematic, in the context of the representational restrictions bearing upon the cinema at this time.[40]

The 'representational restrictions' referred to here by Krutnik were those imposed by the PCA. This study discusses the radical transformation seen to have taken place in American film-making during the mid-1940s with regard to the representation of 'adult' themes, arising from the moderation of 'the Code', and which, in turn, can be seen to result from the studios' determined attempts to adapt hard-boiled sources.

It is argued that these are events in film history, identified subsequently by film criticism. In setting out evidence in support of this, consideration is given to the Hollywood production context of film noir, for instance, the seven-year struggle between Paramount and the PCA to adapt Cain's *Double Indemnity*, with its central themes of adultery, fraud, and murder. This signalled the relaxation of PCA standards during the mid-1940s and heralded the arrival

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[40] Krutnik, 'Introduction', in *In a Lonely Street*, p.xi.

of more 'explicit' movies, such as the MGM production of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, analysed and discussed in Chapter Three.[41]

While arguing for a dialogic exchange between noir and hard-boiled fiction, it is proposed that there was also a fundamental incompatibility between the two modes. The difficulties encountered by the studios in adapting not merely hard-boiled fiction but Cain's work in particular were due to the candid representation of 'adult' themes, along with an existentially bleak view of human nature, which was in clear conflict with 'the Code'. In order for Cain's fiction to be adapted, it is argued, Hollywood conventions regarding such themes and the PCA guidelines by which they were governed had to undergo radical change. Thus, the adaptation process occupies a central place in the film noir debate, both in terms of the dialogic exchange between the two modes on the one hand, and their incompatibility on the other. It should be noted that, as Krutnik's comments indicate, the representation of these themes, both in films and hard-boiled sources, tends to be allusive and 'vicarious' rather than graphic or direct, giving rise to a darkly erotic and violent 'tone'. Nonetheless, given the legendary zeal of PCA chief, Joseph Breen, in enforcing 'the Code', subtly veiled references, along with an erotic and violent tone, were also subject to the strictures of the Code and as equally liable to moderation as direct representation.

The relative permissiveness of the post-War Hollywood crime thriller, when compared with its 1930s counterpart, seems to be beyond dispute. The following argues for film noir as a product of the Hollywood genre system, rather than merely a French critical construct.

Stephen Neale, citing the view of Tom Ryall, states that 'Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the film-maker, and their reading by the audience'.[42] This is a useful definition in that it identifies the genre film, with its familiar 'patterns' and 'structures', as a dynamic entity, the locus for interaction and negotiation between the Hollywood production team on the one hand and the audience on the other. Proceeding from this premise, Neale states that 'Genres, then, are not systems: they are processes of

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[41] Chapter Two: '"Dead man walking": adapting *Double Indemnity*', pp.81-82.

[42] T. Ryall, 'The Notion of Genre', in *Screen*, Vol 11, no 2, p.28, in S. Neale, *Genre* (London: BFI, 1980), p.7.

systemisation'.[43] This, he believes, is in order that the genre film may fulfil the function allotted to it by Hollywood, which he identifies as the facility 'to provide, simultaneously, both regulation and variety'.[44] The genre film, then, is subject to the ongoing modification of familiar elements in order that it both meets and challenges audience expectations.

The term 'audience' is seen to apply to members of the trade press and academic critics as well as to the cinema-going general public. Indeed, as noted above, producers are also required to adopt the position of the viewer, or critic, in order that the genre film performs its function of providing 'regulation and variety'. For their part, it was seen how the trade press identified an emerging trend in the Hollywood crime thriller almost two years before French critics named and fully conceptualised the new genre as film noir in 1946. Chapters Two and Three examine the way in which producers at Warner Brothers and MGM were quick to respond to the success of the 1944 Paramount production of *Double Indemnity* in the making of their own Cain adaptations, *Mildred Pierce* (Curtiz, 1945) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Garnett, 1946).

Rick Altman provides a fascinating account of the way in which the Hollywood genre system functioned during the 'classical' period, with specific reference to the Warners Brothers producer Darryl Zanuck and his role in establishing the 'biopic' genre. Zanuck and his fellow producers would study commercially successful films with the intention of 'locating a successful device and carrying it to another film where, if it again succeeds, still further success is guaranteed'.[45] As Altman observes, 'film production constantly involves a process of criticism that actually precedes the act of production',[46] with Hollywood genres originating as 'reading positions' taken initially by 'studio personnel acting as critics'.

Applying Altman's principle to film noir, this 'reading position' is seen to be adopted first by producers, then by audience members, including journalists within the trade press and later by Parisian intellectuals, captivated by the sex, violence, and stylish nihilism of the new

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[43] Ibid., p.51.

[44] Ibid., p.51.

[45] Altman, *Film/Genre*, p.44.

[46] Ibid., p.44.

'black films'. It is thus argued that French critics refined, rather than 'invented', the film noir concept, which is seen to originate with Hollywood producers. It is also worth noting that due to the PCA ban which prohibited studios from adapting *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* during the 1930s, this 'reading position' was first adopted many years before the films were made – roughly a decade, in fact.

Interestingly, Altman notes that the identification and subsequent recombination of elements involved in Hollywood production was a process of trial and error, with the 'hybrid' product not always evolving into a fully-fledged genre, at least, not necessarily along the lines envisaged by the Hollywood producer/critic. For instance, Zanuck realised that certain Warner Brothers productions owed their success to the fact that the story was based upon a biography or autobiography, while others involved fictitious characters based upon people who had enjoyed recent fame or notoriety in the press.[47] He concluded, therefore, that the general public was drawn to stories related to recent newspaper headlines. He named the prospective genre the 'headline' film, although this prototype became known eventually as the 'biopic'. As Krutnik proposes, 'Films do not somehow spring magically from their culture, for they are constructions that are both economically and ideologically determined';[48] to paraphrase, film genres do not 'spring magically' from the minds of Hollywood producers, fully conceptualised and with a ready-made name with which to describe them. If one applies this principle to film noir, then, while it may be viewed as a 'post-constructed' category, it is hardly unique in this respect. On the contrary, it is seen to be exemplary of the Hollywood genre system, where the 'biopic' and, as discussed below, even the venerable Western, once lacked a name and a mature concept, the main difference being that noir was fully conceptualised and named by French critics, rather than by American media institutions.

If defining film noir has proven a difficult task for critics, this reflects the exacting task faced by producers in performing a similar role, albeit at a different stage in the process and for different reasons. This is not to dismiss the arguments of the revisionist debate or Spicer's notion that film noir is a 'contested construction'. Krutnik observes that, not only was film

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[47] Ibid., p.44.

[48] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, pp.56-57.

noir a 'post-constructed category', but French postwar criticism 'developed the concept of noir without an adequate familiarity with the context of Hollywood's wartime cinema'.[49] Thus, successive critics have valorised noir's transformation of the 'representational parameters' of Hollywood film-making without giving sufficient regard to – or, indeed, being adequately familiar with – the 'classical' system, that is, the 'industrial and institutional practices and its generic modalities of practice'.[50] While this may have been problematic for French criticism in 1946, as Krutnik argues, the postwar Anglo-American debate struggled to develop the critical concept of noir, and to define the genre, due to an ongoing lack of consideration for the specifics of Hollywood film-making during and after the Second World War.

In terms of these 'practices and modalities', Krutnik makes the important point that 'generic labels tend to be very loose, demarcating broad and at times far from contradictory patterns' and that a genre is not defined by exclusive elements but by the 'particular *combinations* and *articulations* of elements'.[51] This is germane to the thesis, which argues that noir's generic practice is characterised by the recombination of pre-existing tropes, but in a new era which afforded film-makers greater freedom due to the relaxation of 'the Code'. The perceived origin of these tropes in European and Hollywood cinema is discussed in further detail below in relation to 'the advent of noir style'. The thesis also addresses Krutnik's argument that the noir debate has tended to over-emphasise 'iconographic elements' without giving due consideration to how they relate to 'narrative motifs and scenarios, and narrational processes'[52] by contextualising the commentary on visual style in relation to narrative motifs and processes, as well as the specifics of production.

It is also necessary to distinguish between the genre system as a whole, the different genres of which the system is composed, and the individual elements which comprise each genre. In terms of the system as a whole, film noir is seen to represent a departure in terms of character, theme, and narrative structure. While ostensibly radical, these can be seen as a

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[49] Ibid., pp.16-17.

[50] Ibid., 'Introduction', p.x.

[51] Ibid., p.8.

[52] Ibid., p.19.

recombination of existing elements. For instance, the 'sympathetic' portrayal of villainous couples such as Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) and Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) in *Double Indemnity* is seen to challenge audience expectations. The same is true of the complex narrative structure, for example, 'flashback' or analeptic narration, especially given that the 'flashback' was often told from the viewpoint of an unfamiliar type of narrator, such as Walter Neff. In other respects, however, Walter is an instantly recognisable male lead – tall, handsome, muscular, fast-talking, and well-dressed. This familiarity may have rendered his first-person 'flashback' all the more alarming, and audience identification, potentially problematic.

Each genre is designed to appeal to different audiences for different reasons, providing a particular type of pleasure in the process. One might reasonably ascertain that identification with the beastly yet affable Walter would have afforded a vicarious thrill to audiences at the time, precisely because his character was an innovative, and more complex, version of a recognisable type. This provides an example of the variation of familiar elements in relation to the genre system as a whole. As the film noir cycle developed, and as Hollywood producers recognised the success of the vulnerable yet predatorial 'male victim' type, the character is seen to become one of the familiar elements of the new genre. Where the relationship with hard-boiled fiction is concerned, it should be noted that 'flashback' narration by the transgressive protagonist and the eliciting of sympathy for the criminal couple are also characteristic of Cain's work.

Adopting a phrase popularised by Tzvetan Todorov, Neale makes reference to 'generic verisimilitude',[53] that is, the resemblances between each individual film within a given genre. The 'femme fatale' and 'male victim' of films such as *The Woman in the Window*, *Double Indemnity* and *Scarlet Street* were rapidly assimilated within the Hollywood genre system, recurring in other noirs such as *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. In terms of the relationship between noir and other types of Hollywood genre film, as a crime text, noir is seen to lay claim to a relative degree of 'realism', referred to as 'cultural verisimilitude'.[54]

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[53] Stephen Neale, 'Questions of Genre', in *Film and Theory: an anthology*, ed. by Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.158.

[54] Ibid., p.158.

This can be defined as a form of representation which bears resemblance to lived experience, or which references 'real life' events. This distinguishes it from, for instance, the inherently anti-realist musical, although it should be said that neither form 'equates in any direct sense to "reality" or "truth"'.[55] As Neale states:

> Certain genres appeal more directly and consistently to cultural verisimilitude. Gangster films, war films, and police procedural thrillers, certainly, often mark that appeal by drawing on and quoting "authentic" (and authenticating) discourses, artefacts, and texts: maps, newspaper headlines, memoirs, archival documents, and so on.[56]

As also noted, however, the identification of common elements within film noir, that is, the matter of 'generic verisimilitude', has proven to be problematic. Nonetheless, it is possible to say that the 'Police Procedural' phase depends upon a high degree of 'cultural verisimilitude', that is, upon its relationship with lived experience, 'real' events and technical procedures. Conversely, 'Studio Expressionist' noirs such as *Scarlet Street* and *Phantom Lady* are characterised by an 'uncanniness' resulting from the tension between worlds which resemble contemporary American life but which also seem strangely artificial. Further to this, the progression between the two phases of the genre provides an example of the way in which familiar or regulated elements had necessarily to be varied, to conform to as well as to challenge audience expectations.

Altman also identifies a phenomenon referred to as the 'constant sliding of generic terms from adjectives to nouns'[57] which is of interest to the film noir debate. For instance, the term 'western' was used as an adjective to describe 'western chase films' and 'western comedies' before it became a standalone term, or noun, to describe a 'separate genre'.[58] Altman observes that 'earlier uses of the term are invariably adjectival in nature, describing and delimiting a broader category'.[59] The progression from adjective to 'standalone substantival treatment' also involves 'a corresponding change in status of the new

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[55] Ibid., p.158.

[56] Ibid., p.159.

[57] Altman, *Film/Genre*, p.52.

[58] Ibid., p.52.

[59] Ibid., p.50.

category'.[60] Taking an example from literature, the term 'epic' was once used as an adjective to describe a particular type of poetry but is now applicable to various forms of media, including, of course, Hollywood cinema.[61]

Starting out as an adjective applied by French critics, the term 'noir' became a 'categorical noun' in the process of its adoption by the debate. However, a difficulty has arisen in defining that noun. Different genres are defined according to different criteria. For instance, the Western is defined by location, whereas the Musical owes its name to the medium. These are relatively straightforward criteria when compared with film noir. Proceeding from the premise outlined by Altman, one might ask: to what does the term 'noir' or 'black' refer? It seems reasonable to suggest that it refers to a variety of elements, for instance, visual style, theme, and overall tone. In terms of theme alone, the 'blackness' of noir can be subdivided into further categories, such as the recurrence, variously, of violent death, the manipulation of the male victim by the deadly female, the nihilistic view of human nature, and so on.

The problems in defining film noir, when viewed in this respect, would seem to stem from the fact that, first the adjective and subsequently the noun used to describe the genre refer to a vague and ineffable quality, unlike the Western, War, or Gangster picture. Also, regarding the substantive change which occurs when an adjective progresses to a noun applicable to various media, it is interesting that the adjective 'noirish' seems to have entered common usage as a way of describing, for instance, a novel, a song, or an advertising image. It would appear, then, that it is possible for a generic term to cycle from adjective to noun and back to adjective again, at least in the strange case of film noir, where the referent is so complex.

In summary, the study supports the view that the 'series' identified by French critics as film noir does indeed constitute a genre, according to the terms defined by contemporary genre criticism. It may not be as easy to describe as other genres, but that hardly disproves its existence. The discussions of the various films noirs concerned are premised upon the

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[60] Ibid., p.50.

[61] Ibid., p.51.

notion that the Hollywood genre film is a dynamic entity, as Neale says, not part of a system, but rather, a 'process of systemisation'. Genres do not 'spring magically' from the minds of producers. They develop over time through a process of negotiation between producers and audiences, and involve the recombination of various elements of a pre-existing signifying practice which themselves are not unique to any given genre. Once established, the newly-evolved generic practice is necessarily subject to an ongoing process involving both repetition and variation.

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The following provides a brief overview of each Chapter, including a justification for the prevailing methodology, that is, critical analysis, the reasons for the film selection, and a broad theoretical framework. The Introduction concludes with a separate section which examines the hard-boiled mode.

The thesis is structured so as to enable a discussion of the various aspects of the relationship between hard-boiled fiction and film noir, with each of the chapters relating to the main topic in a different way. Chapter One examines the relationships between Weimar cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir. It is thus concerned, in the main, with the influence of Weimar cinema on noir, and touches only occasionally upon hard-boiled fiction. However, this is in order to prepare the ground for the discussion of each of the main cultural influences, both literary and cinematic, upon film noir which occurs in Chapter Four. As noted above, Chapter Two discusses the respective influences of Cain and Chandler on Paramount's *Double Indemnity*, and thus upon the 'birth' of film noir, while Chapter Three examines the way in which MGM's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is seen to apply and consolidate generic practice, as well as identifying, and providing reasons for, the modifications made to the source text during the adaptation process. Chapter Four considers the work of a number of notable directors in relation to 'the advent of noir style', leading to a discussion of the 1946 Warner Brothers adaptation of Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. It also assembles the main arguments of the thesis, and involves a comprehensive discussion of the various discourses involved in film noir adaptations of hard-boiled fiction.

**Chapter One, 'Weimar Cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir'**, involves the analysis of two Weimar films, namely *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Wiene, 1920), *The Last Laugh* (Murnau, 1924), as well as Murnau's first Hollywood feature, *Sunrise: a song of two humans* (1927). As previously noted, in addition to the relationship between noir and hard-boiled fiction, the thesis also examines the connections with two of its supposed cinematic influences, namely Weimar cinema, often conflated with the artistic movement known as 'German Expressionism', and the Hollywood Gangster cycle.

The arguments are based upon textual analysis intended to test theories of influence, and to offer possible rather than definitive readings. This approach applies to the thesis as a whole. The readings are not absolute. Rather, they are preferred inferences. In each case, however, the analysis of visual style, such as the occurrence of mirrored reflections in *The Last Laugh*, is linked with a discussion of narrative themes, in this case, the 'double life' of the Doorman, played by Emil Jannings. Furthermore, in its testing of critical theory, the textual analysis is concerned with identifying precedents, rather than supplying 'proof' of influence, given that the arguments are based upon inferences. Nonetheless, the readings are intended to provide original insights, both into the films concerned and the relationship between film noir and hard-boiled fiction.

Chapter One argues that the relationship between noir and Weimar cinema does indeed stand up to close scrutiny. The thesis puts forward textual evidence in support of this view, seeking to establish the nature and the extent of the Weimar influence through a discussion of common tropes. However, it is proposed that this should be seen as the influence of Weimar cinema, rather than German Expressionism, a term purloined from arts criticism, in acknowledgement of the uniqueness of film in relation to other media. This provides the basis for a discussion in Chapter Four, 'The advent of noir style: "Portraits and Doubles" and the "femme fatale"', of the films noirs of Fritz Lang and Robert Siodmak, both of whom worked in the German film industry during the Weimar period, and who are therefore seen to have a more direct influence upon the genre. This, in turn, leads to a discussion of one of the main points of the thesis, namely, that certain tropes identifiable in the work of Lang and Siodmak, but also Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock, are seen to be influential upon the generic practice of noir.

The Chapter also examines ways in which we may talk about the influence of 'external sources', such as literature and art history, in relation to film. This leads to the conclusion that notions of style and influence must be discussed with due regard for the immanence – and uniqueness – of film production. When, in *The Haunted Screen*, Lotte Eisner identifies connections between Weimar cinema and German Expressionism and Romanticism, some difficulties occur. These include a privileging of painting, sculpture, and theatre, over the film text, a lack of consideration for the film production context, and condescension towards the commercial aspect of film-making, seen to have a detrimental effect upon 'artistic' content. Similarly, in *From Caligari to Hitler: a Psychological History of the German Film* (1947), Siegfried Kracauer championed the original scenario of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* over the film, arguing that 'While the original story exposed the madness inherent in authority, Wiene's *Caligari* glorified authority and convicted its antagonist of madness'.[62]

In addition to inter-art relationships, the history of a given period can be seen to influence the film text. As Thomas Elsaesser argues, however, the practice of establishing direct relationships between film and a period of history, on the one hand, and artistic tradition on the other, is problematic. To address the former, the connection between film and history can be viewed as the 'imaginary relations' between the 'symbolic' history and the 'field of representations'.[63] Thus, when Kracauer perceived a link between *Caligari* and the rise of Hitler, he was responding to such 'imaginary relations'. Where film noir is concerned, the historical sources include the Second World War, rising crime figures, and as Joan Copjec observes, 'mounting paranoia regarding the woman's place in society'.[64]

In summary, while giving scant, if any, attention to the relationship between art and the production processes of the film industry, critics have, variously: privileged source material over film; condescended towards the commercial aspect of film-making; utilised the film text both as a means of accessing a given historical period, and as an index of the 'national psyche'; and appeared to view film study as an extension of art history. Elsaesser proposes a

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[62] S. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974; first published by Princeton Press, 1947), p.67.

[63] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.440n6.

[64] J. Copjec, 'Introduction', in *Shades of Noir*, pp.xi-xii.

means of addressing the 'influence' of such external sources which has specific relevance to the film industry, and the production and reception of its products. This involves:

> [A] concept of style immanent to a given production context, understood as the material as well as discursive conditions of production *and* reception, where style intervenes in ... the relations between an industry, its products, and the meanings given to these products in the acts of reception and production.[65]

As discussed, however, the critical debate has tended to make the seemingly unproblematic connection between Weimar cinema and German Expressionism, without giving due consideration to 'a concept of style immanent to a given production context'. Rather than taking such an art-historical perspective, the thesis discusses film in relation to art, but in the context of film production.

**Chapter Two '"Dead man walking": the adaptation of *Double Indemnity*'**, focuses upon the 1944 Paramount adaptation of Cain's novel, directed by Billy Wilder. It is argued that the 'watershed' adaptation, regarded as signalling the relaxation of PCA censorship, also heralds the arrival of a new crime genre, later called film noir by French critics.

As previously noted, the thesis is concerned solely with the 'Studio Expressionism' phase of noir, and with films produced between 1944 and 1946. The primary reason is that the films noirs of this period, exemplified by *Double Indemnity*, are seen to be a nexus for the various discourses seen to affect the adaptation process. The influence of Weimar cinema upon noir is seen to be at its strongest, while traces of the Gangster genre are also discernible. Where the industry is concerned, the PCA still exerted a stranglehold over content (as it was to do until well into the 1960s), while the production values and conventional morality of classical Hollywood, with which the unconventional new genre also came into conflict, still prevailed.

Most importantly of all, this is the period when audiences first encountered the screen versions of Cain's hard-boiled anti-heroes. In terms of the hard-boiled influence, as noted above, *Double Indemnity* was adapted by Billy Wilder and Cain's fellow hard-boiled author, Chandler. The Chapter argues for ideological differences between the 'fatalistic determinism' of Cain and the 'romantic idealism'[66] of Chandler, which are seen to have a

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[65] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.37.

[66] MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, p.101.

distinct bearing upon the adaptation – particularly upon one of the film's central characters, Barton Keyes (Edward G. Robinson). The landmark adaptation led to the PCA being deluged with screenplays involving 'murder and eros'.[67] This can be attributed to Cain's realist treatment of sex and violence, but also to Chandler's involvement. The screen version of Keyes becomes a 'crusader' for hegemonic values resembling Chandler's 'chivalric' private detective, Philip Marlowe. This provided the adaptation with the 'compensating moral values' necessary to meet the rigidly enforced guidelines of 'the Code'.

Rather than corroborate theories which dispute the influence of hard-boiled fiction on film noir, the thesis argues that the hard-boiled influence manifests itself in a variety of ways. Besides the ideological differences between Cain and Chandler, the difference between Cain's first two novels, which, like the adaptations, are narrated in 'flashback' by criminals, and the detective fiction of Hammett and Chandler, narrated by private eyes, are seen to be of central importance to the 'birth' of film noir and to the debate regarding the existence of the genre. The variety within the hard-boiled mode, and how this seen to impact on noir, is discussed in further detail below.

The Chapter also includes an analysis of *Scarface* (Hawks, 1932). This is to enable a discussion of the relationship between noir and the Hollywood Gangster cycle. Once again, the analysis of *Scarface* would suggest that certain noir tropes are traceable to the Gangster movie. In addition, given that *Scarface* was directed by Howard Hawks, and given also that Hawks directed one of the films noirs under discussion, *The Big Sleep*, Hawks's work is seen to have a direct influence upon the generic practice of noir. It is discussed in Chapter Four, however, that certain other characteristics, such as his valorisation of traditional masculine virtues and a preference for 'winners' over 'losers', are seen to conflict with noir tropes such as the 'male victim' and a bleak existential viewpoint which eschewed happy endings.

**Chapter Three, '"The price of fornication": adapting *The Postman Always Rings Twice'*,** discusses the 1946 MGM production of Cain's first novel in the context of the emerging film noir genre. The Chapter involves a detailed discussion of the intertextual relationship

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[67] L.J. Leff and J.L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), p.131.

between the novel and the film. The overall purpose is to observe and comment upon the specific ways in which MGM is seen to apply and thereby consolidate generic practice. However, the close reading also scrutinises the complex relationships concerned, and the various, competing discourses involved. The fatalistic determinism and realism of Cain's novel, along with the eponymously dark style and themes of the emerging genre, are seen to be at odds with the MGM 'house style', described by Leff and Simmons as 'all sunshine and splash'.[68] This is a reference to the high production values associated with the studio, the glamour and 'glitz' seen to conflict with the 'art house' ethos of film noir, characterised by 'pinched budgets and intellectual commitment'.[69]

The Chapter argues that, rather than investing fully and enthusiastically in noir, the studio is seen to adhere to more traditional values, both in terms of 'classical' style and conventional morality. MGM assured Breen that physical contact would be kept to a minimum and that Frank Chambers (John Garfield) would be shown to be remorseful over the death of Cora Smith (Lana Turner) in order 'to demonstrate the price of fornication'.[70] The close reading highlights the differences between Cain's 'radical' novel and what is seen to be a relatively 'conservative' adaptation, setting out textual evidence in support of this argument.

There is always a danger when comparing hard-boiled fiction, which enjoyed relatively relaxed censorship, with Hollywood film, policed with zeal by the ever-vigilant Breen, of perceiving the adaptation to be a somewhat diluted, and thus 'lesser' version of the source text. However, this is precisely the mistake made by critics such as Eisner and Kracauer in their appraisal of Weimar cinema, and which this study tries to avoid. Rather than make qualitative evaluations, either about respective films noirs or their relationship with hard-boiled sources, the thesis is concerned with that which Robert Stam refers to as the 'theoretical status' and 'analytical interest' of the adaptations, rather than 'the subjective question'[71] of their perceived qualities. The main reason for examining the MGM adaptation

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[68]L.J. Leff and J.L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono*, p.135.

[69] Ibid., p.135.

[70] Ibid., pp.134-135.

[71] R. Stam, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, ed. by Robert Stam and Alessandro Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p.3.

of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, as noted, is to explore the way in which it is seen to apply and thereby consolidate noir's emergent generic practice, rather than to criticise it for being 'unoriginal' or overly conservative.

Stam argues that 'The conventional language of adaptation criticism has often been profoundly moralistic, rich in terms that imply that cinema has somehow done a disservice to literature'.[72] Thus, the privileging of literature, or indeed the plastic arts, over film is seen to involve an unnecessarily 'moralistic' discourse which valorises one medium over another. This outmoded position, which presumes 'a bitter rivalry between film and literature', whereby the relationship between the two media is perceived to be 'a Darwinian struggle to the death', is rejected by the thesis in favour of an approach which views the inter-art relationship as 'a dialogue offering mutual benefit and cross-fertilization'.[73] Proceeding from this, the film text is seen to be 'automatically different'[74] from the literary source, due to the change of medium. Thus, 'fidelity' to the original, even if it were desirable, is impossible. The very idea that an adaptation can remain faithful to the source presupposes the existence of an originary meaning. However, such does not exist.

This issue leads to one of the main theoretical arguments of the thesis. The analysis of any film adaptation is concerned with the co-existence of two texts. However, it is proposed that primary consideration must necessarily be given to the film itself. When talking about a film adaptation, one is talking primarily about a film. Notwithstanding dialogic relationships with other media, film responds to its own traditions and conforms to its own conventions. This is the principal reason why this study of the relationship between film noir and hard-boiled fiction starts with a Chapter dealing with the Weimar influence, concludes with another focusing on the origins of generic practice in relation to the work of several key directors, and is contextualised within the specifics of the Hollywood genre system. This is certainly not to devalue the relationships between noir and other media, but to establish clear lines of demarcation between the films and their cultural sources prior to a discussion of perceived influences, for instance that of 'German Expressionism' on *Double Indemnity*,

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[72] Ibid., p.3.

[73] Ibid., p.4.

[74] Ibid., p.17.

and intertextual relationships, such as the narrative motif of 'chivalry' in Chandler and how this is explored in Hawks's *The Big Sleep*.

Furthermore, in terms of its reception, the novelistic text can 'trigger a plethora of possible meanings'.[75] This creates an 'open structure' which is 'constantly reworked and reinterpreted', whereby each text 'feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext'.[76] Applying Stam's principle to the relationship between hard-boiled fiction and Hollywood, the 'infinitely permutating intertext' is a means of accounting for the common trope of the 'male victim' in Siodmak's 1944 noir *Phantom Lady*, Woolrich's 1942 source novel and his work *per se*, but also in the work of Hitchcock, for example *The 39 Steps*, released in 1935.[77] However, before discussing the 'infinite permutations' of the intertext, it is necessary to delineate the films and their cultural sources, and to acknowledge the 'automatic difference' between the filmic tropes and their literary counterparts.

Chapter Three concludes with an analysis of *Ossessione*, Luchino Visconti's 1943 adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, in order to conduct a further examination, this time of the intertextual relationship between the respective Cain and Visconti texts, and a comparison between *Ossessione* and the MGM film. It is proposed that *Ossessione* not only confronts, but also develops, the novel's controversial themes, including prostitution as well as adultery and murder.

**Chapter Four, 'The advent of noir style: "Portraits and Doubles" and the "femme fatale"'**, discusses the development of certain stylistic motifs which were to become part of the generic practice of film noir. These two motifs were chosen because the representational conventions of the 'femme fatale' and 'Portraits and Doubles' can be traced from film noir to their origins in early cinema, and to their use in the work of Murnau, Lang, and Hitchcock, and for this reason help to contextualise noir's generic practice within the history of cinema. In addition, the Chapter examines the use of certain motifs characteristic of the work of Hawks recurring in noir, including the 'venetian blind' and 'cross' devices, and contains a

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[75] Ibid., p.15.

[76] Ibid., p.15.

[77] Chapter Four, 'The advent of noir style: "Portraits and Doubles" and the "femme fatale"', pp.208-209.

detailed discussion of an 'equestrian statue' motif in *The Big Sleep*, which, it is argued, is used to represent the theme of the 'chivalric code' from the Chandler source text.

Chapter Four is intended to summarise the main findings of the critical analysis conducted in the foregoing chapters, and to apply these in a series of close readings of 'Studio Expressionist' films noirs. In chronological order, these are: *The Woman in the Window* (Lang, 1944), *Phantom Lady* (Siodmak, 1944), *Scarlet Street* (Lang, 1945), *The Spiral Staircase* (Siodmak, 1945),[78] *The Killers* (Siodmak, 1946), *Gilda* (1946), and *The Big Sleep* (Hawks, 1946). The overall purpose is to enable the comprehensive discussion of each of the discources involved in the adaptation process which concludes the chapter. This focuses on the 1946 Warner Brothers adaptation of Chandler's 1939 novel *The Big Sleep*, although Universal's 1944 adaptation of Woolrich's 1942 novel *Phantom Lady* is also discussed.

The purpose of this strategy is twofold, in that it addresses both the primary and secondary purpose of the thesis. First, it enables an overarching discussion of the various discourses involved in the adaptation process, including cinematic as well as literary influences. Second, it engages with the contemporary noir debate and attempts to address some of the aforementioned existential questions. To this end, the thesis examines the evolution of the trope of the 'femme fatale'. The discussion explores how Lang's *The Woman in the Window* and Siodmak's *Phantom Lady*, both released in 1944, and Hitchcock's *Suspicion*, released in 1941, are seen to involve a self-reflexive, and ironic, commentary on the trope, which, it is argued, indicates that it was well-established prior to the 'birth' of noir. Rather than dispute the genre's existence, however, this analysis is intended to situate noir's generic practice within the history of film and the work of the directors concerned.

The study concurs with the revisionist debate that the parameters of film noir, initially determined by French critics, may prohibit the study of other films which could be of historical interest. Vernet argues persuasively that many 'anterior films' are disregarded 'in order to attempt to maintain a sense of artificial purity and isolation of *film noir*'.[79] The work of Hitchcock is not considered to be film noir. However, his 'psychological thrillers' are

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[78] Spicer refers to *The Spiral Staircase* as a 'Gothic Noir' (Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.116). It is determined, however, that the period setting distinguishes it from film noir *per se*, despite the obvious generic similarities.

[79] Vernet, 'Film Noir on the Edge of Doom', p.14.

closely related to the genre, both in theme and style. An analysis of several of these 'anterior films' is included to provide a more comprehensive overview of the development of generic practice, which the arguments aim to show did not occur in 'isolation' and which attempt to dispel any sense of 'artificial purity'.

The discussions of *Phantom Lady* and *The Big Sleep* identify the dominant discourses as 'directorial style', the Hollywood genre system, the involvement of the 'front office' studio personnel, and PCA censorship, as well as the important relationship with hard-boiled fiction. In the case of *Phantom Lady*, for example, it is seen how director Robert Siodmak and writer-producer Joan Harrison had a shared interest in 'psychical disturbance', and also how Universal's involvement with the 'horror genre' is seen to ally the studio with the eponymously 'dark' series of crime films. However, the film also provides an excellent example of the dialogic relationship between Hollywood film-making and the hard-boiled mode. As noted above, this involves the shared trope of a 'wrongly accused' man or woman, which besides its use in film noir, is also representative of the work of Woolrich, as well as being a prominent feature of the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Chapter Four discusses how Scott Henderson's character in Siodmak's *Phantom Lady* has both literary and cinematic precedents in Woolrich's fiction and Hitchcock's films. Thus, influence is seen to permeate the two modes of popular culture, with 'authorship' attributable to a variety of cinematic and literary influences, and to the 'infinitely permutating intertext'.

While the thesis examines certain of the principal motifs of noir, it should be noted that it does not attempt to define the genre in terms of a list of essential traits. It is proposed that such lists have tended to be overly reductive and to have embroiled the debate in claim and counter-claim, thereby diverting study away from the specifics of the texts towards theoretical generalisations which, all too often, have been found wanting.

The following provides an overview of hard-boiled crime fiction from its origins in the 'pulp' magazine *Black Mask* which concludes the Introduction. Characterised by stylistic 'simplicity' which, the French recognised, possessed 'depth', it was also renowned for its controversial subject matter, which Hollywood producers were forbidden from adapting throughout the 1930s and early-40s due to the prohibitions of the 'the Code'.

**The 'hard-boiled' mode**

The thesis argues that the relationship between hard-boiled fiction and film noir is seen to involve a form of dialogic exchange. This view is based upon the premise that the inter-art relationship between film and literature *per se* is seen to offer mutual benefits and, in Stam's words, to involve 'cross-fertilization'. As noted above, Krutnik argues that 'Hollywood genres are not self-contained, for they are influenced by, and themselves influence, other modes of popular culture'. Where film noir and hard-boiled fiction is concerned, the dialogic exchange is observable in specific terms, such as 'a tendency towards melodrama and action [and] by stock or typical characters'.[80] Having considered the specifics of film noir, the following involves a discussion of the hard-boiled mode, including an overview of its origins and evolution, and the critical analysis of the work of one of its founders, Dashiell Hammett.

Hard-boiled fiction is closely associated with *Black Mask*, the 'pulp' magazine which was founded in 1920 by H.L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, and which fostered the early careers of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler – but, notably, not James M. Cain. Naremore observes that 'Hammett's early stories were published by a factory of cheap, all-fiction periodicals', which, he argues, 'provided melodramatic fantasy to an audience of millions in the days before paperbacks and television'.[81] In addition, Spicer observes that hard-boiled fiction 'was a development of the nineteenth century "dime novel" where writers developed a vernacular style and promoted working class attitudes and values'.[82]

While, for Spicer, hard-boiled fiction is seen to promote 'working class attitudes and values', Stephen Knight argues that 'the between-wars private eye' has 'a much more individualised set of values'[83] than his American antecedents, such as Coryell's detective, Nick Carter. Knight proposes that the hard-boiled private eye 'shares no one's values but his own', and that '[i]t is through this sense of isolation that the private-eye story is in fact most

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[80] Ibid., p.33.

[81] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.49.

[82] Spicer, *Film Noir*, pp.5-6.

[83] S. Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.112.

innovative, bespeaking a sense that social values ... have no real value'.[84] Knight makes a good point. While the hard-boiled private detectives of the interwar era are professionally employed and well-versed in working class culture, they are essentially social outsiders, as well as 'rugged individuals'. Indeed, from the 1920s and Hammett's Continental Op, via the 1940s and Chandler's Marlowe, through the Cold War era and Ross MacDonald's Lew Archer, to Stieg Larsson's twenty-first century 'hacker' Lisbeth Salander,[85] the private investigator tends to be a tough-minded maverick. This essential detail enables the author to critique the conventions of a society in which their protagonist cannot invest fully, through the interaction between the investigator and the many corrupt and morally wayward characters, from all social strata and on either side of the law, whom they encounter while at work. Professionally speaking, the 'private eyes' are self-employed businesspeople, often, like Marlowe and Lew Archer, ex-police officers. However, they tend to be disdainful of wealth and social status, which often manifests itself in the form of their affluent clients, a trope dating back at least as far as Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* (1929) and the Continental Op's uneasy relationship with Elihu Wilsson, the 'Czar of Poisonville'. Although they assist in upholding the law, they are not bound by the same procedures as the police, for instance, Detective Sergeant O'Gar in Hammett's 'The Tenth Clew' (1924) and the District Attorney's Chief Investigator Bernie Ohls in Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), and thus operate with a degree of leeway, both professionally and morally.

In the preface to *The Simple Art of Murder* (1950), Raymond Chandler notes the way in which the mode, most notably the work of Dashiell Hammett, defines itself against the more 'genteel' modes of writing of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Referred to by Chandler as 'the English formula',[86] due to the predominance of English crime writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, the traditional detective story was seen to suffer from being 'too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world'.[87] Chandler

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[84] Ibid., p.112.

[85] Although it transpires that she is a computer 'hacker', Salander is employed by Milton Security as a private investigator in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Larsson, 2005).

[86] Raymond Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', in *The Simple Art of Murder* (New York: Random House, 1988), p.2.

[87] Ibid., p.11.

proposed that Hammett, perhaps drawing upon his experience as a Pinkerton detective, wrote 'realistic mystery fiction'.[88] Besides its realism, Hammett's work was also notable for its minimalist, plain-spoken, pared-back language, or, as Chandler states, a 'revolutionary debunking of both the language and material of fiction'.[89] The 'revolutionary' language and material, or style and theme, in turn, suggest links with Ernest Hemingway and Modernism; or rather, as Chandler phrases it, 'there is nothing in [Hammett's] work that is not implicit in the early novels and short stories of Ernest Hemingway'.[90] Interestingly, he also hints at a form of dialogic exchange between literary fiction, detective stories, and journalism, noting that while Hammett was indebted to Hemingway, 'for all I know, Hemingway may have learned something from Hammett'.[91]

While Chandler was not renowned for his generosity to fellow writers – he once referred to Cain as 'a *faux naïf*, a Proust in greasy overalls'[92] – the hard-boiled mode can, indeed, be seen to owe a significant debt to Hemingway, and therefore to Modernism. Naremore observes that in the aftermath of the First World War 'all forms of writing, from verse to journalism, became more plainspoken and "masculine"'.[93] Roland Barthes refers to the minimalism and disengagement from 'literary' language which characterises the hard-boiled mode as 'zero degree' writing.[94] In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes focuses exclusively upon French literature, citing the novels of Albert Camus as a prime example of the 'zero degree' mode. However, Jonathan Culler makes the connection between the relatively neutral (but nonetheless 'literary') style of Camus and that of Hemingway.[95] It is argued that, by extension, the work of Hammett and Cain can also be regarded as 'zero degree' writing.

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[88] Ibid., p.13.

[89] Ibid., p.14.

[90] Ibid., p.14.

[91] Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', p.14.

[92] F. MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Company: 1986), p.101.

[93] Naremore, *More Thank Night,* pp.43-44.

[94] R. Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

[95] J. Culler, *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.17-18.

As already discussed, the hard-boiled mode had made a significant impact upon French intellectual culture long before the emergence of film noir. However, the reception of American (including hard-boiled) fiction by French critics is seen to be characterised by a certain cultural elitism. Fay and Nieland observe that the 'unconscious spontaneity'[96] of American authors such as Faulkner, Hemingway, and Cain represented to their French counterparts an authentic form of literary radicalism and rebellion, one which could be utilised in the service of French anti-fascism. Sartre thought such 'brutal, observational fiction' to be the only form of writing appropriate to the 'unthinkable atrocities'[97] of the Spanish Civil War and the Nazi occupation.

Despite the French admiration for American fiction, however, it is seen as providing merely the basis for a 'much more theorized and deliberate existential literary technique', whereby the likes of Sartre and Camus would rework 'consciously and intellectually what was the fruit of a talented and unconscious spontaneity'.[98] This bears a marked similarity to the reception of Hollywood cinema by French film critics after the War. It appears to be the case that the French reception of American culture, whether this be Sartre's outlook on American literature or the Parisian critics' response to Hollywood cinema, is characterised by a 'deliberate', 'conscious', and 'theoretical' approach which tends to favour French intellectualism over the notable, but nonetheless unrefined, talent emanating from the United States. As noted above, Barthes focuses exclusively upon French literature in *Writing Degree Zero*, regardless of the parallels with American fiction, and despite the fact that 'Camus confessed that he had been inspired to write *The Stranger* after reading Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*'.[99] Naremore argues that 'the French treated Hollywood as if it were filled with primitives unburdened by European sophistication'.[100] If he appears to overstate the case then, as he explains, Jean-Luc Godard once opined in *Cahiers du Cinema* that 'the Americans, who are much more stupid when it comes to analysis ... have a gift for

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[96] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), p.30.

[97] Ibid., p.30.

[98] Ibid., pp.114-120, p.117, n41.

[99] Ibid., p.23.

[100] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.315, n30.

the kind of simplicity which brings depth'.[101] This 'gift', it would seem, was paralleled by the French talent for the back-handed compliment.

Echoing the sentiments of Chandler in *The Simple Art of Murder*, Naremore proposes that Hammett, along with *Black Mask* colleague Carroll John Daly, 'seems to have "invented" the tough detective sometime around 1923'.[102] He views his 'invention' as being 'in clear reaction against the amateur, puzzle-solving sleuths descended from Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle'. This is a reference to the Victorian antecedents of the hard-boiled private eye, namely C. Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, the amateur detectives from *The Murders on the Rue Morgue* by Edgar Allan Poe and Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series.

The 'tough detective' of hard-boiled fiction is, perhaps, personified by Hammett's Continental Op (or Operative). In 'The Tenth Clew', an early *Black Mask* story in which the Op is hired by Charles Gantvoort to investigate his father Leopold's murder, Knight observes that Hammett seems to be 'deliberately parodying the techniques of classical detection', given that 'the "tenth clew" is that the other nine are all artificial'.[103] Unlike the Victorian detective, the Op has no 'sidekick narrator' – no John Watson, Holmes's partner in crime detection, as it were. Rather than 'sit around puzzling over clues (or 'clews') like Dupin or Holmes', the hard-boiled private eye 'plunges off into detective activity'.[104] This includes being knocked unconscious and almost drowned in San Francisco Bay after a confrontation with Gantvoort's murderer, Madden Dexter.

Thus, one of the defining characteristics of the mode is the way in which the private detective becomes actively involved in the investigation, influencing the outcome of the case, as opposed to the 'puzzle solving sleuth' who was given to filling his pipe with tobacco and retiring to his room to ruminate over *a priori* facts. One of the most notable instances occurs in Hammett's *Red Harvest*, in which the Op instigates so many murders in the mining town of Personville (or 'Poisonville') that he, himself, is in danger of becoming 'blood

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[101] Ibid., p.315, n30.

[102] Ibid., p.49.

[103] Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800*, p.113.

[104] Ibid., p.113.

simple',[105] that is, surrendering his powers of ratiocination and being overcome by violent impulses. As the proactive Op observes, 'Play with murder enough … it gets to you [in] one of two ways. It makes you sick, or you get to like it'.[106]

In 'The Golden Horseshoe' (1924), where the Op investigates the disappearance of English architect, Norman Ashcraft, there is further evidence to support Knight's view that Hammett was parodying 'the techniques of classical detection'. The Op tracks Ashcraft, alias Ed Bohannon, to The Golden Horseshoe bar in Tijuana. During a three-day drinking bout with Bohannon, who bears 'all the marks of the gentleman gone to pot',[107] the Englishman produces an 'elaborate opium layout – all silver and ebony – on a silver tray' and proceeds to 'flourish' a pipe of opium at the Op. The Op, while quite prepared to 'punish' large quantities of liquor, refuses the offer of opium, upon which Bohannon offers him some cocaine – which the Op also declines. Whether Hammett was engaging directly in a parody of Holmes, the relentless 'sleuth hound' with a weakness for opiates, is open to conjecture. However, one can certainly detect the 'heady whiff' of fin de siècle Europe in Bohannon's bohemian ways, by which the professional detective, harbinger of a new, hard-boiled era, refuses to be tempted.

The urban setting is a primary characteristic of hard-boiled fiction, particularly Californian cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles. Knight attributes the 'innovative sense of anomie' in the hard-boiled mode to the 'valueless, traditionless cities of the far west'.[108] Besides commercial fiction and the 'dime novel', the cultural origins of the mode can also be located in terms of the response of literary Realism to modernity, in particular, the effects upon the individual of the rapid expansion of American cities, the rise of the commercial centres which Homberger observes marks 'the beginning of "modern" American culture'.[109]

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[105] D. Hammett, *Red Harvest*, in *Dashiell Hammett: The Four Great Novels* (London: Picador, 1975), p.157.

[106] Ibid., p.154.

[107] Hammett, 'The Golden Horseshoe', in *The Continental Op* (London: Orion, 2012), p.50.

[108] Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800*, p.112.

[109] Eric Homberger, 'Chicago and New York: Two Versions of American Modernism', in *Modernism: a Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991), p.151.

Theodore Dreiser's Naturalist novel *Sister Carrie* (1900) is seen to be characteristic of this response in its depiction of 'the bitterness of the battle between labour and capital ... and the shattering indifference of urban society towards the individual'.[110] Furthermore, Bradbury observes that the nineteenth-century Realist preoccupation with the city prefigures Modernism, by arguing that 'the naturalistic stress on the power of the external environment' can be seen as 'responsive to the idea of the great city of modern life'.[111]

The representation of the contemporary urban environment is thus seen to be an integral part of the hard-boiled mode, that is, of the 'realistic mystery fiction' pioneered by Hammett, the Modernist-influenced response to the classical detective novel which, Chandler argued, suffered from being 'too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world'. However, despite its undoubted realism and social focus, the mode is also characterised by the stereotypical characters and melodrama it shares with other forms of popular culture, including the Hollywood genre film. In this respect, in addition to its realist elements, it is also seen to be stylised and 'contrived'.

In terms of the emerging mode and the focus upon 'what goes on in the world', Hammett also situates crime within a social context, thereby imparting a degree of social relevance, in addition to realism. His *Black Mask* story, 'Dead Yellow Women' (1925), involving the swindler, Neil 'The Whistler' Conyers, is worthy of note in this regard.[112] Conyers's first encounter with the forces of law and order occurred in 1895, at age eleven, when he was prevented by the police from joining Coxey's March, a reference to a 'real life' unemployed workers' march. In 1901, the Philadelphia police charged him with 'being the head of the first organized automobile-stealing ring'. In 1908 he was suspected of involvement in 'a fake airplane-manufacturing deal'. In 1910, he was questioned during 'the Post Office Department's famous raid on get-rich-quick promoters', another 'real life' historical reference. Acquitted on all counts, in 1915, Conyers was convicted of 'buncoing [swindling] visitors to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition', an event held in San Francisco to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal. In 1919, working with a Japanese accomplice,

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[110] Ibid., p.151.

[111] M. Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', in *Modernism: a Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, p.99.

[112] D. Hammett, 'Dead Yellow Women', in *The Big Knockover* (London: Penguin, 1969), pp.196-197.

Conyers 'nicked the Japanese colony of Seattle for $20,000' wearing a counterfeit medal of The Order of the Rising Sun.

Hammett thus situates his tale, not merely within a social context, but amidst historical events. In fact, Conyers's charge sheet provides a neat summary of early-twentieth century American socio-economic history leading up to 1919, the year that saw Prohibition ratified, an event which heralded the crime boom against which Hammett's detective stories are set. While this certainly imparts a degree of realism and social relevance, there is also a sense in which this early example of the mode can be seen to critique capitalism, if indirectly, by equating the growth of American industry, technology, and commerce with criminal activity.

The situation of crime in its social, economic, and historical contexts is a departure from the classical detective story, where criminal tendencies tend to be the consequence of some diabolical hereditary strain, for instance, those of Sherlock Holmes's arch-enemy, Professor James Moriarty, of whom Holmes's sidekick Dr. Watson opines '[a] criminal strain ran in his blood, which instead of being modified, was increased and rendered infinitely more dangerous by his extraordinary mental powers'.[113] In Doyle, criminals – such as the dastardly Moriarty – are born criminals. In Hammett, they start out life as idealists protesting against unemployment, graduate to swindling investors in stocks and shares, and end up exploiting cynically and ruthlessly the idealism of their gullible victims.

Hammett's work also has considerable political and ideological focus. McCann has provided an account of the relationship between the work of authors such as Hammett, Cain, and Chandler and the 'New Deal Liberalism' of President Roosevelt.[114] Following the Wall Street Crash of 1929, leading to the Great Depression of the 1930s, Roosevelt proposed that 'a complex industrial society demanded a "redefinition" of the nation's traditional liberal principles'.[115] These principles, founded upon 'the primacy of personal liberty and freedom

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[113] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Final Problem', in *The Best of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. by David Stuart Davies (London: Wordsworth, 1998), p.217.

[114] S. McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and fall of New Deal Liberalism* (London: Duke University Press, 2000).

[115] Ibid., p.16.

of contract',[116] had, Roosevelt maintained, become outmoded in modern industrialised society, due to the emergence of a political and economic elite. This led to central government adopting a more interventionist role in acknowledgement of the gap between political dogma and 'social reality'. McCann argues that the revision of the classical detective story 'mirrored the "realist" critique of traditional liberal theory', a view based on the premise that 'the classic mystery story had been itself a parable of liberal society'.[117] The realism of hard-boiled fiction can thus be seen as a response to the emergence of political and economic oligarchies, and a rejection of the classic detective story as 'a political myth' which was seen to be 'illegitimate because it no longer corresponded to the complex realities of an urban, industrialised society'.[118] Similarly, Knight observes that 'The world-weary feeling of the Hammett-Chandler detective seems related to the growing dismay with modern mercantile society'.[119]

The world-weariness of the private detective, relating to a 'growing dismay with mercantile society', is a prominent feature of Hammett's *Black Mask* story 'The Gutting of Couffignal' (1925). The Continental Op is given an assignment at a society wedding on Couffignal Island, a job which requires him simply to guard wedding presents, and which he therefore undertakes with some reluctance. The Op's client, Mr Hendrixson, is the wealthy owner of the largest house on Couffignal, where other 'well-fed old gentlemen' are living off 'the profits they took off the world with both hands in their younger days'.[120] Unsparing in his social satire, the Op surmises that the wedding presents are worth between fifty and a hundred thousand dollars, as befitting a wedding party in the largest house in a community where 'working people, and similar riff-raff' are only admitted to keep the likes of Hendrixson 'comfortably served'.[121] The Continental Op has neither a back story, nor indeed a name, an indication of the minimalism of Hammett's work, which, in turn, may be

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[116] Ibid., p.17.

[117] Ibid., p.18.

[118] Ibid., p.18.

[119] Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800*, p.112.

[120] D. Hammett, 'The Gutting of Couffignal', in *The Big Knockover*, p.25.

[121] Ibid., p.25.

attributed to the influence of Hemingway and literary Modernism. Although there is insufficient background information to confirm the Op's working class origins, he certainly seems to have a good deal of sympathy with the 'riff-raff' – and little truck, if any, with the ageing capitalists who have come to Couffignal 'so they may spend the rest of their lives nursing their livers and improving their golf among their kind'.[122]

Another noteworthy aspect of Hammett's writing concerns the representation of gender. There are seen to be connections between the, invariably criminal, female characters in Hammett's 'pulp' fiction and the 'vamp' of early Hollywood (and Weimar) cinema, seen as a forerunner of the 'femme fatale' in film noir. The cinematic conventions of the 'vamp' and the 'femme fatale' can thus be seen as 'stock' character types resulting from the dialogic exchange between the two modes.

In 'The Tenth Clew' the Continental Op proposes that 'There are many, many murders with never a woman in them anywhere; but seldom a very conspicuous killing'.[123] However, regarding the signifying practice of the mode, to paraphrase the Op, while there are many hard-boiled detective stories with barely 'a woman in them anywhere', what few female characters there are tend almost always to be criminals. In terms of the stereotypical representation of gender within the mode, women are seldom more than two-dimensional ciphers. Much like the 'vamp' and the 'femme fatale', they can be viewed as a projection of male anxiety and desire, rather than as rounded characters. Descriptions are heavily gendered and stylised, tending to focus upon physical attributes, and often resorting to animal metaphors, thereby suggesting a latent, bestial evil.

In 'The House on Turk Street' (1924), Elvira, a female member of a criminal gang, has 'Smoke-gray eyes that were set too far apart for trustworthiness – though not for beauty'.[124] In 'The Gutting of Couffignal', when the Op accuses Princess Zhukovski of being a thief and a murderer, he observes that 'Her white face became the face of an enraged animal'.[125]

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[122] Ibid., p.25.

[123] D. Hammett, 'The Tenth Clew', in *The Continental Op*, p.4.

[124] D. Hammett, 'The House on Turk Street', in *The Continental Op*, p.88.

[125] Hammett, 'The Gutting of Couffignal', p.46.

Likewise, in 'The Tenth Clew', when Creda betrays her accomplice, Madden, she transforms into 'a furious, spitting cat, with claws and teeth bared'.[126] Such conventions are seen to become codified within generic practice, and to be communicated to the work of other hard-boiled authors, particularly Chandler. In *The Big Sleep*, for instance, Philip Marlowe describes Carmen Sternwood as having 'little sharp predatory teeth, as white as fresh orange pith and as shiny as porcelain'.[127] Despite Chandler's claims regarding the realism of the mode, his own work absorbs and transmutes generic practice as defined by Hammett, often representing the 'reality' of American fiction rather than American life.

While Hammett's criminal gangs tend to consist of a mix of class, race and gender, the female members of these 'crews' invariably act as a lure for male victims. The relationship between the literary trope of the attractive, worldly-wise female who manipulates men for her own ends and the 'femme fatale' of film noir is discussed in further detail in the main body of the study.

In terms of the representation of class in 'pulp' fiction, the victims of crime in Hammett's stories are often to be found amongst the upper echelons of society, their lofty ideals and lack of worldly knowledge making them prime targets for professional criminals. In 'Dead Yellow Women', Lillian Shan, the daughter of a Chinese nationalist and political exile, is a wealthy woman, living on an inheritance from her deceased father. Lillian is also a supporter of the Chinese nationalist cause. As McCann observes, although Lillian thinks her opulent, brownstone property is being used as a front to smuggle guns, paid for by Neil Conyers's accomplice, Chang Li Ching, to Chinese patriots, 'the real issue soon turns out to be the use of this nationalist vision as a cover'[128] for Conyers's criminal schemes, including rum and opium smuggling, as well as the lucrative 'coolie traffic' between China and the West. The vulnerability of the middle classes to exploitation by professional criminals is also a feature of Chandler's work, with wealthy families such as the Sternwoods besieged by the unscrupulous likes of Eddie Mars in *The Big Sleep*; or, more menacing still, perhaps,

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[126]Hammett, 'The Tenth Clew', p.36.

[127] R. Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (London: Penguin, 2011), p.3.

[128]McCann, *Gumshoe America,* p.71.

infiltrated by streetwise, working class impostors, such as society hostess Mrs Lewin Lockridge Grayle, alias nightclub singer Velma Valento, in *Farewell, My Lovely*.

Turning now to the work of James M. Cain, David Madden argues that Cain's oeuvre is characteristic of the 'tough-guy' novel, a broad category within which 'the private eye novel takes part'.[129] While Cain's work is, broadly speaking, similar to that of Hammett and Chandler, it also differs from the 'private eye' novel in certain important respects. Madden identifies the characteristics of the 'tough-guy' novel as follows:

> The typical tough-guy novel...presents a vision of life that is cynical, if not pessimistic; the attitude is ironic, dispassionate, neutral; the tone is hard-boiled, having no cultural pretensions, expressing few tender emotions. The first-person point of view is used almost exclusively – the syntax, diction, and grammar are those of the characters – the imagery is stark, rarely lyrical. The characters are vivid and elemental...The authors write with a predominance of blunt, brisk dialogue. Action is swiftly paced.[130]

In summary, the 'tough-guy' novel is a starkly realist tale, told bluntly, briskly, and in the vernacular, by a detached, ironic, and cynical 'tough-guy' narrator. In this respect, Cain's work can be seen to be broadly representative of the hard-boiled mode. Its swiftly-paced action and hard-boiled tone, devoid of 'cultural pretensions', allied with its thematic motifs of illicit sex and crimes of passion, provided Hollywood with a rich source of material, which, due to the restrictions of the PCA, the studios were unable to adapt until after the production of *Double Indemnity*.

However, in terms of the crucial differences between the work of Cain and his hard-boiled contemporaries, unlike Hammett and Chandler, Cain did not write detective stories.[131] In *The Postman Always Rings* and *Double Indemnity* the crimes are perpetrated, rather than investigated, by the main protagonists. As Madden observes, 'Cain's stories are concerned with murder and love, from the criminal's point of view'.[132] Naremore also notes that Cain

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[129]D. Madden, *James M. Cain: Hard-Boiled Mythmaker* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011), pp.5-6.

[130] Ibid., pp.6-7.

[131] Ibid., p.6.

[132] Ibid., p.6.

did not write detective fiction and, furthermore, that he 'avoided the pulps',[133] a reference to the fact that, unlike Hammett and Chandler, he did not serve his 'apprenticeship' writing detective fiction for *Black Mask*. He is, however, seen to be influenced by the work of fellow journalists, such as Ring Lardner, H.L. Mencken (the co-owner of *Black Mask*), and by the Naturalism of Theodore Dreiser.[134] Further to this, Naremore links Cain's work with that of the French Naturalist Emile Zola, observing, quite correctly, that the plot of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is 'lifted from Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*'.[135]

It is important to acknowledge that hard-boiled detective stories were adapted by Hollywood long before the advent of film noir. The 'rugged individualism' of 'tough guys' such as Hammett's Sam Spade was readily accommodated within the Hollywood genre system, there to jostle with sergeants and sheriffs from war films and westerns. For example, Hammett's 1929 novel *The Maltese Falcon* was adapted in 1936 by William Dieterle as *Satan Met a Lady*. In that Dieterle's film was made after the introduction of 'the Code' in 1934, the thesis argues that it was not hard-boiled fiction *per se* to which the PCA objected, but in particular, Cain's Naturalist-inspired 'crime of passion' narratives. However, this is not to detract from the importance of the morally ambiguous private detective, operating midway between the law and the criminal underworld, to film noir.

The difference between Cain's Naturalist-inspired novels and the private eye fiction of Hammett and Chandler is thus seen to be a significant factor in the 'birth' of noir. *Double Indemnity* is considered a 'watershed' film, due to the representation of 'adult' themes and the sympathetic portrayal of the criminal couple.[136] However, as also noted, the film acquires a 'moral centre' in the character of Barton Keyes, seen to bear the clear imprint of Chandler's private eye, Philip Marlowe, and to embody Chandler's 'romantic idealism'.

Chandler himself insisted on the distinction between his work and that of Cain in a letter to the publisher Alfred Knopf in 1943. The letter refers famously to Cain being 'a *faux naïf*, a

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[133] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.83.

[134]Ibid., p.83.

[135]Ibid., p.279.

[136] Chapter Two, pp.81-82.

Proust in greasy overalls, a dirty little boy with a piece of chalk and a board fence and nobody looking'.[137] In the same letter, Chandler remarks of Cain that '[s]uch people are the offal of literature, not because they write about dirty things, but because they do it in a dirty way'.[138] If Chandler found Cain's work to be excessively stark, blunt and lacking in lyricism, as noted, this can be attributed to ideological differences. As MacShane observes:

> The dislike of Cain goes deeper, for it reflects Chandler's romantic, even sentimental view of the world ... Cain's characters end up in sordid situations because of their overwhelming sexual passions. His stories have an inevitable downward course that always produces disaster. In this he may be a more realistic writer than Chandler, but he also lacks the idealism without which life for Chandler would be unbearable. Chandler's distaste for Cain's prose is an aspect of his dislike for Cain's moral position ... His characters are condemned from the beginning and cannot escape their fate. His style reflects this view of the world, and what is missing is the tension that exists when people have some possibility of choice.[139]

There is, thus, seen to be a fundamental difference in the 'moral position' of the respective authors and the way in which this is seen to inform their work. As proposed by MacShane, Chandler's detective novels exhibit a certain 'romantic idealism', whereas the 'inevitable downward course' of Cain's narratives, leading to the main characters' inescapable fate, suggests an entirely different position, grounded in determinism and fatalism. In the figure of the private eye Philip Marlowe, however, Richard Schickel argues that Chandler's work has 'a center of conventional morality in an otherwise frowsy universe'.[140] In addition, the worldview which informs the Marlowe novels is seen to be premised upon individual agency, as represented by the asceticism of the private eye, who suffers 'poverty, loneliness, and a constant sense of his own otherness, precisely because of his rectitude'.[141]

The 'conventional morality' of Chandler's work, where 'people have some possibility of choice', and where the narrator is a detective, thus contrasts starkly with the fatalistic

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[137] MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, p.101.

[138] Ibid., p.101.

[139] Ibid., p.101.

[140] R. Schickel, *Double Indemnity* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000), p.34.

[141] Ibid., p.34.

outlook of Cain's, where the criminal narrators Frank Chambers and Walter Huff are 'condemned from the beginning' to their fate. Described by Langdon as a 'knight-protector for the innocent and downtrodden', Marlowe seems in one respect to be the very opposite of Cain's anti-heroes, who, while they prey upon the vulnerable are also victims themselves, both of circumstance and their desire for the 'femme fatale'. Madden also observes of the ideological and artistic differences within the hard-boiled mode that Cain's *pure "tough-guy" novel* represents 'a picture of life for its own sake'.[142] Cain is thus seen to eschew the 'conventional form'[143] of detective fiction in favour of a version of the mode which is even more frank and unembellished than Hammett's, and far more so than that of Chandler.

This provides an interesting perspective upon the notion that the French critics who gave 'film noir' a name, and who refined rather than invented the concept, were valorising aspects of their own culture. Just as 'Camus confessed that he had been inspired to write *The Stranger* after reading Cain's *Postman Always Rings Twice*',[144] Cain's debut appears to have been 'inspired' by *Thérèse Raquin*. One wonders if during their encounter with the seemingly 'unconscious spontaneity' of Cain, Camus and Sartre realised they were engaging with a literary descendant of Émile Zola, an influence which it is difficult to ignore or deny given the similarities between Cain's first novel and *Thérèse Raquin*. Furthermore, in light of the above, it could be said that the 'adult' themes of *Double Indemnity*, that is, the film noir as well as the novel, are directly traceable to French Naturalism. Thus, just as the binaries between film directors and film critics appear unstable, this is also seen to apply to the boundaries between European and American culture.

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[142] Madden, *James M. Cain: Hard-Boiled Mythmaker,* p.6.

[143] Ibid., p.6.

[144] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.23; previously quoted on p.34.

**Chapter One**

Weimar Cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir

This Chapter focuses upon the critical analysis of two Weimar films, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Wiene, 1920), *The Last Laugh* (Murnau, 1924), and *Sunrise: a Song of Two Humans* (Murnau, 1927), F.W. Murnau's first Hollywood feature. The readings interrogate the links between the Weimar films concerned and film noir, while they also attempt to determine the nature of their relationship with the artistic movement known as German Expressionism. The overall purpose of this is to enable a discussion of the various discourses involved in the noir adaptation process, including cinematic as well as literary influences.

The connection between Weimar cinema and German Expressionism is an idea which continues to have currency. In his 2008 study *German Expressionist Cinema: The World of Light and Shadow*, Ian Roberts proposes the post-First World War German film industry 'strove to extend the new medium's technical and narrative possibilities', and that one of the ways in which this was achieved was 'to turn to Expressionism – an artistic movement which had flourished in Germany in the first years of the twentieth century'.[145] The critical endorsement of relationships between a new form of popular entertainment and the arts can also be seen as a means of valorising bourgeois culture over its mass media, working class equivalent. Thomas Elsaesser argues compellingly that 'the establishment of film as art'[146] is the result of historians' attempts to 'label' Weimar cinema, and 'to advertise the turn from plebeian amusement to high modernism'.[147]

As noted in the Introduction, Eisner considers German Expressionism in painting, sculpture, and expressionist theatre to have been an influence upon Weimar cinema,[148] arguing that 'German cinema was never to know another flowering like this one, stimulated ... by the theatre of Max Reinhardt and ... by Expressionist art'.[149] She also perceives a relationship between Expressionism and the traditions of German Romanticism. However, Elsaesser

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[145] I. Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema: The World of Light and Shadow*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), p.2.

[146] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.19.

[147] Ibid., p.18.

[148] Introduction, p.21.

[149] L. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973);
First published in France in 1952; revised and reissued, 1965, Le Terrain Vague), p.7.

argues that 'The German cinema of the Weimar Republic is often, but wrongly identified with Expressionism'.[150] While the 'label' of German Expressionism is seen to impart a certain artistic kudos, Elsaesser suggests an alternative view, one which sees the films 'grow from the studio floors of the Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft (UFA)', and which therefore 'takes its cue more from commerce and industry than art'.[151] As discussed in the Introduction and in further detail here, this study acknowledges commercial and industrial alongside artistic factors, and situates the discussion of 'external sources', for example, literature, painting, and printmaking, within the film production context.

The revisionist debate has also queried the relationship between noir and its supposed determinants, including German Expressionism. Based upon the analysis of the three films concerned, it is proposed that certain tropes can indeed be traced from film noir back to postwar German cinema and to *Sunrise*. However, it is proposed that this should be termed the 'Weimar' influence. While there are seen to be connections with the fundamental roots of 'German Expressionism', it is argued that the use of the term tends to conflate film with the plastic arts, and harkens back to a former time when critics privileged these established forms over the new mass medium. This argument is developed in subsequent chapters, which explore the occurrence of 'Weimar-inflected' tropes in a number of important films noirs released between 1944 and 1946, that is, the 'Studio Expressionist' phase, when the Weimar influence is seen to be strongest.[152]

Much like their predecessors, the *fauves* (or 'wild beasts') in France, and closer to home the German 'secessionists', the artists associated with German Expressionism formed part of loose-knit groups rather than a movement. As Robinson notes of such groups, 'the word [Expressionism] never delimited a clear and distinct school or style',[153] whereas Herwald Walden, the founder of the Expressionist review and gallery *Der Sturm* ('The Storm'),

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[150] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.3.

[151] Ibid., p.3.

[152] As noted in the Introduction (p.20), the thesis is concerned with identifying precedents rather than offering 'proof' of influence due to the fact that the arguments are based upon preferred inferences.

[153] I. Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, (London: BFI, 2005), p.33.

observed that Expressionism '"is neither a style nor a movement; it is a *Weltanschauung* [perception of the world]"'.[154]

However, these groups are seen to be united in their goals to break with the traditions of artistic representation and to seek societal change, due to the rise of industrialisation and capitalism and the damage that these conditions of modernity were perceived to have inflicted upon society and the individual. The Expressionists, along with their similarly discontented counterparts across Europe, such as the British Arts and Crafts movement and the *Jugendstil* Art Nouveau movement in *fin de siècle* Vienna, sought 'a purity of artistic expression … in a world (as they saw it) of soulless industrialised production'.[155]

In Germany, this led, during the early years of the twentieth century, to the formation of two Expressionist groups: *Die Blaue Reiter* ('Blue Rider') in Munich, established by Franz Marc, August Macke, Gabriele Münter, and Wassily Kandinsky; and *Die Brücke* ('Bridge') in Dresden, led by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. The work of both groups is characterised by a Modernist rejection of representational convention, an intuitive, symbolic, and 'expressive' use of colour, as exemplified by the Franz Marc painting *Der Blaue Reiter* (1903), and the more abstract experimentations with colour and form of Wassily Kandinsky. The paintings of *Die Brücke*, although still colourful, were iconoclastic in terms of subject matter, the work of Kirchner and Schmidt-Rottluff rendering 'stark images of city life, emphasising the dehumanised individual'.[156] The work of the group also seems remarkable for its figure studies, with mask-like faces staring blankly from the canvas amidst equally angular and jarring backgrounds. Such paintings are reminiscent of Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893), while seeming to anticipate the make-up and set designs of early Weimar cinema, such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Wiene, 1920).

With regard to this (disputed) influence, Willett has proposed that the term 'Expressionism' as it applies specifically to 'a particular modern German movement which lasted roughly between 1910 and 1922', and which is therefore capitalized, should be distinguished from

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[154] Ibid., p.33.

[155] Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, p.14.

[156] Ibid., p.14.

'expressionism', understood to be 'a family characteristic of modern German art, literature, music, and theatre'.[157] In terms of this distinction, Robinson argues that 'The design of *Caligari* clearly found its inspiration in theatrical precedents', rather than in 'the more fundamental aesthetic and philosophical roots of the plastic arts of Expressionism', given the similarity between the 'expressionist' set design of Hermann Warm, Walter Reimann, and Walter Röhrig, and the decors of contemporary theatre.[158]

German Expressionism, as seen to apply to the plastic arts, tends towards 'hyperreality', an anti-realist form representing the artist's subjective response to the objective world, as Roberts says, fusing 'the visible with the invisible'.[159] Commenting on the work of Murnau, Fischer notes how, in certain sequences, he 'literally depicts a character's consciousness'.[160] Murnau himself spoke of his intention to '"photograph thought"',[161] and of the parallels between such 'stream of consciousness' techniques and the work of James Joyce. He surmised that Joyce 'first picturizes the mind and then balances it with the action'.[162]

It is therefore the case that F.W. Murnau, born F.W. Plumpe but who renamed himself after the Bavarian town where the *Blaue Reiter* was formed, believed there to be connections between Weimar cinema and Modernism, in which Expressionism takes part. But do such easy comparisons between film and art stand up to close scrutiny?

As noted, the thesis proposes that connections can, indeed, be made between Weimar cinema and the 'fundamental aesthetic and philosophical roots' of German Expressionism, provided that the inter-art relationship is discussed in the context of film production, giving due regard to the uniqueness of film as a medium. What does this mean in plain terms? As

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[157] J. Willet, *Expressionism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970), cited in Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, p.33.

[158] Ibid., p.37.

[159] Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, p.15.

[160] L. Fischer, *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, (London: BFI, 1998), p.49.

[161] Freidrich Wilhelm Murnau, 'Films of the Future', *McCall's Magazine*, September 1928, pp.27, 90, cited in Fischer, *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, p.78.

[162] F.W. Murnau, 'The Ideal Picture Needs No Titles', *Theatre Magazine*, January 1928, p. 41, 72, in Fischer, *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, p.78.

discussed below, Murnau's endeavours to depict a character's thoughts appear to have been successful, for instance, in relation to The Doorman (Emil Jannings) in *The Last Laugh*. However, the representation of The Doorman's subjective viewpoint is necessarily achieved through the use of cinematic techniques, such as an 'in camera' effect enabling the superimposition of one image over another. Furthermore, the film is the product of a collaborative effort between various production team members, including the great 'auteur' Murnau. It is essential, therefore, to acknowledge the fundamental differences between the two modes of production, in this case film and literature, and as Elsaesser suggests, to approach film study from a standpoint which 'takes its cue more from commerce and industry than from art'.

While the First World War can be seen as having extinguished a good deal of the giddy optimism and idealism of the artistic movements of the early years of the century, as Robinson notes, recent scholarship views the War 'rather as a watershed between two distinct generations of Expressionists'.[163] With regard to the 'second generation', Barron argues that they 'suffered from war-induced disillusionment and were dissatisfied with post-war German society; they joined in with the cry for a new, classless society'.[164] The joyously colourful work of the *Blaue Reiter* is seen to give way to a 'socially-committed form of art' known as *Neue Sachlichkeit* or 'New Objectivity'.[165] It is possible to view these developments as part of a cultural trend towards minimalism, nihilism, and a new-found social commitment and political focus, which as noted is also seen to characterise postwar American literature.[166] As also discussed, this study proposes that such cultural trends were international phenomena, seen to be influential upon Hollywood film-makers and French critics alike, bearing in mind also that many of the personnel working in the American industry at the time were European émigrés. It is important to note, therefore, that Weimar cinema, considered to be one of the primary influences upon film noir, is itself seen to

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[163] Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, p.34.

[164] S. Barron, *German Expressionism 1915-1925: The Second Generation* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1988), cited in Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, p.35.

[165] Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, p.16.

[166] Introduction, pp.31-32.

involve the prevalent minimalism and 'social commitment' – that is, the Modernist influence – of the interwar years.

However, this is not to suggest that film-making should be seen purely in terms of broad cultural trends, or that Modernist painting and/or literature and Weimar cinema are one and the same thing. The following analysis and discussion, while comparing aspects of Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* with the plastic arts, theatre design, and literature, is conducted with this proviso in mind. Also, the film is attributed to the director merely for ease of reference. The contributions of the Decla-Bioscop team as a whole, including producer Erich Pommer, are also acknowledged.

### *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Wiene, 1920)

*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Wiene, 1920) is the film 'credited with launching the era of expressionist cinema'.[167] Given its place in cinematic history, it has been the focus of much critical debate. This was founded upon two major studies: Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947) and Eisner's *The Haunted Screen* (1952). As discussed in the Introduction, Elsaesser has offered fresh insight into the post-First World War German film industry, revisioning the 'historical imaginary' of the scholarly debate, as promulgated by Kracauer and Eisner.[168] The respective studies both linked Weimar cinema with the rise of fascism and the realities of life under Hitler. Elsaesser notes of the complex relationship between film, history, and critical discourse that if 'the German nation is haunted by the cinema screen, and the films are haunted by German history', as Kracauer and Eisner claimed, then it is equally true that 'their books are themselves haunted by the history that came after the films'.[169]

Thus, as with noir, a discussion of Weimar cinema tends towards a meta-critical discourse. The thesis concurs with Elsaesser's view that it is necessary to revisit the films themselves and effectively deconstruct the 'historical imaginary' in order 'to "give back" to [the films] some of their other, possible futures'.[170] To this end, the following analysis and discussion

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[167]Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, p.23.

[168] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.440n6; see Introduction, pp.21-22.

[169] Ibid., pp.3-4.

[170] Ibid., p.8.

focuses initially upon the film itself, and later upon the Weimar production context, rather than the 'imaginary' links with the rise of Hitler, in order to enable an alternative reading of *Caligari*, which is seen to challenge rather than acquiesce to and appease authority. Following on from this, the thesis argues that, besides the technical and artistic influence of Weimar films such as *Caligari* on noir, Weimar film production, as championed by producer Erich Pommer, also provides a precedent for a commercially-oriented, but nonetheless politically radical, form of cinema. However, the thesis also supports the orthodox view that there are connections between the Weimar films analysed here and the aesthetic and philosophical roots of German Expressionism, and that this is communicated to film noir via the Weimar influence.

*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* is based upon an original scenario written by Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer. The narrative involves the encounter between Holstenwall residents Franzis (Freidrich Feher), Alan (Hans-Heinrich von Twardowski), and Jane Olsen (Lil Dagover) and the travelling sideshow of the 'mountebank', Dr. Caligari (Werner Krauss), featuring the somnambulist, Cesare (Conrad Veidt). When the Town Clerk and Alan are murdered, suspicion falls upon Caligari, who, Franzis appears to 'discover', is using Cesare to carry out the killings for him. Cesare is sent to kill Jane, but, unable to carry out the deed, abducts her instead, dying in a chase with the enraged townsfolk. Franzis believes he has established links between the Holstenwall killings and those orchestrated by an eleventh century Italian murderer, also called Caligari, thereby incriminating the doctor. However, Caligari turns out to be the director of the local asylum, resulting in the 'deluded' Franzis being incarcerated, and his 'evidence' being discredited.

The adaptation of the scenario saw the addition of a framing device, or *Rahmenhandlung*, whereby the narrator, Franzis, is shown recounting his tale from an insane asylum. Kracauer argued that this resituated the indictment of authority in the Janowitz-Mayer scenario in terms of the delusions of the film's psychologically impaired narrator. As noted in the introduction, Kracauer contended that '[w]hile the original story exposed the madness inherent in authority, Wiene's *Caligari* glorified authority and convicted its antagonist of

madness',[171] attributing the production decision to Wiene's 'instinctive submission to the necessities of the screen',[172] rather than his remaining 'faithful' to the original scenario. Eisner dismissed Wiene as one of the 'second-rate directors'[173] of the period. As recently as 1997, David Robinson noted of the critical response to Wiene that, due to his inability to match the success of *Caligari*, 'he was forever written off as a one-film director'.[174] However, recent scholarship has reappraised Wiene's directorial status, prompting Roberts to state that he can now be regarded as part of 'the central group of major Weimar directors', and to propose that 'Wiene and his team established a template for filming the themes and motifs which preoccupied Weimar cinema for the best part of a decade'.[175]

The debate arising from the addition of the *Rahmenhandlung* highlights the way in which critics have privileged literature over film. As far as this study is concerned, Wiene should be praised rather than condemned for his submission to 'the necessities of the screen', given that such necessities are what distinguish film from other arts and media. Then there is the notion that one should remain 'faithful' to the adapted source when this is neither desirable nor indeed possible, as discussed in the Introduction.[176] One could argue that the framing moderates the social and political focus of the film, although this seems a qualitative and subjective evaluation which diverts study away from the film itself towards a hypothetical construct, a 'film that never was' rather than the film itself.

In fact, the radical film which Kracauer argues was Janowitz and Mayer's conception[177] is still seen to be present. The mise-en-scene contains a number of instances seen to critique the petit bourgeois bureaucracy. For example, when Caligari visits the Town Hall to obtain a permit to operate his concession, featuring the somnambulist, Cesare, at the Holstenwall

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[171]S. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974; first published by Princeton Press, 1947), p.67; see Introduction, p.21.

[172] Ibid., p.67

[173]Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.17.

[174] Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, p.24.

[175] Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, p.34.

[176] Introduction, pp.25-26.

[177] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p.67.

town fair, he is treated with disdainful contempt by the town clerk. The clerk is seated upon an elongated stool, accentuating his authority in relation to Caligari and the junior clerk behind him, while simultaneously satirising his absurd, petit bourgeois attitudes (*plate* 1). The forced perspective of Warm's set, which Robinson demonstrates effectively was influenced by expressionist theatre design,[178] evokes a sense of the walls of the Town Hall engulfing the human figures. This can be interpreted as the overpowering of the individual, particularly Caligari and the office junior, by the bureaucracy. Eisner notes of the actors' performances that 'through a reduction of gesture they attain movements which are almost linear and which ... remain brusque, like the broken angles of the sets'.[179] There does, indeed, appear to be a symbiosis between the actors' bodies and the sets in the 'Town Hall' scene, where the 'lofty' Clerk sits on a representation of a chair resembling a perch and the actor adopts a distinctly bird-like posture. The merging of two aspects of the mise-en-scene, that is, set design and performance, accentuates the town clerk's overweening demeanour, and is seen to be effective in representing the abuse of bureaucratic power.



This merging of the organic and inorganic led Eisner to make the link with expressionist theatre, but also with German Expressionism and Romanticism. The actors' stylised movements and gestures are certainly those of an expressionist acting style. Werner Krauss and Conrad Veidt had appeared in *Seeschlact*, an expressionist drama written by Reinhold Goering and directed by Max Reinhardt, at the Deutsche Theater during the winter of 1918, alongside Murnau favourite Emil Jannings, and were 'keenly conscious to adapt style and

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[178] Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, pp.36-37.

[179] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.25.

appearance to the visual character of the film'.[180] Thus, taking *Caligari* as an exemplar of Weimar cinema, the actor's physical form tends to become an intrinsic part of the signifying practice, complementing, and indeed merging with the mise-en-scene.

As discussed, however, in addition to the influence of expressionist theatre, Eisner also notes a more profound relationship between the trope and the fundamental principles of German Expressionism, and furthermore, a certain tendency towards 'anthropomorphism' which, she argues, characterised German art before the advent of Modernism. The 'animation of the organic', she proposes, is imbedded in the syntax of the German language, where 'objects have a complete active life: they are spoken of with the same adjectives and verbs as human beings, they are endowed with the same qualities as human beings'.[181] Thus, in terms of the relationship between the 'sinuous lines' of the set design and the actors' body postures, this is seen to indicate the latency of anthropomorphic tendencies characteristic of German art, but also rooted in the language. As Eisner relates:

> Long before Expressionism this anthropomorphism had been pushed to the extreme. In 1884 Friedrich Vischer, in his novel *Auch Einer*, talks about 'the perfidy of the object' which gloats upon our vain efforts to dominate it. The bewitched objects in Hoffmann's obsessed universe appear in the same light.[182]

In Hoffman's *The Sandman*, for example, the protagonist, Nathanael, falls in love with Olimpia, who is revealed to be an automaton, created by the mysterious Coppelius. Thus, in the traditions of German Romanticism, and perhaps according to the conventions of the language, too, the 'bewitched object', Olimpia, is 'given active life' by Coppelius.

As noted above, this study gives some credence to the view that that there are connections between *Caligari* and German Expressionism and Romanticism. However, it does so with the important qualification that the aspects of the mise-en-scene noted by Eisner, such as performance, set design, and lighting, along with the adapted screenplay, should be viewed, and valued, as part of the film-making process, rather than merely as the 'lesser siblings' of

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[180] Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, p.40.

[181] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.23.

[182] Ibid., p.23.

other art forms. Taking this caveat into consideration, Eisner's theories facilitate an informed reading of the text. For instance, she refers to the 'Expressionist treatment' of *Caligari* which is seen to be effective in rendering the '"latent physiognomy" of a small medieval town, indeed, of oblique windows with distorted frames [which] seem to gnaw into walls'.[183] If a town can be described as having facial features, and jagged windows as having teeth, then, *mutatis mutandis*, the human form can be seen to assume characteristics of the built environment, signifying the loss of individual will to the bureaucracy. Thus, Eisner's reading of *Caligari* in the context of other art forms may be illuminating, provided, of course that one does not privilege those forms over the film.

John Orr, citing Eric Rohmer, discusses the merging of human beings with the totality of the mise-en-scene in Weimar cinema, proposing that 'Expressionist stylistics ... had its own metaphysic of film space. Rohmer puts this most succinctly: "Movements and gestures whose meaning seemed contingent are in a sense – by their insertion into a certain spatial universe – grounded in necessity"'.[184] While Orr argues for the influence of 'Expressionist stylistics' on Hitchcock, other critics have identified that Weimar's 'metaphysic of film space' also applies to film noir. Paul Schrader, for instance, observes in 'Notes on *film noir*' that when 'the environment is given an equal or greater weight than the actor, it, of course, creates a fatalistic or hopeless mood'.[185]

The points made by Orr, Rohmer, and Schrader seem to support a similar view: the practice of giving equal weight to actors and the environment creates a 'fatalistic mood', transforming contingent movements and gestures into necessary ones. It is therefore argued that the merging of actors and sets in film noir, connoting a sense of fatalistic determinism, is subject to the influence of Weimar cinema. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter Two in relation to the representation of Walter and Phyllis in *Double Indemnity*.[186] For example, during scenes at Jerry's supermarket, the murderous pair

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[183] Ibid., p.21.

[184] E. Rohmer, in E. Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1979), p.26, cited in J. Orr, *Hitchcock and 20th Century Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), p.55.

[185] Paul Schrader, 'Notes on *Film Noir*', in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. by Alain Silver and James Ursini, p.57.

[186] Chapter Two: '"Dead man walking": adapting Double Indemnity', pp.100-102.

appears to blend with the consumerist milieu. This is seen to represent a lack of individual agency, both deterministically, in terms of them being subsumed within the capitalist system, and fatalistically, with regard to their criminal pathology and animalistic urges. This occurs throughout the film, for instance, in the opening titles when Walter's silhouette appears juxtaposed with the Paramount logo, the looming two-dimensional figure fusing with the mise-en-scene, becoming effectively a form of 'graphic insert' emblematic of the 'monstrousness' of the ensuing patriarchal revolt.[187]

In addition, the predominance of painstakingly composed shots, incorporating carefully arranged sets and actors, as Roberts observes, is partly accountable for the reluctance to move the camera in early Weimar films such as *Caligari*.[188] This was all to change during the 1920s, following technological improvements facilitating the use of the tracking shot, as evidenced by the wonderfully fluid camera movement – the *entfesselte Kamera* (unchained camera) – in Murnau's later films. However, the artfully composed, static shot remained a staple of film noir throughout its 'Studio Expressionism' phase, featuring prominently in the work of ex-Weimar personnel such as Fritz Lang and Billy Wilder.

The chiaroscuro lighting effects for which film noir is renowned are seen to be part of the technical and artistic legacy of Weimar cinema. Where *Caligari* is concerned, this is achieved largely through the set design of Warm, Reimann, and Röhrig, who utilise distorted linear perspective and harsh tonal contrasts reminiscent both of the decors of contemporary expressionist theatre design, but also Expressionist printmaking. Roberts notes of the relationship between Expressionist painting and Weimar cinema that the 'huge and obvious restriction' faced by the film-makers who 'took up the standard of Expressionism in the 1920s'[189] was that they had to shoot in black and white. However, German Expressionism did not depend exclusively upon the 'expressive' use of colour. It was also renowned for its woodcuts, a tradition in German art reaching back to the *Meisterstiche* ('master print') of Albrecht Dürer in the sixteenth century. The work of Emil Nolde, a member of *Die Brücke*, is

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[187] Chapter Two, p.86.

[188] Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, p.24.

[189] Ibid., p.24.

exemplary of this widely used Expressionist form, characterised in the main by black and white images which utilise tonal contrast, along with the expressive use of line rather than colour. Weimar set designers were also intent upon harnessing the expressive power of line and tone. Indeed, the *Caligari* designer Hermann Warm stated that 'the cinema image must become an engraving'.[190] Eisner notes that the effective use of tonal contrast is not only a prominent characteristic of *Caligari*, but also the serial film, *Homunculus* (Otto Rippert, 1916), which she argues 'clearly demonstrates the effect that can be obtained from contrasts between black and white'.[191] The restrictions of working in black and white were not, therefore, as 'huge' or as 'obvious' as Roberts proposes.

The scene in Franzis's lodgings is also remarkable in that the painted scenery contains a representation of a shadow pattern created by light falling through a window – remarkable in the sense that it can be seen as a forerunner of film noir's 'venetian blind' motif, both in terms of visual appearance and thematic connotations. In Franzis's case, the details of the cramped and claustrophobic interior, the 'tormented lines and angles and crazily leaning structure'[192] of the mise-en-scene, are seen to represent the oppressiveness of the doomed protagonist's troubled inner state, as well as foreshadowing his literal incarceration in the asylum, that is, his 'entrapment'. In relation to film noir, as noted above, the 'venetian blind' motif is also seen to connote 'entrapment'. The term can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Taking *Double Indemnity* as an example, it might apply to Walter having been 'ensnared' by Phyllis.[193] In a more literal sense, it might indicate that he stands to be imprisoned for murder before facing the death penalty. Alternatively, it might represent the couple's 'imprisonment' by their own, either pathological or socio-economic circumstances, a form of fatalistic determinism which, as we shall see, is characteristic both of noir but also the 1930s hard-boiled fiction of James M. Cain. However, as the 'window' motif in *Caligari* shows, there are also cinematic precedents in Weimar cinema.

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[190] Ibid., p.25.

[191] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.25.

[192] Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, p.39.

[193] See Chapter Two, p.88; p.92.

The 'window' motif can also be interpreted as representing the latent power dynamic of the narrative, both in *Caligari*, and later in *Double Indemnity*, the film which helped to establish noir's generic conventions.[194] An instance occurs in the sequence where the police investigate the murder of the town clerk (*plate* 3). The assumption is that justice has been meted out to the overbearing bureaucrat who bullied Caligari in the previous scene, although subsequent events cast doubt on this. The distortion of linear perspective and tonal contrast is such that the 'window' resembles a dagger blade, Cesare's weapon of choice, as much as a window, and can thus be seen to represent the horror and obscenity of the murder. One of the police investigators points down towards the clerk's unseen corpse. The 'window' motif, the left side honed to a fine point, also indicates the spot where the bureaucrat was slain, providing another instance of set design and performance functioning in tandem. In terms of the power dynamic, the motif can be interpreted in two ways. It can be seen to depict the 'imagined' demise of the bureaucracy, Kracauer's 'hallucination in which … authority is overthrown'. [195] As discussed further below, however, if the audience were to accept Franzis's account that the mountebank Caligari was responsible for instigating the murders, then it could also be interpreted as a more straightforward attack upon the hegemony.
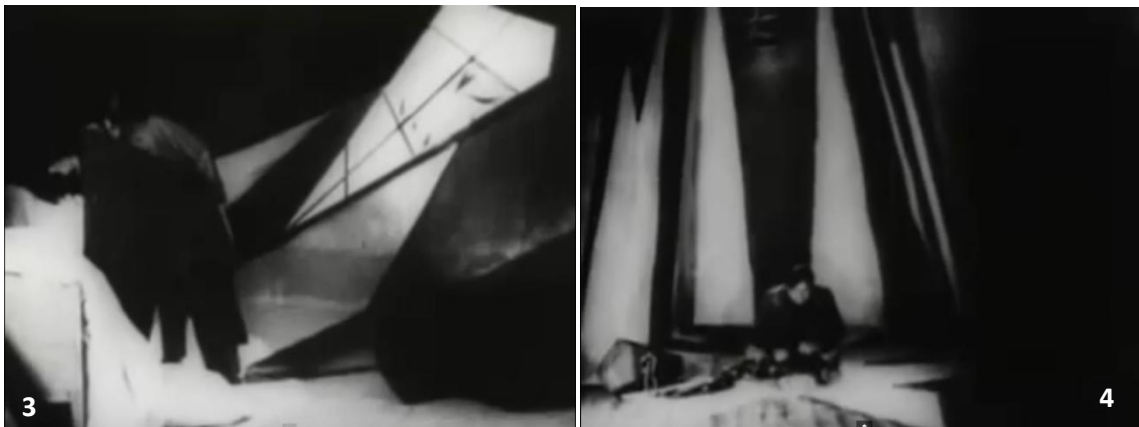


Another striking example of the motif appears in the subsequent scene after a local man is wrongly imprisoned for the murders. He is shown in a prison cell wearing a grossly enlarged ball and chain, positioned in front of a massively distorted 'window' motif, seen to represent

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[194]See Chapter Two, pp.86-90.

[195] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p.67.

both 'entrapment' and the miscarriage of justice, that is, the plight of the wrongly-accused suspect and the wayward authority of the state (*plate* 4). As Eisner observes of the 'Prison Cell' scene, with its menacing vertical lines, resembling 'arrow-heads':

> The oppressive effect is heightened by these verticals being extended along the floor and directed at the spot where the chain-laden prisoner squats. In this hell, the distorted, rhomboid window is a mockery.[196]

As noted above, in addition to 'entrapment', the 'venetian blind' motif in film noir is also seen to represent the latent power dynamic. This variant of the motif takes the form of a sloping rhombus, with the power dynamic indicated by the direction in which the bars of light and shade are pointing. In *Double Indemnity*, this occurs in scenes where Walter, played by Fred MacMurray, towers over his boss Barton Keyes, played by the diminutive Edward G. Robinson, with the motif corresponding to and accentuating the taller man's stare. However, given that Keyes is morally, intellectually and professionally Walter's superior, in this instance there is an inverse relationship between the power dynamic and the sloping rhombus. Thus, the film noir version of the 'rhomboid window', in an alternative 'hell' envisaged by the Paramount team, is also seen to 'mock' Walter's lack of authority.[197]

The interlinking of sex and death which characterises film noir is also seen to be one of the thematic preoccupations of Weimar cinema, including *Caligari*. In relation to another influential Weimar film, Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Roberts observes of the nocturnal encounter between Nosferatu (Max Schreck) and Ellen (Greta Schröder), when the vampire is shown 'feeding upon the limp body of the victim', that '*thanatos* (death) and *eros* (sexuality) ... are united in an orgasmic sequence'.[198]

Hans Janowitz is credited with the idea for the scenario upon which *Caligari* is based, conceived following a visit to Hamburg's Reeperbahn where he witnessed a mysterious event involving a pretty girl who strayed into some shrubbery in a park adjacent to the Holstenwall, closely followed by a young man, apparently lured there by the girl's laugh. The young man soon left, whereupon Janowitz noticed a shadowy figure lurking in the bushes

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[196] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.25.

[197] Chapter Two, pp.88-90.

[198] Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, p.47.

nearby, described as 'an average bourgeois',[199] who walked towards the spot where the girl still lay concealed. The following day, the writer learned from news reports of a '[h]orrible sex crime on the Holstenwall', involving the murder of a local girl called Gertrude. Presuming her to be the same girl, Janowitz attended her funeral, whereupon he encountered, once more, the shadowy 'average bourgeois' of the previous evening, and 'suddenly had the sensation of discovering the murderer'.[200]

The tale of the origins of the *Caligari* scenario thus involves the dual themes of sex and death while also conveying a sense of Expressionist 'hyperreality', with the 'discovery' rooted in the imagination of the scenarist, Janowitz, as much as in the factual details of the murder investigation. In addition, Kracauer observes how the scenario is seen to be 'in the spirit of E.T.A Hoffmann',[201] that is, German Romanticism, with its taste for the macabre and the bizarre. He also perceives a relationship between *Caligari* and the work of Franz Kafka, known for its anthropomorphic transformations and nightmare visions of bureaucracy.

These elements connect the film of *Caligari*, both with European artistic tradition, and various aspects of twentieth century Modernism, including Expressionism, as discussed in the Introduction. In addition, there appear to be resonances with the commentary made by Robert Warshow upon the Hollywood Gangster cycle, in particular his memorable and oft-quoted comment regarding the 'dangerous and sad city of the imagination',[202] which relates to the encounter between 'real life' crime, the Modernist sensibility, and the 'tragic hero' of the Hollywood gangster movie.[203]

In terms of the merging of real and imagined cities, Kracauer proposes that film provides an ideal means to 'externalize the fermentation of the inner life' and that it has 'the function of

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[199] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p.61.

[200] Ibid., p.61.

[201] Ibid., p.62.

[202] Robert Warshow, 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero', in *The Gangster Film Reader*, ed. by Alain Silver and James Ursini (New Jersey: Limelight Editions, 2007), p.13.

[203] The influence of the Gangster cycle upon film noir is discussed further in relation to *Double Indemnity* in the Chapter Two, pp.113-125.

characterizing the phenomena on the screen as the phenomena of the soul'.[204] He also argues that the 'long procession of 100 per cent studio-made films' initiated by *Caligari* was representative of the apparently deep-seated need for 'the command of an artificial universe'.[205] These observations seem directly relevant to film noir. Early noirs such as Lang's *The Woman in the Window* (1944) and *Scarlet Street* (1945) relied heavily upon studio shooting and 'the command of an artificial universe'. Within this carefully constructed world, hubristic men would find themselves marooned amidst rain-soaked streets reflecting the neon signs of shady nightclubs, wherein lurked the beautiful women who preyed upon them, the 'femmes fatales' who were, in effect, no more than apparitions, projections of male desire and anxiety. In combination with 'realism', or rather elements of 'cultural verisimilitude', for instance, 'streetwise' characters such as Johnny Prince (Dan Duryea) in *Scarlet Street*, this artificiality contributed significantly to the distinctive tone of noir, and to the 'uncanny' quality of many 'Studio Expressionist' films.

While the critical debate has tended to dismiss Wiene as 'second rate' or a 'one hit wonder', as noted, recent scholarship has reappraised his directorial status. Roberts argues that his direction is effective in representing surreptitiously the political conditions of the time, rather than altering the film's radical stance for commercial reasons. As discussed below, this is of relevance to politically radical noirs such as RKO's *Cornered*. When Franzis and Alan arrive at the fair, the two walk across the front of shot whilst in the background are shown a barrel organ, with the organ grinder vigorously cranking the handle, and a piece of wildly revolving scenery, representing a carousel. Roberts has commented upon the use of 'circular imagery' in *Caligari*, arguing that Wiene's directorial input ensures 'that the revised story-frame should be echoed in repeated circular imagery', and that this 'points towards a very deliberate attempt to reflect the pattern of events unfolding on Germany's streets'.[206] Thus, the repetition of circular imagery within a framed or 'cyclical' narrative is seen to be effective in representing the 'reactionary events of recent German history', that is, the overthrow of authority leading to the abdication of the Kaiser followed by its reinstatement

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[204] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, pp.70-71.

[205] Ibid., p.74.

[206] Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema*, p.31.

with the establishment of the Weimar Republic. As Roberts summarises with regard to Wiene's decision to have Franzis to narrate the story from an asylum:

> Instead of an expressionistic device standing as a cipher for instability and madness, the mental institute becomes instead the focal point for a different kind of instability, namely that of political revolution, and the scene of triumph for reactionary forces – something which comes extraordinarily close to true events in Weimar Germany.[207]

Roberts argues convincingly that Wiene's film is effective in representing the cyclical nature of political action and reaction. In light of Jeff Smith's arguments, explored below, concerning Hollywood film-making during the Cold War and the use of allegory to comment surreptitiously upon the HUAC hearings, *Caligari* can also be interpreted as a radical political allegory. Rather than turning a revolutionary story into a conformist film, as Kracauer maintained, it can be argued that *Caligari* is, in fact, a more subversive text than the original scenario, given that it can be seen to indict the 'reactionary forces' at work in Germany at the time which, Roberts argues, provide the 'real life' pretext for Wiene's allegory.



When Cesare awakes and emerges from the 'Cabinet', his make-up resembles a form of expressionist 'war paint', the exaggerated shadows beneath his eyes and his dense black eyebrows creating an effect at once terrifying and pitiful (*plate* 5). This is seen to prefigure the 'vulnerable predator' of film noir, for example, Walter in *Double Indemnity*. The tonal contrasts of his make-up are augmented by Veidt's black costume, spotlighting, and the use of 'iris-ins' and 'iris-outs', all of which heighten the *unheimliche Stimmung* ('uneasy atmosphere'). As the somnambulist walks towards the audience, his stiff posture and slow,

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[207] Ibid., p.33.

deliberate, almost mechanical movements, characteristic of an expressionist acting style, also convey a sense of eerie uncanniness (*plate* 6). The perceived influence of this style upon the performances in *Double Indemnity* is discussed in further detail in Chapter Two.[208]

Cesare appears utterly subordinated to his mountebank master, for whom he performed the grisly murder. Kracauer observes of the original scenario that Caligari 'stands for an unlimited authority that idolizes power as such, and to satisfy its lust for domination, ruthlessly violates all human rights', given his manipulation of the 'zombified' Cesare, who might also be seen as the 'bewitched object' of German Romanticism. It is clear how such a worldview, or *weltanschauung*, could have prevailed after the slaughter of the First World War in which millions died in the service of such 'unlimited authority', with its 'lust for domination' and its willingness to violate human rights. However, if the framing of the tale as the recollection of a madman appears to moderate this anti-authoritarian stance, as noted, the use of the 'cycle' motif can be seen to indict the overthrow, but subsequent reinstatement, of authority, in a different but nonetheless familiar guise.

As previously noted, *Caligari* involves a framed narrative whereby Franzis is shown recounting his tale from an asylum. It was discussed how the ensuing debate over the use of the framing device has diverted attention from a discussion of the film itself towards a qualitative evaluation of the adaptation. However, the resituating of the tale in terms of the recollections of a madman, as opposed to a subversive indictment of authority, suggests further connections between Weimar cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir.

Kracauer was instrumental in promulgating the view that the perceived ideological shift between scenario and film 'perverted, if not reversed [the writers'] intrinsic intentions', arguing that 'a revolutionary film was thus turned into a conformist one'.[209] Thus, the 'revolutionary' aspect of the original story, Kracauer proposes, was 'preserved and emphasised', but rather than being shown as a victory for reason and justice over 'unreasonable power and insane authority',[210] the outcome is effectively reversed. This

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[208] Barbara Stanwyck as Phyllis, Chapter Two, pp.96-97; Fred MacMurray as Walter, p.100.

[209] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p.67.

[210] Ibid., pp.65-67.

results in the idea of revolution remaining precisely that, a 'madman's fantasy' marooned in the realm of 'psychological experiences'[211] rather than manifesting in social and political change. This sublimated, politically subversive impulse is, in turn, seen to be part of the intertextual relationship between adaptation and source, that is, the discrepancies between the Janowitz-Mayer scenario and the Wiene film.

However, Robinson suggests that this perspective appears 'somewhat blinkered', arguing convincingly with regard to the framed narrative in relation to Expressionist principles that 'far from being the shown as the visions of the madman, Expressionism is demonstrated as a graphic style supple and expressive enough to be able to depict that vision'.[212] As he also proposes, it is conceivably the case that the spectator may disregard the implication that Franzis is mad, and conclude that Caligari used his corrupt power and influence to have the hapless narrator locked up, thus avoiding indictment for murder. As Robinson says:

> In an era of endemic scepticism in the face of authority, a fin-de-siècle audience does not so easily accept the ending at its face value. A modern viewer can readily interpret the ending from the position that Franzis's story is true and he is not mad.[213]

Robinson's view regarding Franzis in *Caligari* would also seem to apply to Canadian airman Laurence Gerard (Dick Powell), the main protagonist of *Cornered*, the 1945 RKO film noir directed by Edward Dmytryk, who is suffering from the effects of a head-wound received during the War, causing him to have occasional psychotic episodes. While *Cornered* is, broadly speaking, an anti-fascist film, dealing with the hunt for renegade Nazis in Argentina, Langdon notes how the initial screenplay, written by John Wexley and based on an idea by Ben Hecht, was rewritten by John Paxton, due partly to Dmytryk's belief that it was 'too much of an attack against fascism',[214] and that RKO might have faced a boycott in Argentina if it had been stated explicitly that they had harboured Nazi fugitives. Given that Gerard is seen to be delusional, as with *Caligari*, the focus is diverted away from the film's radical

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[211] Ibid., p.67.

[212] Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, p.33.

[213] Ibid., p.33.

[214] J. E. Langdon, *Caught in the Crossfire: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Americanism in 1940s Hollywood*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); electronic resource, Chapter 4, paragraphs 19-21.

political message towards the hero's psychological impairment. However, it is worth noting Robinson's point that this does not prevent the spectator from making their own decision regarding the protagonist's psychological state, and concluding that neither Franzis nor Gerard are mentally ill and that their accounts are perfectly reliable.

In *Film Criticism, the Cold war, and the Blacklist: Reading the Hollywood Reds*, Jeff Smith discusses American cinema of the 'Cold War' period, focusing, on the one hand, upon films seen to provide a vehicle for anti-Communist propaganda, and on the other, upon those which enabled a surreptitious critique of McCarthyism and the HUAC hearings. As Smith argues, noir's tendency to represent 'the irrational causes of human behaviour', which in the hands of a Wilder or a Lang might be utilised to critique capitalism, could be easily appropriated by the political right in order to 'illustrate how Communism "dupes" red-blooded American males'.[215] For instance, *I Married A Communist* (Stevenson, 1949) is seen to be a curious amalgam of anti-Communist propaganda and the narrative strategies of noir, notably *Out of the Past* (Tourneur, 1947), in which the main protagonist Brad Collins (Robert Ryan) is 'haunted' by his past involvement with the Communist Party. Brad's brother-in-law, Don Lowry (John Agar) is 'duped' into supporting Communism by 'femme fatale' Christine Norman (Janis Carter). Thus, whether in terms of the projection of a repressed, subversive fantasy in Weimar Germany, or the delusional state of the 'red-blooded American male' of the McCarthy era, the desire for revolutionary change can be represented as a psychological impairment, an aberration of a disturbed mind.

If, as with Pommer's observation about Janowitz and Mayer, this Chapter is in danger of merely 'talking art', then, as Thomas Elsaesser recommends, the tropes of Weimar cinema ought also to be discussed in the context of industrial and commercial factors. Indeed, where film and art are concerned, the two cannot be discussed meaningfully in isolation from one another. Weimar Cinema and film noir are both renowned for 'artistic' content. However, in both cases, this is seen to be directly related to technical innovation arising from material shortages caused by a World War. Elsaesser notes Pommer's observations regarding the 'material constraints' faced by the German film industry immediately after the

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[215]J. Smith, *Film Criticism, the Cold war, and the Blacklist: Reading the Hollywood Reds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), p.61.

First World War 'which apparently necessitated the "Expressionist" stylisation in *Dr Caligari*', and which Pommer saw as 'a consequence of power-rationing and the lack of technical infrastructure'.[216] For instance, the Decla-Bioscop studio where *Caligari* was filmed, the glass-house Lixie-Atelier at Weissensee, was 'restrictive in scale'[217] with the sets appearing to not exceed six metres in width and depth. These practical considerations are, thus, seen to have a significant bearing upon the oppressive atmosphere conveyed by the painted scenery. Likewise, regarding the work of Max Reinhardt, the theatre director whom Eisner saw as having influenced Weimar cinema, his 'innovative styles of symbolic and dramatic lighting' can be seen as partly attributable to war shortages, and the need for sets made from 'ersatz' materials to be 'disguised with light'.[218]

The 'Expressionist' styling of certain Weimar films is thus seen to be attributable to producers like Pommer as much as to directors like Wiene and Murnau. The UFA business strategy involved product differentiation and niche marketing, including 'art films for export', which established Weimar cinema's artistic credentials abroad, and which perhaps inevitably led to many German film workers starting a new career in Hollywood. Elsaesser acknowledges Erich Pommer's flair for business, and his awareness, following the overseas success of *Caligari*, of the potential of the term Expressionism as a '"brand-name" for connoting things German',[219] in preference to the French term 'Caligarisme'. Pommer summarises the position in which German film-makers found themselves:

> The German film industry made 'stylised' films to make money ... Germany was defeated: how could she make films that would compete with others? It would have been impossible to try and so we tried something new; the Expressionist or stylised film.[220]

These observations regarding material constraints, war shortages, and product branding and differentiation are directly relevant to the relationship between Weimar cinema and film

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[216] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.26.

[217] Robinson, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, p.25.

[218] Ibid., p.26.

[219] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.26.

[220] Ibid., p.26, p.54, n48.

noir. The lack of raw film-stock and the imposition of a 'ceiling' of five thousand dollars on set design during the Second World War, Krutnik observes, prompted the studios to encourage staff to 'experiment with new techniques',[221] for instance with lighting, cameras, and lenses, factors which contributed to the development of noir style. Chinen Biesen goes further, stating that '[t]he *noir* aesthetic derived from wartime constraints'. Just as the sets of *Caligari* were affected by austerity measures caused by the First World War, then the 'Brooding, often brutal, realism' and 'low-lit images of noir' are attributable to the 'recycled sets' and 'tarped studio back lots'[222] necessitated by the subsequent global conflict.

In addition, these 'alternative' production values are seen to be effective in terms of niche marketing, with low-budget, B-films becoming associated with 'art strategies', enabling smaller studios such as Monogram to gain a market foothold. As with the UFA example, this 'aesthetic differentiation' functioned as a 'means of upgrading the status' of low-budget films, imparting a certain artistic credibility, and, according to Krutnik, becoming as standardised as 'classical norms'.[223] Krutnik, like Elsaesser, stresses the importance of commercial and industrial expediency in relation to artistic considerations, observing that the staff involved with technical and stylistic innovation 'were not in general attempting to make a critique of the system, but were in fact seeking to advance their position in it', and that they were part of 'the commercial, mainstream cinema, rather than within the oppositional space of the *avant garde*'.[224] Thus, material constraints can facilitate technical and artistic innovation; or, alternatively, techniques arising out of expediency can easily be mistaken for, or even promoted as, artistic achievements.

In Krutnik's view, the 'art strategies' which enabled a form of 'aesthetic differentiation' within the marketplace, and are seen to contribute to noir style, were 'firmly associated with a mode of quality cinema represented … by "German Expressionism"'.[225] He references

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[221] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, p.21.

[222] S. Chinen Biesen, *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 'Introduction', p.3.

[223] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, p.21.

[224] Ibid., p.20.

[225] Ibid., p.21.

the work of German émigré cinematographer Theodore Sparkuhl for his contribution to Paramount's *Among the Living* (Heisler, 1941), characterised by 'carefully composed, deep-focus cinematography', 'extended tracking shots', and 'trick photography'.[226] Thus, it would appear that artistic and technical innovation, first in the German film industry during the Weimar period and later in Hollywood during and after the Second World War, were both directly linked to commercial factors, to 'art strategies' providing an effective means of product differentiation. It is interesting to note the similarities between the business models of the two industries, at different times and under different social, political, and economic conditions, and how in both instances the term 'Expressionism' was an effective means of 'branding' the respective products.

In his revisioning of the orthodox positions of Kracauer and Eisner, Elsaesser proposes a mode of critical discourse which is capable of understanding 'the cinema's function in a modern society, without metaphorising its political history', and of enabling a means of valorising style 'as historically significant while not being trapped into art-historical thinking about influence'.[227] Described as the 'Constructivist turn',[228] this revisioning of art-historical notions of style and influence acknowledges the collaborative effort involved in film-making rather than individual contributions, as well as 'the institutional, semi-industrial, profit-driven context' in which the members of Weimar production teams were both 'constrained' as well as 'encouraged to work'.[229]

Furthermore, as noted above, by focusing upon Weimar film production, that is, upon the industry, one is able to disassociate films such as *Caligari* from the rise of fascism, and to 'give back' to them 'some of their other, possible futures'. When viewed in this way, the products of commercial enterprises such as Decla-Bioscop and UFA can be seen to challenge 'bourgeois arts on their own grounds and in their own idiom of cultural consumption'.[230] This approach casts film noir's Weimar legacy in an interesting light. As also noted, in

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[226] Ibid., p.22.

[227] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.36.

[228] A reference to post-revolutionary Russian Constructivism.

[229] Ibid., p.37.

[230] Ibid., p.39.

addition to the technical and artistic influence upon film noir, Weimar film production is seen to provide a precedent for a commercially-oriented yet radical type of film-making.

The following involves brief analyses of *The Last Laugh* and *Sunrise*. These are intended to show that certain noir tropes are attributable both to Weimar cinema and the 'hybrid' arising from Murnau's move to Hollywood, such as the use of 'Portraits and Doubles' in *The Last Laugh* and the representation of the 'vamp' in *Sunrise*, seen to be a forerunner of noir's 'femme fatale'. In addition, Murnau's depiction of a character's inner state, the 'phenomena of the soul', is seen to be one of the key elements in terms of noir's Weimar legacy. The analysis and discussion here is expanded upon in Chapter Four, which argues that Murnau's work, along with that of Alfred Hitchcock and other ex-Weimar personnel, had a profound effect upon 'the advent of noir style'.

### *The Last Laugh* (Murnau, 1924)

When the Atlantic Hotel Doorman (Emil Jannings) in Murnau's *The Last Laugh* is relieved of his duties and reassigned as a lowly washroom attendant, he steals his uniform in order to conceal his demotion, and his shame, from his family. When he falls into a drunken stupor at a wedding party, a montage sequence shows his anguished face superimposed over the revolving doors at the entrance to the Hotel (*plate* 7). Thus, the film provides an early example of the use of montage, that is, an 'in camera' effect involving the superimposition of one image, that of the outer world, over another – one might say that of the subject's 'inner self' – to represent simultaneously the character's outward appearance and state of mind. The montage technique also occurs in Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (Hitchcock, 1927), when the Bunting family, gathered in a downstairs room, imagine the Lodger (Ivor Novello) pacing the floorboards in an upstairs bedroom.[231]

In relation to film noir, the influence of Murnau and Weimar cinema is also discernible in Boris Ingster's 1940 *Stranger on the Third Floor* (Ingster, 1940). Although Huston's 1941 adaptation of Hammett's hard-boiled novel *The Maltese Falcon* was once widely seen as the first film noir, the contemporary debate tends to afford this accolade to *Stranger*, giving

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[231] This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four: 'The advent of noir style: "Portraits and Doubles" and the "femme fatale"', pp.186-187.

substance to claims that French-based critical theory did a disservice to film history. In summary, *Stranger* concerns the story of Mike Ward (John McGuire), a career-driven young journalist who dreams he is wrongly accused of killing his neighbour Albert Meng (Charles Halton) but who is tried and convicted of the murder. As the judge passes sentence, Ward's point-of-view shot involves a montage where the judge is replaced momentarily by a nightmarish figure holding the 'scales of justice' in one hand and a scythe in the other (*plate* 8), described by Spicer as 'a paranoid conflation of the law with death'.[232]



In depicting Ward's consciousness, Ingster, like Murnau, is seen to attempt to 'photograph thought', that is, to visualise the anguished inner state of the character. The cinematography was provided by Nicholas Musuraca, a product of Val Lewton's 'B' unit at Universal. Musuraca made a significant contribution to noir, working on *Stranger on the Third Floor*, Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase*, and *Out of the Past* with director and fellow Lewton protégé Jacques Tourneur. Interestingly, *Stranger on the Third Floor* was marketed by RKO as a horror film and is seen by Krutnik to involve the incorporation of the 'generic modes of the crime film and the horror film',[233] an indication of the trans-generic elements, not merely of film noir but of genre cinema *per se*.

Returning to *The Last Laugh*, the image of the revolving doors is a recurring motif. The grotesquely exaggerated, vertical lines and tonal contrast of the sets depicting the exterior of the Atlantic Hotel, reminiscent of expressionist theatre design, dwarf The Doorman, who is robbed of his livelihood, his authority, and his gender identity when he becomes

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[232] A. Spicer, *Film Noir*, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), p.49.

[233] Krutnik, *In A Lonely Street*, p.22.

unemployed. This can be interpreted as an indictment of the capitalist system, especially given the parlous state of the German economy at the time, but also as a satire, that is, of snobbishness and the absurdity of such outward shows of 'respectability'. However, despite his snobbery, The Doorman – much like The Man (George O'Brien) in *Sunrise* – is a largely sympathetic, working class character. The social standing of The Doorman and The Man, an agricultural worker, is, in each case, contrasted with more affluent city dwellers, the urban sophisticates who frequent the films' public spaces. Social class is, thus, emphasised and demarcated. However, neither film is seen to provide an unequivocal critique of capitalism. On the contrary, there is a sense in which the social and geographic boundaries are fluid, with the liminal spaces of doors and stairways imparting a sense of mobility as The Doorman navigates between home and work; between the dreariness of the tenement block, and the excitement and sense of worth and purpose which his beloved job imparts.

Murnau makes use of another motif which occupies a central place in the signifying practice of film noir: the 'doubled' or mirrored image. Hirsch argues that the doubling process in noir can be seen to signify 'schizophrenia and masquerade'.[234] The 'double life' of The Doorman in *The Last Laugh*, who feels obliged to conceal his demotion and who therefore enters into an elaborate masquerade, is seen as subject to the pressures of a materialistic and status-orientated society. When the bridegroom's aunt (Emilie Kurz) visits the hotel to discover that he is now a lowly washroom attendant, Jannings is shown reflected in the washroom mirror, framed by spotlights, much like an 'actor in make-up'. The mirrored or doubled image is seen to represent the divided nature of the protagonist, namely, the public persona he feels obliged to maintain, and the secret truth which, in turn, he must conceal. The 'divided image' also serves to represent gender anxiety and sense of diminished masculinity, due to demotion and consequent loss of social status. The use of the trope in this scene from *The Last Laugh* is analysed and discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, which revisits the Weimar influence on noir.[235]

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[234]F. Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001), p.90.

[235] Chapter Four, pp.172-173.

***Sunrise: a Song of Two Humans* (Murnau, 1927)**

Murnau, also known as the 'German Genius', was brought to Hollywood by William Fox who was 'seeking to lend art-house prestige to his studios in the mid-1920s'.[236] A number of tropes common to both *The Last Laugh* and *Sunrise*, such as the use of montage to represent 'inner' and 'outer' states, are seen as attributable to the Weimar influence, and to the 'art-house' style so valued by Fox. However, certain representational conventions, such as those discussed below involving the 'vamp', seen to be a forerunner of noir's 'femme fatale', were part of Hollywood as well as Weimar tradition. Murnau's work is thus seen to be of particular interest to this study as the use of certain tropes, including that of the 'vamp', are seen to involve the merging of the signifying practices of the postwar German and American industries, as well as to involve his own directorial style. As Graham Petrie argues, 'Murnau had neither an "American" nor a "Continental" film, but something … which mediated between the two'.[237]

While *Sunrise* was filmed 'on a back-lot belonging to Fox Film Corporation', John Orr observes how he managed to conjure 'an entire social world',[238] linking imaginary city, coastal resort, and countryside, with remarkable finesse and technical skill. The 'symbiosis' of city and countryside, and the 'encounter of tradition and modernity', Orr contends, 'is unmatched anywhere'.[239] This may well be the case, but the use of studio artifice and carefully controlled environments to suggest an 'entire social world', as noted, is part of noir's Weimar legacy.

Murnau's idenitifiably Modernist approach to film-making is characterised by its pluralism and by 'junctions that trace the subtle connections between entities rather than their clear demarcation'[240] as opposed to embracing fixed divisions. However, Tony Rayns argues that

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[236] Fischer, *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, p.10.

[237] G. Petrie, *Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America, 1922-1931*, (London, Boston, Melbourne, and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), cited in Fischer, *Sunrise: a Song of Two Humans*, p.8.

[238] J. Orr, *Hitchcock and the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2005), p.72.

[239] Ibid., p.72.

[240] Fischer, *Sunrise: a Song of Two Humans*, p.8.

the meaning of *Sunrise* can be interpreted as arising 'largely from [its] oppositions'.[241] Understood in this way, the sense of meaning in *The Last Laugh* and *Sunrise* is seen to derive as much from the contrasts, for instance, between built environments such as the tenement block and the Atlantic Hotel, as from the (liminal) spaces between them.

While the studio-bound shots of rural and urban settings in *Sunrise* involve the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, Murnau also counterpoints the three main characters: The Man, The Wife (Janet Gaynor) and The Woman from the City (Margaret Livingstone), in particular, as Fischer observes, 'the farm girl versus the City Woman'.[242] In Murnau's first Hollywood feature, the organisation of narrative and characterisation in binary pairings appears, therefore, to prefigure film noir. While The Woman from the City, or 'vamp', can be seen as a prototype 'femme fatale', luring the happily married husband away from the marital home, The Wife is seen to be a forerunner of another noir trope, namely the 'nurturer/homebuilder'.[243] Fischer notes that while The Wife is 'a familiar figure of supreme good', The Woman from the City is 'a nebulous figure tied to modernity'.[244] Fischer also observes that the origins of the 'vamp' can be located in 'an earlier Fox film – *A Fool There Was* (1915)', thus acknowledging the cultural traditions of Hollywood film-making as well as the Weimar influence. The arguments of both Fischer and Petrie appear to resonate with the observation made by Mark Bould that the noirs of European émigrés can 'be regarded as palimpsests, over-writing fatalist Weimar sociopsychology and expressionist aesthetics onto the American crime film'.[245] This provides a useful context within which to interpret aspects of the generic practice of noir, such as the binary opposition of the 'femme fatale' and the 'nurturer/homebuilder', and their association with the city and the countryside.

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[241] Tony Rayns, 'Sunrise: a Song of Two Humans', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, XLII, no.495, April 1975, pp.92-93, in Fischer, *Sunrise: a Song of Two Humans*, p.8.

[242] Ibid., p.40.

[243] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.91.

[244] Fischer, *Sunrise: a Song of Two Humans*, p.40.

[245] M. Bould, *Film Noir: From Berlin to Sin City* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2005), p.32; see Chapter Two: '"Dead Man Walking": adapting *Double Indemnity*', p.91.

For example, in *Out of the Past* femme fatale Kathie Moffat (Jane Greer) is associated with evil, darkness, interiors, and the past, whereas nurturing woman Ann (Virginia Huston) is linked with good, light, exteriors, and the present. Regarding Billy Wilder's 'indebtedness to Weimar', Naremore notes the opposition of 'good girl' Lola Dietrichson (Jean Heather) with 'bad girl' Phyllis Dietrichson in *Double Indemnity*, arguing that 'the bad girl represents Culture and the good girl represents Nature'.[246] *Laura*, directed by Austrian émigré Otto Preminger, involves a variation on a theme with male urban sophisticate, the theatre critic Waldo Lydecker (Clifton Webb), manipulating his female protégé Laura (Gene Tierney), masterminding the operation from the palatial interior of his lavishly decorated apartment.

Returning to *Sunrise*, at the start of the film The Woman from the City is still vacationing at a holiday resort, having recently met The Man, whom she plans to seduce, who lives nearby with The Wife and their infant child. Margaret Livingstone's character is seen to typify the 'vamp'. As she prepares to meet her hapless victim, she is shown in a state of dishabille in the dark recesses of her bedroom, lighting a cigarette from a candle and combing her hair in the mirror (*plate* 9). The mise-en-scene also includes a perfume bottle, a single high-heeled shoe, and a wardrobe containing other outfits.

These conventions include the use of dark interiors, evoking a sinister eroticism, and making the visual connection between sex and death, characteristic of Weimar cinema, and later film noir. If the entrapment of the 'male victim' entails the usurping of male authority, then the candle and the cigarette are seen to invest the 'vamp' with phallic power. The mise-en-scene is also effective in associating The Woman from the City with fashion and cosmetics, the shoe and perfume bottle signifying a certain 'urban sophistication', but also a sense of duplicity, as the 'vamp' assumes her disguise in order to entrap her 'male victim'. The same can be said of her fashionably angular hairstyle, cut into a short, dark 'bob'. Later in the film, when The Man and The Wife visit a beauty salon, their naïve wonder is seen to contrast with the worldliness of the 'vamp'. Unlike her binary opposite The Wife, a precursor of noir's 'nurturing woman', who is 'natural', 'wholesome', and 'virtuous', the sexual attraction of the 'vamp' is premised upon artificiality, equating with duplicity and deception.

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[246] J. Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), p.89.

The visual means of representing the 'vamp' are seen to prefigure the 'femme fatale' in film noir. In the scene from *Double Indemnity* when Phyllis and Walter first meet (plate 10), Phyllis is seated at a mirror, applying lipstick, and wearing a fashionable white dress exhibiting her slender figure. These and other elements of the mise-en-scene, such as her immaculate coiffure, are similar to the conventions of the 'vamp', connoting a powerful but fundamentally artificial sexuality. The horizontal 'venetian blind' shadow pattern cast across her back, as previously noted, is seen to signify 'entrapment'. While this element of the mise-en-scene in the Wilder film does not appear in the still from *Sunrise*, it does occur elsewhere in Weimar cinema, for example, in Wiene's *Caligari*, as discussed above.







In the second example, Cora is also shown applying lipstick in a mirror, which, as with the 'vamp', can be seen to signify her usurping of male authority and her 'unnatural phallic power'.[247] The shot includes an equivalent of the 'venetian blind' motif, with the banisters casting a vertical shadow pattern, resembling prison bars, onto the stairwell. As with The Woman from the City and Phyllis Dietrichson, she is scantily clad, with Lana Turner wearing one of her many white outfits, which serves to accentuate her suntanned legs and attractive physique. Thus, much like her predecessors, she is seen to assume a 'disguise' in preparation for a 'performance' in an attempt to entrap her victim and usurp male power. A

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[247] Chapter Three, p.148.

more detailed analysis of the images of Phyllis and Cora in relation to the representational conventions of the 'femme fatale' is included in Chapters Two and Three, respectively.[248]

The Man is incited to murder The Wife by drowning her during a boat trip to the city. After he fails to carry out the deed, and after being forgiven by his virtuous spouse, the two continue to their destination. When they chance upon a beauty salon, the establishing shot shows some modish, stainless steel art deco doors, the deep focus photography revealing the busy scene within. The hot towel dispenser has an oddly anthropomorphic appearance, which, along with the robotic movements of the uniformed workers, suggests an 'Expressionist' merging of organic and inorganic.

A sequence which combines many of the foregoing stylistic and thematic elements occurs during the 'Funfair' scene. This starts with an abstract image of a flashing light which, an iris-out reveals, is the gigantic, illuminated sign over the entrance, into which processions of tiny, ant-like customers are streaming. This is followed by a crane shot, tracking in from the gates at the entrance to the enormous arches beyond. As with the entrance to the salon, both establishing shots are perfectly symmetrical, with the staff and clientele of these edifices to modernity and artifice shown as an extension of the urban milieu, subsumed within the advertising signs and technological gadgetry, that is, the paraphernalia of mass media and consumerism.

However, although Weimar cinema and later film noir tend to represent the dehumanising effects of life in a modern industrialised society, it must be acknowledged that film is itself an industrial art form. Regarding the encounter between art and industry in Weimar and Hollywood cinema – between commercial products with an 'art-house' style – the artistic achievements, both of *Sunrise* and *The Last Laugh*, are linked intrinsically with technological advances. The illusion of the 'entire social world' of *Sunrise* is rendered via the use of innovative shot types, such as the *entfesselte Kamera* which tracks the lovers' progress seamlessly out of the restaurant and into the funfair, with its automated, 'state of the art' amusements, such as a large-scale model plane, which thrill the young newcomers. Here, the city is shown as a place of fascination and delight, foregrounding the appeal of modernity, consumerism, and mass entertainment. *Sunrise* is, therefore, as much a

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[248] Chapter Two, p.93; Chapter Three, p.147.

celebration as an indictment of the conditions of modernity. It is seen to be complex, self-reflexive, and pluralistic, rather than conflicted, drawing attention to its own mass media status, the 'plebeian amusement' referred to by Elsaesser, while critiquing (subtly) the capitalist system to which it owes its existence.

This is also seen to apply to film noir, a genre which affords a complex type of pleasure: the sinister appeal of characters who are both beautiful and bad, the contemporary urban American setting at once exciting and dangerous, and of course the dazzlingly attractive women, as much the objects of fear and mistrust as desire. The Woman from the City is a pivotal figure in this regard. As a precursor of the 'femme fatale', she is seen to be as compelling and seductive as she is corrupt and menacing. Fischer notes how the appeal of the 'vamp' is linked to modern technology and to 'the film medium itself'.[249] In terms of noir's Weimar legacy, Naremore argues that the 'city woman' in *Sunrise* and Phyllis Dietrichson in *Double Indemnity* can be categorized as 'an urbanized, mass-cultural type', observing that Phyllis is 'so bad that she seems like modernity and kitsch incarnate'.[250]

In summary, the Weimar films analysed and discussed here are seen to bear the imprint of the artistic movement known as 'German Expressionism'. The critical analysis identifies several tropes, such as the 'window' motif in *Caligari*, the 'doubling' of The Doorman in *The Last Laugh*, and the 'vamp' in *Sunrise*, seen as precursors of the generic practice of noir. Perhaps the key point which emerges from the discussion of *Caligari*, *The Last Laugh*, and *Sunrise* in relation to noir, however, is the ability of 'Expressionist-related', or 'Weimar-inflected', tropes to enable film-makers to represent 'the fermentation of the inner life'. This subjective viewpoint tends also to be a 'skewed' perspective, attributable to anguish, desire, or insanity, as with The Doorman in *The Last Laugh*, The Man in *Sunrise*, and Franzis in *Caligari*.

The 'inner life' made manifest upon cinema screens thus tended to be a troubled existence. This is also very much the case with the protagonists of noir, such as Walter in *Double Indemnity*, driven to murder by his desire for Phyllis, likewise the unfortunate Christopher

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[249] Fischer, Sunrise: *a Song of Two Humans*, p.41.

[250] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.89.

Cross (Edward G. Robinson) in *Scarlet Street* and 'Swede' (Burt Lancaster) in *The Killers*, the respective 'dupes' of the deadly Kitty March (Joan Bennett) and Kitty Collins (Ava Gardner). One could dismiss as pure coincidence the fact that the directors of these films, Wilder, Lang, and Siodmak, all worked in the German film industry during the Weimar period. This study, however, argues that the likes of Walter, Chris and 'Swede', the troubled men of noir, have precedents in Weimar cinema, which in this way can be seen to exert a considerable influence over the Hollywood genre. Further, as noted in the Introduction,[251] precedents also exist in the early hard-boiled fiction of Dashiell Hammett, where characters such as Leopold Gantvoort in 'The Tenth Clew' were 'duped' by unscrupulous women. In these instances we can see a connection between two of noir's major cultural influences.

So much for desire then, one might say, but what of insanity? It was also discussed how the representation of Franzis as being of unsound mind nonetheless allowed the spectator to make their own judgement regarding his mental state, and thus to read the protagonist's quest either as a delusion or as a politically radical, anti-establishment crusade. As discussed, this is seen to prefigure such 'tormented' noir protagonists as Laurence Gerard in *Cornered* and to enable similar readings of the film; that is, as a study of psychological impairment and post-traumatic stress, an anti-Nazi statement, or, as this thesis proposes, a compromise between the two. As we shall see, this technique, enabling representation of the subjective viewpoint of troubled individuals, but allowing also for albeit veiled indictments of capitalism, intertwined with an allusive eroticism, was particularly useful when Billy Wilder and Raymond Chandler came to produce the adapted screenplay of *Double Indemnity* and to tackle Cain's famously, and deliciously, erotic and subversive tale.

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[251] Introduction, pp. 39-40.

**Chapter Two**

'Dead man walking': adapting *Double Indemnity*

This chapter analyses and discusses *Double Indemnity*, Paramount's ground-breaking 1944 adaptation of Cain's second novel, directed by Billy Wilder, and adapted by Wilder and Raymond Chandler. Developing the discussion of the tropes of Weimar and early Hollywood cinema in Chapter One, such as 'Portraits and Doubles' and the 'femme fatale', the critical analysis contained here focuses upon the emergent generic practice of noir, while also considering its relationship with hard-boiled fiction. As noted in the Introduction, the thesis argues for a mutually beneficial dialogic exchange between the two modes, observable in terms of shared characteristics such as 'a tendency towards melodrama and action [and] by stock or typical characters'.[252] However, there were also fundamental incompatibilities regarding the representation of sex and violence. In order for Cain's novel to be adapted, Hollywood film-making had to undergo radical change. The mostly harmonious – but sometimes conflicted – relationship is explored further here.

*Double Indemnity* is widely regarded as a cultural landmark. As Naremore states, '[f]ew would deny that *Double Indemnity* is a definitive film noir and one of the most influential movies in Hollywood history'.[253] Spicer observes it is historically significant due to its ground-breaking representation of 'sex and violence and the degree to which it creates sympathy for an adulterous couple',[254] while Murray Schumach considers it a 'trailblazer' due to the fact that it was 'the first movie in which both the male and female protagonists were thorough villains'.[255] It is considered to have exposed the Production Code, devised in the 1930s, as being overly restrictive, anachronistic, and out-of-step with public attitudes. The PCA, the organisation responsible for the enforcement of 'the Code' from 1934-1968,[256] had banned the studios from adapting *Double Indemnity* in October 1935,[257] due in the main

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[252] F. Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.33; see Introduction, p.30.

[253] J. Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), p.81.

[254] A. Spicer, *Film Noir* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), p.38.

[255] M. Schumach, *The Face on the Cutting Room Floor* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), p.63.

[256] T. Doherty, 'Introduction', in *Hollywood and the Production Code* (Woodbridge, CT: Thomson Gale, 2006), p.iv.

[257] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.37.

to its violation of guidelines regarding 'adulterous relationships and detailed murder plotting'.[258] The production values and moral ethos of 'classical' Hollywood, and of course the PCA, still exerted considerable influence, but *Double Indemnity* would be effective in initiating change and ushering in a new, more permissive era of film-making. Chinen Biesen observes that 'Hollywood's industrial self-censorship by the PCA certainly eased during (and after) WWII' and that this was 'evident in studios producing racy Cain stories',[259] while Leff and Simmons note that the relaxation of 'the Code' led to Breen being inundated with screenplays involving 'murder and eros'.[260] In summary, then, *Double Indemnity* is regarded as being the quintessential noir, and to have been influential upon Hollywood film-making *per se*, as well as serving to define the genre. It is seen to be pioneering, not merely in its representation of 'adult' themes, but for having male and female leads who, while 'thorough villains', were portrayed with a degree of sympathy.

The hard-boiled mode, in this case the work of James M. Cain, is of central significance to each of these 'groundbreaking' aspects of the film. The Chapter considers how Cain's work is seen to differ from that of his fellow hard-boiled authors, that is, how the detective heroes of Hammett and Chandler investigated the sorts of crimes – the insurance 'scams' and premeditated murders – that the protagonists of Cain's *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* conspired to commit. Where the dialogic exchange between the hard-boiled mode and film noir is concerned, Cain's criminals are as attractive as they are repellent; or alternatively, they elicit sympathy either in spite of, or, indeed, due to the fact that they are flawed. While it was the scandalous themes of the novels which attracted public attention, the appeal of Walter and Phyllis – even moreso Cora and Frank – resides in the complexity of their characters. The complexity of the 'vulnerable predator', captured by Cain in print, was to become, eventually, an important element of film noir.

Rather than dispute the influence the hard-boiled mode upon noir, as the revisionist debate has done, the thesis argues that there is a diversity of influence, arising from variations

[258] Ibid., p.37.

[259] S. Chinen Biesen, *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p.97.

[260] L.J. Leff and J.L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), p.131; see Introduction, p.23.

within the mode, in particular, the ideological differences between Cain and Chandler. Where the adaptation of *Double Indemnity* is concerned, these variations are of interest given that Chandler co-wrote the screenplay. The development of the character of Barton Keyes, seen to provide the film with its 'moral centre', is discussed in this regard.

The Chapter concludes with a critical analysis of *Scarface* (Hawks, 1932) which discusses the perceived influence both of the Hollywood Gangster cycle and the work of director Howard Hawks on film noir. The discussion of cinematic influences runs in parallel to the main topic, that is, of hard-boiled fiction and noir. This is in order to enable a discussion of the various discourses involved in the adaptation process which takes place in Chapter Four concerning 'the advent of noir style', and which assembles the main points arising from the preceding chapters. Of particular interest here regarding the broader discussion of cinematic as well as literary influences is the overlap between Hawks's directorial style, such as the use of a 'cross' motif in *Scarface* to connote the recent or impending demise of a mobster, and the use of a similarly recurring device involving an 'equestrian statue' motif in Hawks's 1946 film noir *The Big Sleep*, seen to represent the 'chivalric code' of the private detective and latter-day 'knight-protector', Philip Marlowe. In addition, *Double Indemnity* also involves the 'marking' of characters, both with a 'cross' and a 'venetian blind' motif to connote 'impending doom' and 'entrapment', seen in this case to be part of the Weimar legacy, but also to bear relation to the Gangster cycle and to Hawks's method of working.

As mentioned in the Introduction, *Double Indemnity* was one of a number of Hollywood films screened in Paris during the summer of 1946 which prompted French critics, amongst them Nino Frank and Jean-Pierre Chartier, to first use and popularise the term 'film noir' in relation to the Hollywood crime thriller.[261] Frank praised a 'young generation' of Hollywood directors for rejecting the 'sentimental humanism' of their forebears and engaging directly with 'the dynamism of violent death', and with contemporary American life, as it were, refracted through the distorted lens of 'criminal psychology'.[262] Chartier, on the other hand, disliked the 'series' of films due to a perceived 'pessimism and disgust towards humanity'.[263]

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[261] Introduction, p.3.

[262] Naremore, *More than Night*, p.16; see Introduction, p.5.

[263] Ibid., p.16.

He regarded the central characters in such films, including Lang's *The Woman in the Window*, as 'monsters, criminals whose evils nothing can excuse, whose actions imply that the only source for the fatality of evil is in themselves'.[264] As far as Chartier was concerned, then, films such as Wilder's and Lang's failed to situate crime within its social context, as the cinema of the Popular Front had done. Instead, they appeared to emphasise the irrational, subconscious urges which motivate crime, that is, precisely the psychological element of the films which appealed to Frank and the Surrealist-inspired criticism of Étienne Borde and Raymond Chaumeton.

However, film noir is seen to exhibit both a fascination with criminal psychology and a social and political focus. Far from being mutually exclusive, these two elements coalesce within noirs of the 'Studio Expressionist' phase, including *Double Indemnity*, discussed in detail below. As Brian Neve argues in relation to noir in general and to the RKO feature *Crossfire* (Dmytryk, 1947) in particular:

> Both social and existential issues were dealt with, and the films provided opportunities both for more realism – including more location shooting – and for aesthetic innovations that could be seen as the opposite of realism. As with *Crossfire*, expressionist techniques could be combined with efforts to engage with contemporary society.[265]

*Double Indemnity*, like *Crossfire* and another Dmytryk-directed RKO noir, *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), involves a combination of location shooting and the 'expressionist techniques' which Neve proposes 'could be seen as the opposite of realism'. Sequences shot on location in Los Angeles nestle amongst studio-based scenes featuring carefully composed static shots of shady suburban interiors, reminiscent of the entirely studio-based films of Weimar cinema.

As discussed in Chapter One, Kracauer viewed this to tendency to be representative of the need for 'the command of an artificial universe'.[266] Within this 'artificial universe', film-

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[264] Naremore, *More than Night*, p.16.

[265] B. Neve, *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.145.

[266] S. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974; first published by Princeton Press, 1947), p.74; see Chapter One: 'Weimar Cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir', p.61.

makers such as Murnau were able to depict the 'fermentation of the inner life' and to characterise 'the phenomena on the screen as the phenomena of the soul'.[267] It was also noted that the 'inner life' of the characters concerned tended to be an anguished existence, and how characters such as Franzis in *Caligari*, The Doorman in *The Last Laugh*, and The Man in *Sunrise* were affected by insanity, gender anxiety, and sexual desire, respectively. This is seen to provide directors of films noirs, some of whom, including Wilder, worked in the German film industry during the Weimar period, with a model for depicting the 'skewed' criminal consciousness. In addition, it was seen how such techniques were also effective in enabling a surreptitious critique of hegemonic power.[268]

It so happened that an American author, James M. Cain, had been developing literary techniques which enabled him to represent the world through the eyes of marginal figures such as the 'hobo' Frank Chambers in his first novel and the dapper *flaneur* Walter Huff in his second, social outsiders who were just one step away from adultery, fraud and murder. Just as with Weimar cinema, the fatalistic determinism of Cain's Depression-era tales also enabled a critique of capitalist society, a fact not lost on his European admirers, including several notable Existentialists, Sartre and Camus, and the Realist film-makers Renoir and Visconti. The combined influence of Weimar cinema and American hard-boiled fiction are thus seen to be key factors in the 'birth' of film noir.

### *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944)

The following involves a close reading of *Double Indemnity* which focuses upon elements of the emergent generic practice of noir, in particular 'Portraits and Doubles', the 'femme fatale' and the 'venetian blind' motif, thereby developing some of the main points arising from the discussion of Weimar cinema in the preceding Chapter. The analysis starts, however, with the dramatic title sequence. The opening credits are superimposed over the silhouetted image of a man on crutches. When the image first appears at the bottom of the screen, the Paramount logo is emblazoned over his head (*plate*1). The silhouetted figure gradually advances and increases in size, eventually filling the screen. The sense of menace is heightened by Miklós Rózsa's dramatic score. Given that the injured man, who turns out

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[267] Ibid., pp.70-71; see Chapter One: 'Weimar Cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir', p.61.

[268] Chapter One, pp.65-66.

to be the main protagonist Walter Neff, is in silhouette, when viewed in a movie theatre, this would have created the menacing illusion of the figure approaching the audience from behind the projection screen. The solemn score fades as the titles dissolve to a location shot of a Los Angeles street at night, with a speeding car containing the wounded Walter hurtling towards the camera/spectator.

The memorable title sequence serves to foreground the transgressive nature of the film which threatens to 'infiltrate' the movie theatre almost before it has begun. When Chartier referred to the 'monsters' of noir, the shady characters 'whose actions imply that the only source for the fatality of evil is in themselves' he may have had the dark silhouette of Walter in mind. With further regard to 'monstrousness', that is, transgressivenes, one might also consider the influence of horror movies, as well as Gangster anti-heroes like Tony Camonte in *Scarface*,[269] and thus the transgeneric aspect of the Hollywood genre system.

The dominating physical stature of the actor Fred MacMurray who plays Walter, his 'monstrous' presence, as it were, is a defining element of the visual fabric of the film, with Wilder and cinematographer John Seitz seen to play upon the incongruence between Walter's impressive manly bulk and his lack of moral substance. As Richard Schickel notes of MacMurray, 'he was perfect for the part, his size and solidity contrasting ironically with the psychological insubstantiality he projected'.[270]

Adopting a psychoanalytic perspective, this aspect of the visual styling serves to foreground the various ways in which patriarchal authority is challenged and undermined by Walter and his lover, Phyllis, but eventually reasserted by Walter's boss at the Pacific All-Risk Insurance Company, Barton Keyes. Krutnik observes that film noir tends to involve the 'testing' of the male hero, not merely by the 'femme fatale', Phyllis, but also 'in relation to other men'.[271] The film's exquisitely composed, largely static shots tend to show Walter towering over other characters, including Phyllis, Keyes, and Lola Dietrichson (Jean Heather), Phyllis's

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[269] Chapter Two, pp.114-115.

[270] R. Schickel, *Double Indemnity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p.59.

[271] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, p.165.

stepdaughter. However, as discussed in Chapter One,[272] the appearance of authority belies the power dynamic of Walter's relationships both with his lover and his boss, who threaten to outwit and outmanoeuvre him at every turn. Phyllis does this to ensure he transgresses the 'patriarchal and economic systems of law'[273] by assisting her in the murder of her husband, Mr Dietrichson (Tom Powers) and defrauding the insurance company of one hundred thousand dollars, the eponymous 'double indemnity' for a death which takes place on board a train. Keyes, on the other hand, deploys his rationality and his actuarial tables to solve the case, to ascertain who murdered Dietrichson, and to restore hegemonic order.



One of the structuring elements of the film, in terms of characterisation and narrative, is the binary relationship between Phyllis and Keyes, with the former representing the threat to hegemonic values and male authority embodied, in turn, by the latter. Walter is a relatively powerless character, beguiled by the 'femme fatale', by the 'erotic display' of a 'modern Circe'[274] who first appears to him clad merely in a bathrobe on the steps of her Hollywood Hills home, and badgered by Keyes. Keyes is seen as a patriarchal figure, who, while physically diminutive, is morally, intellectually, and professionally superior to his junior colleague,[275] and who refers constantly to his 'little man', an imaginary figure who endows him with his perspicacity in respect of human nature.

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[272] Chapter One, pp.58-59.

[273] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, p.139.

[274] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.91.

[275] Chapter One, p.60.

Following Dietrichson's murder, Walter and Keyes are summoned to the office of the President of the insurance company, Edward S. Norton Jr. (Richard Gaines), who announces that he intends to challenge the double indemnity payment. When Phyllis arrives at the office, and as Norton prepares to tell her about the decision, a shot-reverse-shot sequence shows Walter and Keyes on one side of the office and Phyllis and Norton on the other. Keyes is seated with a manila folder, presumably containing his beloved statistics, on his lap, while Walter is standing, supporting the left hand side of the shot, seemingly a bastion of male authority (*plate* 2).

However, Walter appears agitated, not merely because he is about to meet his lover/accomplice Phyllis while in the company of his mentor/father figure, Keyes, but because he is unaware upon which grounds Norton intends to withhold payment. The mise-en-scene suggests possible reasons for his agitation. Firstly, the 'venetian blind' lighting effect, which casts diagonal 'bars' of light and shadow across Walter and the rear wall, is seen to signify his 'entrapment' by Phyllis, and, should Norton claim that Dietrichson was murdered, surely his imminent incarceration, pending the death penalty. Secondly, a miniature ornamental cannon sits upon the mantelpiece. Appearing above Keyes, the most tangible threat to the villainous couple, it is pointing directly at Walter. The angle of trajectory is roughly approximate, both to the diagonal bars of the shadow pattern and the direction of Keyes's stare, which creates the appearance of him 'targeting' Walter. Although he does not yet know it, the shot is seen to signify that Keyes has Walter 'in his sights'.

Furthermore, the 'venetian blind' motif is in the form of a sloping rhombus, angled downwards from left to right. Keyes and the cannon are situated at the bottom-right of shot, with Walter at top-left. Although Keyes is seated adjacent to the lower, right-hand side of the rhombus, given that he is in every respect Walter's 'superior', the mise-en-scene is seen to involve an inversion of the power dynamic, an ironic reference to Walter's lack of authority.[276] A version of the motif also appears in MGM's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (without the inversion and ironic reference) to signify the inherent power dynamic of the narrative.[277] Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter One, a precedent is seen to occur in the

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[276] Chapter One, p.58-59.

[277] See Chapter Three: '"The price of fornication": adapting *The Postman Always Rings Twice*', pp.145-147.

1920 Decla-Bioscop feature, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. This supports the view that *Double Indemnity* was instrumental in establishing noir's generic practice, while also indicating that Weimar cinema was influential upon the Hollywood genre.

A corresponding shot appears in a subsequent scene in Keyes's office, when Keyes reveals to Walter that he believes Dietrichson was murdered (*plate* 3). The composition shows Keyes recumbent on a sofa to the left of shot, with Walter standing to the right. The 'venetian blind' shadow pattern is again deployed, with Keyes adjacent to the lower left-hand side of the rhombus, which slopes downwards from right to left. Given that Keyes is shown in an even more vulnerable and submissive pose than in the shot in Norton's office, but that his 'phallic power' is increasing while Walter's diminishes, this instance of the trope is seen to represent the inverse relationship between the power dynamic and the configuration of the mise-en-scene and the irony it creates. The more diminutive and vulnerable Keyes is made to seem, the greater the irony. The mise-en-scene also includes wall charts containing graphs, the statistical analysis which enables Keyes to deduce that Dietrichson was highly unlikely to have committed suicide. This deduction enables Keyes to progress his investigation, and to assert his 'phallic power' and the authority of the state. Furthermore, in Freudian terms, the shot also involves an inversion of the analyst-analysand relationship, given that the 'analyst' Keyes is on the sofa.



The 'venetian blind' device is also deployed in a scene involving Walter and Lola Dietrichson, when Lola reveals that Phyllis once nursed her sick mother, and that she believes her to have been responsible for her death. Wilder and Seitz shoot Walter and Lola from an

overhead angle (*plate* 4), which accentuates Walter's height and creates more acute angles in elements of the mise-en-scene. The rhombus slopes downwards from right-to-left and towards the centre of frame, where it intersects with a picture rail, which due to the overhead angle, faces downwards in the opposite direction. The intersection falls immediately between Walter and Lola, forming a chevron, or 'wedge'. This division can be seen in terms of the 'moral divide' between the virtuous Lola and the transgressive pairing of Walter and 'femme fatale', Phyllis. It can also be seen to apply to the divisions within Walter, the authority figure to whom Lola is appealing for help, but who is corrupt, immoral, and largely responsible for her dilemma. Furthermore, given that Walter works in the financial services industry, this can be seen as an indictment not merely of male authority, but of the capitalist system, a thematic concern 'articulated' within the mise-en-scene.

*Double Indemnity* can be interpreted as 'a transgressive fantasy', but one which is marked 'by the inevitability of its failure'.[278] As Krutnik notes of the opening scene where the mortally wounded Walter drags himself into the office to make his confession to Keyes via the dictation machine, in such transgressive fantasies, 'the fact that the hero will fail is pointed out very early on'.[279] As Krutnik argues, besides satisfying the PCA, the framed narrative enables the spectator to take vicarious pleasure in the 'Oedipal revolt',[280] given that it is situated within a strict, moral framework, and that the spectator is aware from the very outset that the 'revolt' is doomed to failure. The visual motifs and the transgressive theme function in tandem, foregrounding the 'mismatch' between the crusading Keyes and his unworthy acolyte, which, due to excellent casting, is referenced ironically in the physical appearance of MacMurray and Robinson.

As noted above and discussed in detail in the preceding Chapter, the 'venetian blind' motif and its perceived relationship with the power dynamic is traceable to Weimar cinema and *Caligari*. The discussion now turns briefly to the Weimar influence on *Double Indemnity* and the generic modalities of film noir.

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[278] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, p.138.

[279] Ibid., p.138.

[280] Ibid., p.138.

The representation of criminal psychology within a social, economic, and political context is a central feature of *Double Indemnity.* This is traceable to noir's cultural hinterland, perhaps most notably, to Weimar cinema. Mark Bould notes how *Doktor Mabuse, Der Spieler* (Dr. Mabuse, The Gambler) a 1922 Weimar film directed by Fritz Lang and produced by Erich Pommer for Uco-Film der Decla-Bioscop AG, 'connects the criminal underworld to high finance, government, and the aristocracy', whereas in his influential crime thriller *M* (1931), Lang 'turned inwards, relocating manipulating power within the pathological psyche'.[281] It should be noted that Pommer and Decla-Bioscop were behind Wiene's *Caligari*, a film which is also seen to connect the state with criminal activity, albeit surreptitiously. Bould considers Fritz Lang's work to exemplify the 'fatalistic determinism' of Weimar cinema. He argues that 'Lang's films depict determinist worlds'[282] in which economics and politics have become integrated and effectively 'collude' for mutual benefit; but also, due to the fact that the subject is seen to be lacking individual agency, that films such as *Metropolis* exhibit a 'fatalist version of determinism'.[283] In terms of how this ideology is seen to inform the mise-en-scene, the disempowered subject is represented amidst an array of mechanised gadgets of which they themselves become 'mere components'.[284] The 'dehumanisation' of the subject, the merging of humans and machines referred to as 'cyberneticisation',[285] is further emphasised by rhythmic, choreographed movement.

How is this seen to be relevant to film noir? Bould argues convincingly that Lang, along with fellow German émigrés such as Siodmak and Wilder, brought these thematic and stylistic tropes to Hollywood, where they 'continued to depict the subject as lacking agency in the face of forces beyond his or her control'.[286] As noted in Chapter One, he proposes that the films noirs of émigrés such as Wilder can 'be regarded as palimpsests, over-writing fatalist

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[281] M. Bould, *Film Noir: From Berlin to Sin City* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2005), p.32.

[282] Ibid., p.29.

[283] Ibid., p.32.

[284] Ibid., p.30.

[285] Ibid., p.30.

[286] Ibid., p.32.

Weimar socio-psychology and expressionist aesthetics onto the American crime film'.[287] This palimpsest is arguably nowhere more apparent than in *Double Indemnity*. In addition, as discussed further below, Cain's work is also seen to be informed by 'fatalistic determinism', allying the philosophical underpinnings of the novel, both with noir and Weimar cinema.

In fact, Robert Siodmak and Billy Wilder had collaborated on the 1931 Universum Film AG (UFA) production *Der Mann, Der Seinen Mörder Sucht* (1931), directed by Siodmak and co-written by Wilder. *Der Mann* involves the suicidal Hans Herfort (Heinz Ruhmann), who is prevented by a burglar from shooting himself. He attempts to persuade the burglar to shoot him instead. The burglar marks Herfort's back with a target – a chalk cross – but is unable to carry out the gruesome deed (*plate* 5). The 'cross' motif, seen to signify imminent death, also appears in another, much-vaunted Weimar film. In Lang's crime thriller *M*, as Frau Beckmann (Ellen Widmann) awaits the return of her daughter Elsie (Inge Landgut), the straps of her apron mark her with an 'X', signifying Elsie's perilous situation and impending doom (*plate* 6). Later in the film, Hans Beckert (Peter Lorre) is marked in chalk with an 'M' (*Mörderer*, or Murderer) after having been identified by a blind balloon seller as Elsie's killer (*plate* 7). In all three shots, the inscription of characters with graphic marks is seen to merge the human form with the rest of the mise-en-scene, to the point where it is merely another compositional device. This 'dehumanisation' can be seen as representative of the 'socio-psychology and expressionist aesthetics' of Weimar cinema.



The marking of characters, whether by a 'cross' motif to signify imminent death, or, as discussed above, by a 'venetian blind' signifying entrapment, occurs freely throughout *Double Indemnity*. This relates mostly to the representation of Walter, for example, in the opening scene at the Pacific Building when he is marked by a veritable array of crosses

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[287] Ibid., p.32; see Chapter One: 'Weimar Cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir', p.74.

(*plate* 8). However, the 'venetian blind' motif occurs in several sequences involving Walter and other characters, such as those mentioned above, but also during the first meeting between Walter and Phyllis at the Dietrichson house, where the latter, applying make-up and delivering the *double entendre* 'Hope I've got my face on straight' (a reference to the ensuing acts of duplicity and deception) is also marked by bars of light and shadow (*plate* 9).

In the first instance, Walter returns to the Pacific Building to make his confession to Keyes, although his line 'I don't like the word confession' suggests his statement is more a justification of his poor decisions, as well as a 'plea for forgiveness'. Traversing the balustrade, he is 'marked' twice, by the cross-shaped railings in the foreground, and by the shadow cast over his body and onto the rear wall. This can be seen to signify that he is 'marked' for destruction, but also his having been 'double crossed' by Phyllis, who, while luring the insurance man into surrendering his technical expertise in the construction of the murder plot, had been having an affair with Lola's boyfriend, Nino Sachetti (Byron Barr).



The scene involving Walter and Phyllis at the Dietrichson home when the latter is applying her lipstick exemplifies the Weimar influence on noir.[288] This is evident in the 'marking' of both characters; by their 'doubling' in their reflections in the mirror, and, in Walter's case, by his shadow; and furthermore, in the representation of the 'femme fatale'. As discussed, the latter two tropes have precedent in Murnau's *Sunrise*, a film also seen to involve the overwriting of Hollywood convention with that of Weimar cinema.

Many commentators have drawn attention to the trope of 'Portraits and Doubles' in noir, including Hirsch, who argues that the 'doubling' process signifies 'schizophrenia and

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[288] Chapter One, p.76.

masquerade'.[289] This would certainly seem to apply to the main characters in *Double Indemnity*. Walter is on the threshold of betraying Keyes and the hegemonic values he represents. While Keyes has a 'little man' upon whom he can rely to help him reason and to uphold those values, Walter, by contrast, at first wrestles with and then succumbs to his instinctive urges, to his own 'little man', which in his case is more like an incubus, leading him astray. There is a sense in which the reflection in the shot concerned can be seen to represent this dark and mischievous 'other'.

It should also be noted that while both his shadow and reflection are featured in the shot, Walter himself is not. The mise-en-scene is seen to represent an interstitial state between presence and absence. Given the analeptic or 'flashback' narration, the audience is aware that Walter's 'transgressive fantasy' will lead to his demise. The mirror image can, thus, be seen to signify his interstitial state, not merely between good and evil, between betraying Keyes and remaining loyal to him, but between life and death. The reflection is effectively a 'ghost image', representing Walter's marginal presence. As noted, he is also 'doubled' with his shadow. This further endorses his marginalisation, signifying the process of his becoming, as it were, a 'shade' (or ghost). This is a thematic motif of the film, as evidenced by the memorable line 'I couldn't hear my own footsteps. It was the walk of a dead man'. The theme of a 'dead man walking' was, of course, explored by Wilder in the screenplay of *Der Mann, Der Seinen Mörder Sucht*. It was a motif to which he would return in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), with its posthumous narrator, Joe Gillis (William Holden), and which proved influential upon the narrative strategies and characterisation of noir, for example, *DOA* (Rudolph Maté, 1950).

The discussion now turns to the film's representation of Phyllis. This is seen to be much in keeping, both with the 'vamp' of early cinema and the 'femme fatale' of film noir. From the moment she first appears on the landing of her Spanish-style home, the mise-en-scene is effective in associating her with intrigue, obfuscation, and duplicity. Wilder and Seitz elect a low-angle, over-the-shoulder establishing shot from Walter's point of view, looking up from the vestibule to the landing, where Phyllis appears clad only in a white towel. Thus, the camera approximates Walter's lustful gaze while objectifying Phyllis. However, given the

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[289]F. Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001), p.90; see Chapter One, p.72.

distance involved, the towel, and a tasselled drape overhanging the wrought iron banister, the shot is characterised by the obfuscation of detail, and by 'veiled' and allusive eroticism.

The ensuing shot-reverse-shot sequence includes a low-angle shot of Phyllis in medium close-up, that is, in more detail than when Walter first espies her, although still tantalisingly obscured. Walter acknowledges the erotic 'subtext' of the encounter, deploying his insurance salesman's patter, and punning 'I'd hate to think of you getting a scratched fender when you're not covered'. This remark, an addition to the script, is characteristic of Chandler's writing style. As Chinen Biesen notes, 'Wilder and Chandler's primary strategy … was to maximise the use of innuendo and wit'.[290] If 'the Code' was designed to recognise direct representation then it was 'ill-equipped to handle nuance'. Both writers' facility in this regard – but particularly Chandler's – enabled them to manoeuvre their way around the eagle-eyed Breen and to discover that 'the Code could be manipulated'.[291]

When Phyllis leaves to get dressed, Walter enters the Dietrichson living room unescorted. He is informed by Nettie the maid (Betty Farrington) that the owners keep the liquor cupboard locked to which he responds 'I always carry my own keys'. While the quip, once again, suggests Chandler's influence upon the writing, it might also be seen as a covert reference to the omniscience of Walter's boss, Keyes, who has the solution to every puzzle. When Phyllis re-emerges from her bedroom, the camera follows her progress down the staircase with a close-up tracking shot focusing upon the lower half of her legs, showing her white high-heeled shoes and an ankle bracelet. The representation of the 'femme fatale' in noir often involves 'a directed glance' at parts of the female body, such as 'an "appreciative shot" of her legs'.[292] Although the signifying practice of noir tends to objectify women, and to involve the fetishisation of individual body parts, arguably, as Place proposes, it also makes the 'sexually expressive woman ... extremely powerful'.[293]

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[290] S. Chinen Biesen, *Blackout,* p.105.

[291] Ibid., p.5.

[292] Janey Place, 'Women in Film Noir', in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. by E. Anna Kaplan (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p.45.

[293] Ibid., p.36.

This sequence is followed by the aforementioned medium two-shot of Walter and Phyllis, where Phyllis is applying lipstick in the mirror (*plate* 9). This can be interpreted as the start of the 'performance within a performance' of the actress Barbara Stanwyck playing the role of the character Phyllis Dietrichson, and of her character Phyllis adopting the generic role of the deadly and duplicitous 'femme fatale'. As noted, when she says she hopes her face is 'on straight', this *double entendre* is taken to mean she hopes her performance(s) will be convincing. However, the iconography of the 'femme fatale' in noir often involves 'cues of dark and immoral sensuality' with the lipstick suggestive of Phyllis's 'phallic power'.[294] As Walter is lured away from Keyes and the American establishment towards the 'underworld' inhabited by the 'femme fatale', passing 'through the looking glass', as it were, Phyllis strips him of the symbolic phallus, usurping his masculine role, and effectively replacing him within the hegemonic power structure. As Walter joins Phyllis in the masquerade, grinning lopsidedly in the mirror, he is rendered both literally and figuratively two-dimensional, stripped of his male power, and marginalised, both by, but also as, the female 'other'.

With regard to the 'underworld' of the 'femme fatale', Place observes that '[t]he dark woman is comfortable in the world of cheap dives, shadowy doorways, and mysterious settings', situating her within the 'violent, unstable milieu of the underworld'.[295] Spicer also acknowledges her existence 'on the fringes of the underworld',[296] and that, conversely, her binary opposite the 'nurturer/homebuilder' 'is associated with daylight, nature, and open spaces'.[297] In *Double Indemnity*, Phyllis appears mostly in interior spaces, and often in doorways or under arches. Whenever she appears in outdoor scenes she seems alienated from her environment, exhibiting a 'vampiric' aversion to the daylight, hiding behind black sunglasses as if in fear of having her 'true nature' being exposed by the sunlight.

In a shot outside Jerry's supermarket, where Phyllis is going to meet Walter after he has been told by Lola that she is effectively a serial murderer, she adopts a casual air, browsing the produce outside the store (*plate* 10). However, Barbara Stanwyck's body movements

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[294] Ibid., p.45; see Chapter One, pp.76-77.

[295] Ibid., p.41.

[296] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.91.

[297] Ibid., p.91.

are rigid and slightly hesitant, her performance reminiscent of an expressionist acting style, as noted in Chapter One.[298] Spicer observes of her performance that her 'hard, insistent, almost hypnotic voice and rigid body postures'[299] serve to reinforce her 'vampiric' characteristics. The brisk movements of passers-by serve to highlight her brittleness and generally 'unnatural' air. It is also worthy of note that as Phyllis walks towards the store, her image appears juxtaposed with some weighing scales. Given that Walter now knows about her involvement in the murder of the former Mrs Dietrichson and is about to tell her he 'wants out' of the insurance fraud, the juxtaposition can be seen to signify the 'scales of justice', and that her phallic 'insurrection' is about to come to a rather bloody conclusion.



If Phyllis's 'insurrection' can be seen, in a symbolic sense, to undermine the patriarchy and to imbue her with 'unnatural' phallic power, then this is also the case in respect of her frontal assault on the institution of the family. It is, thus, significant that Lola is instrumental in her undoing. Indeed, there appears to be a further binary opposition, in addition to that between Phyllis and Keyes, between the errant 'femme fatale' and the virtuous Lola, whose intervention is as effective as that of Keyes, arguably even moreso, given its damaging effect on her stepmother's relationship with Walter. Regarding possible influences, as discussed in Chapter One, the juxtaposition of two women, one signifying good, the other evil, is traceable to Weimar cinema, early Hollywood, and the 'hybrid' in Murnau's *Sunrise*.[300]

Throughout the film, the mise-en-scene subtly references the opposition of Phyllis with the various institutions with which she comes into conflict. The scene in Norton's office is

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[298] Chapter One, p.63.

[299] Ibid., p.100.

[300] Chapter One, p.74.

exemplary in this respect. Phyllis is shown as seated, and perhaps therefore as vulnerable and submissive (*plate* 11). However, in *Double Indemnity*, recumbent postures tend to have an inverse relationship with the power dynamic. The figure 'towering over' Phyllis in this case is the rather buffoonish Norton. The insurance company boss is announcing that he believes Mr Dietrichson committed suicide, showing that his physical dominance in the shot belies his intellectual inferiority, both to Phyllis and to Keyes, who looks on scornfully. Just as the cannon in the reverse shots is pointing at Walter (*plate* 2), Phyllis is overlooked by a photograph of Norton's children and a statuette of an eagle. The photograph of the children suggests Phyllis's antipathy towards the family, whereas the eagle is, quite literally, the symbol of the American establishment.

Taken in context with the shot involving the 'scales of justice', the mise-en-scene appears replete with cues which reference Phyllis's doomed struggle with the hegemony. However, given that Norton's rather aquiline profile, his hunched posture, and his downward stare echo the appearance of the eagle statuette, and that Phyllis has outwitted Norton, the mise-en-scene also reinforces the significant threat posed by the 'femme fatale', who usurps her husband, Norton, Sachetti, and Walter, and is finally defeated by the veritable behemoth of the establishment, Keyes, assisted by Phyllis's other binary opposite, Lola.

It is also worthy of note that Phyllis wears a black veil in this scene – perhaps the same veil that Lola told Walter she was trying on before Dietrichson was killed, 'in rehearsal' for his funeral. Phyllis is shown throughout the film as fundamentally duplicitous. This tends to involve the obfuscation/partial display of her physical appearance, for example, her make-up, veil, and sunglasses, as a means of seduction, entrapment, and deception. The subterfuge reaches a crescendo in her final scene with Walter, when she conceals a fire arm under her armchair. Given that Phyllis usurps male authority, it is significant that she conceals the pistol, an obvious phallic symbol, by sitting on it. In terms of the sexually liberated and powerful 'femme fatale' of film noir, the mise-en-scene of *Double Indemnity* contains a visual cue regarding the source of this power, albeit a subtle one that clearly escaped the attention of Joseph Breen and his staff.

*Double Indemnity* also contains a number of shots involving symmetrical compositions, either of Walter or medium two shots of Walter and Phyllis, in which the human form

becomes merged with other elements of the mise-en-scene. Regarding how this practice relates to the fatalist determinism of noir, as noted in Chapter One, Schrader argues:

> When the environment is given an equal or greater weight than the actor, it, of course, creates a hopeless and fatalistic world. There is nothing the protagonist can do; the city will outlast and negate even his best efforts.[301]

The merging of the subject with other aspects of the mise-en-scene is thus seen to represent the subject's lack of agency. Interpreted in this way, the title sequence of *Double Indemnity* is seen to involve the 'dehumanisation' of the subject. The silhouette of Walter on crutches appears at dead-centre of the screen beneath the Paramount logo (*plate* 1). In this perfectly symmetrical montage of images, Walter is rendered, quite literally, as a two-dimensional and stylised figure. He becomes, effectively, a 'logo', as previously mentioned, an emblem of the 'monstrousness' of the ensuing patriarchal revolt.[302]



The film contains two sequences involving Walter in symmetrical compositions which correspond with the opening credits: the first at the start of the film, when he enters the insurance company office (*plate* 12); the second, as he makes his way onto the observation platform of the train after murdering Dietrichson (*plate* 13). Wilder and Seitz deploy wide-angle, over-the-shoulder shots to show Walter's slow, inexorable progress towards the interior of the office, and the exterior of the train, but in both cases towards his seemingly unavoidable fate. As Naremore observes with regard to the Weimar influence, the office is represented as a 'dark, cavernous room lined with empty desks, each equipped with

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[301] P. Schrader, 'Notes on Film Noir', in *Film Noir Reader,* ed. by Silver and Ursini, p.57; see Chapter One, p.56.

[302] Chapter One, p.56.

identical blotters and reading lamps', which, he argues, 'signifies the tendency of modern society to turn workers into zombies or robots, like the enslaved populace of Lang's *Metropolis*'.[303] There is also a similarity between MacMurray's 'zombie-like' movements and Conrad Veidt's performance in *Caligari* when Cesare awakes, except that Walter is walking away from, not towards, the camera.[304]

The symmetry of each shot provides a deterministic visual patterning taken up by the insistent rhythm and tempo of Rózsa's score. In keeping with the solemn music, Walter's head is bowed in both shots, as if the 'dead man walking' is marching in his own funeral procession. The chiaroscuro lighting effects evoke the 'darkness', both literal and metaphoric, of the scenes, while the deep focus photography contextualises the figure in the foreground with the sets. In both instances, however, the art deco set designs elicit a sense of affluence and respectability. While this appears to jar with the 'shady' actions taking place, this seeming incongruity is entirely consistent with the narrative, involving a 'decent' man who has been 'led astray' and submitted to his baser instincts. The wide-angle lens accentuates the lines of perspective, directing the eye towards office and observation platform. This is both literally and figuratively a 'vanishing point' for Walter. Isolating the events from the plot sequence and rearranging them in chronological order, his slow, rhythmic movements are part of a single 'procession' from observation platform, to office, to his inevitable demise in the office doorway. The critical debate often draws attention to the use in noir of low-key lighting, which is, indeed, a defining element of the visual style. While there are abundant examples of this in *Double Indemnity*, the linear elements of the mise-en-scene, such as those signifying Walter's inexorable procession towards his fate, are also worthy of note.

On the question of how this relates to hard-boiled fiction and specifically to Cain's source novel, as noted, Cain's work is seen to involve narratives which MacShane observes have an 'inevitable downward course'[305] and characters who are the victims of their own

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[303] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.88.

[304] Chapter One, p.

[305] F. MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Company: 1986), p.101; see Introduction, p.43.

pathologies. The 'Weimar-inflected' images in Wilder's film are thus seen to provide an ideal vehicle for the depiction of Cain's fatalistic determinism, with the themes of the novel remarkably well matched by the mise-en-scene of the film.

This merging of the actors' bodies with the rest of the mise-en-scene is also evidenced in shots featuring Walter and Phyllis. As with the shots of Walter, they occur at key points in the narrative. After Walter has first become aware of Phyllis's intention to murder her husband, and temporarily abandoned her to her scheming, she pays a late-night visit to his apartment, where she succeeds in persuading him to assist in the murder plot. Having sealed their pact with a passionate kiss, the couple discuss attempts at insurance fraud, thereby initiating the detailed planning of a murder to which the Breen office objected.





When the couple enters the kitchen, Walter offers Phyllis a glass of bourbon (*plate* 14). Schickel comments that her acceptance of 'plebeian booze'[306] is a means of securing Walter's support, rather than cementing their relationship, or, as Walter believes, an indication that she is succumbing to her sexual urges and his advances. Fay and Nieland observe that Walter and Phyllis's transition from the well-lit sitting room into the darkness of the kitchen is effective in conveying 'the immorality of the plot they're hatching'.[307] Once again, the chiaroscuro lighting and deep focus shot have the effect of giving equal weight to the actors and the 'shady' environment, which, as Schrader says, tends to create the sense of 'a hopeless and fatalistic world'. This is particularly the case with Walter, the top of his head and his downward glance closely matching the angle of the arch in the background. Regarding the figure arrangement within the shot, although Walter is physically dominant in stature and towers over Phyllis, this occurs at the precise point where Phyllis triumphs and he succumbs, agreeing to be her accomplice and thereby sealing his fate. There are also

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[306] Schickel, *Double Indemnity*, p.44.

[307] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), p.190.

similarities with a shot from Murnau's *Nosferatu* when Hutter (Gustav von Wangenheim) first encounters Count Orlok (Max Schreck) in the courtyard of the Count's Transylvanian castle (*plate* 15). As with *Double Indemnity*, Hutter is seen to be crossing the threshold between good and evil, and to surrender his personal will to that of the vampire. The figure arrangement, with Orlok towering over Hutter, also bears comparison.

The film contains several scenes at Jerry's supermarket, Los Feliz, both during the planning of the murder and after its execution, where Walter and Phyllis are photographed amongst stacks of groceries in equally well-arranged, often symmetrical shots which incorporate them with the goods by which they are surrounded (*plate* 16). Contrary to claims made by Chartier that film noir focuses on the criminal psyche to the exclusion of the social context, the mise-en-scene shows Walter and Phyllis almost literally engulfed by canned food and baby milk, to the extent that they merge with, and are almost indistinguishable from, the commodities and advertising slogans. Furthermore, the fact that these scenes show them planning a murder in order to defraud an insurance company, and then trying to escape the consequences, also suggests a critique of capitalist modernity in keeping with Weimar cinema, hard-boiled fiction, and film noir. As discussed in Chapter One in relation to Wiene's *Caligari*, the merging of the corporeality of the actors with the sets can be seen to represent their characters' inextricable relationship with, and entrapment by, their circumstances.[308] In that the actors' physical forms are often indistinguishable from the environment, the thesis argues that the organisational structures of the film equate the sociopathic greed of Phyllis and Walter with the capitalist system, with which they are both, 'femme fatale' and 'male victim' alike, inextricably linked. Given also that they are, themselves, part of a commercial product, the characters are seen to be consumers who are, at one and the same time, being consumed.

As discussed, *Double Indemnity* belongs to the 'Studio Expressionism' period of film noir, so called because shooting is 'almost entirely studio-bound'.[309] This facilitated a high degree of control over the mise-en-scene, resulting in skilfully composed and largely static shots. However, while it is highly representative of 'Studio Expressionism', as also noted, Wilder's

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[308] Chapter One, pp.56-57.

[309] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.52.

film makes extensive use of location shooting. This contrasts with other 'Studio Expressionists', notably Lang. As Hirsch argues, traces of 'the real Los Angeles' appear in *Double Indemnity* whereas the 'entirely studio-created' New York setting of Lang's *Scarlet Street* appears 'airless, and claustrophobic, with no sense of the world going on outside the frame'.[310] Thus, although *Scarlet Street* is set in Greenwich Village, due to wholly studio-bound shooting, it may as well be Berlin, whereas, in *Double Indemnity*, the use of location shooting imparts to the film a stronger sense of 'the real Los Angeles'.



The combination of realism with what one might term Weimar-inflected 'hyperrealism', representing interior as well as exterior worlds, is evident from the outset. The film's opening sequence shows operatives of the Los Angeles Railway Corporation Maintenance Department carrying out a welding job in a sparsely-peopled street (*plate* 17). While the location shot is effective in evoking the 'authentic' atmosphere of the city at night, the flash from the welding gear which illuminates the workmen's sign connotes a sense of the 'infernal' situation in which Walter is embroiled, hinting at the inner turmoil of the speeding driver and of the events which caused his anguished state. Interestingly, the opening scene of MGM's adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* contains a sequence where Frank Chambers burns a 'Man Wanted' sign after accepting the job of handyman at the Twin Oaks diner. As discussed further in Chapter Three, the memorable image of the sign being consumed by flames is also seen to represent Frank's 'hellish' circumstances and to foreshadow the ensuing 'diabolical' chain of events.

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[310] Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen*, p.4.

Commenting upon the overall appearance of *Double Indemnity*, Hirsch argues that it is 'designed as a series of visual contrasts between night and day, shadow and light'.[311] As this remark perhaps implies, the counterpointing of 'shadow and light' can be seen to represent both inner and outer states, providing views of actual locations while hinting simultaneously at the interiority of characters poised between good and evil – between remaining steadfast and submitting to their urges. The opening shot is also noteworthy in terms of the film's overall design, given that the symmetrical composition corresponds with the shots of Walter entering the insurance building (*plate* 12) and approaching the observation platform (*plate* 13). This establishes a sense of stylistic coherence across the film as a whole, that is, between exterior and interior shots, and between the use of locations and studio sets.

After Walter narrowly avoids mowing down the workmen, he swerves to avoid a truck carrying copies of the *Los Angeles Examiner*, perhaps a sly reference to the sensational news story about to unfold (*plate* 18). In terms of how this relates to the novel, rumour had it at the time that Cain's story was based upon a 'true crime', namely the murder of Judd Grey by his wife Ruth Snyder, which, as Schickel observes, had been 'one of the tabloid sensations of the 1930s'.[312] In fact, Cain based his 'novelette' upon a story told to him by Arthur Krock about a newspaper typesetter who allowed a 'salacious error to slip into a headline'[313] and thus 'rebelled' against his employers, albeit in a far less extreme way than Walter. As the genre evolved, the 'true crime' element of film noir became more prominent, as did location shooting, in the evolutionary phase referred to by Spicer as 'The Location Period and the Semi Documentary' (1947-52).

However, the boundaries between these phases are not clearly defined, a point underlined by Wilder's claims regarding *Double Indemnity* that he 'strove for a stronger sense of realism in order to match the kind of story we were telling', adding that prior to shooting he would 'overturn a few ashtrays in order to give the house in which Phyllis lived an appropriately

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[311] Ibid., p.5.

[312] Schickel, *Double Indemnity*, p.45.

[313] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.87.

grubby look'.[314] This attention to detail can be seen to add realism. However, it is also worth noting the comments of John Seitz who recalled that that he and Wilder released iron filings into the air when shooting the grubby-looking interiors 'so the camera could read these particles as it could not read the real thing'.[315] It would seem, then, that Wilder and the production team were not concerned simply with how things actually looked, but how they ought to appear. It is thus argued that *Double Indemnity* is the product of a quest for realism combined with a 'Studio Expressionist' sensibility, as typified by Wilder's micromanagement of the sets, and the technical ingenuity which enabled Seitz to create dust motes from iron filings, and to conjure the film's sultry atmosphere, quite literally, out of thin air.

The discussion now turns to the hard-boiled mode. This includes a further comparison between the work of Cain and Chandler and how this affected the adaptation, in particular the adapted character of Keyes. As noted in the Introduction, the contrasting styles of the two authors are seen to arise from fundamental ideological differences, that is, Cain's 'fatalistic determinism' and Chandler's 'romantic idealism'.[316]

It was discussed how the hard-boiled mode, influenced by Modernism and in particular by the work of Hemingway, defined itself against the 'genteel' detective fiction of British authors such as Christie and Sayers, which Chandler argued was 'too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world'.[317] By contrast, the work of hard-boiled pioneer Hammett was deemed to be 'realistic mystery fiction'.[318] In terms of literary antecedents, the Modernist-influenced mode is also seen to be prefigured by the Realist response to the rapid expansion of American cities and the alienating effects this had upon the individual.

Stylistically, Hammett's work is characterised by minimalism, considered by Chandler to involve a 'revolutionary debunking of both the language and material of fiction'.[319] Cain's

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[314] Billy Wilder, Interview by Cameron Crowe, in *Conversations with Wilder* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), p.53, in Chinen Biesen, *Blackout*, p.108.

[315] Schickel, *Double Indemnity*, p.61.

[316] MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, p.101; see Introduction, p.42.

[317] Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', p.13; see Introduction, p.36.

[318] Ibid., p.13; see Introduction, p.36.

[319] Ibid., p.14; see Introduction, p.32.

work is also characterised by its pared-back, minimalist language. It is not intended to dispute the hard-boiled status of Cain's work. However, generic tropes such as the Californian setting, the use of vernacular speech, and of course the representation of crime, are seen to be fused with a Naturalist influence which distinguished his work from his peers. Naturalism is seen to involve the observation of the material world and the objective recording of the deterministic causal chain and its inevitable, and 'natural', consequences. Bradbury observes that the 'real city' of Dreiser and Zola, two of the Naturalist authors seen to influence Cain, is comprised of the 'materially dominant environment of sweat-shops and hotels', representing 'the total field of action for human will and desire'.[320]

Furthermore, as noted in the Introduction, Cain's work was never published in a 'pulp' magazine, unlike that of Chandler and Hammett, who honed their hard-boiled technique in the pre-eminent 'pulp' *Black Mask*.[321] While sex and violence was very much the staple of the 'pulps' *per se*, as Madden observes, 'Cain's stories are concerned with murder and love, from the criminal's point of view'.[322] These are no mere formal and stylistic variations. They are seen to be informed by ideological differences, specifically between Cain and Chandler. As MacShane notes, Cain's main characters 'are condemned from the beginning and cannot escape their fate'.[323] Moreover, the disasters which befall the protagonists of *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* are seen to be the joint consequence of their own pathology, for instance their lust, greed and violent urges, and a loss of free will to the capitalist state. MacShane argues convincingly that the main factor differentiating Chandler's work from Cain's is 'the tension that exists when people have some possibility of choice'.[324] Where Chandler's moral position is concerned, that is, his 'romantic idealism', Marlowe's powers of ratiocination enable him to triumph over the chaos caused by those

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[320] M. Bradbury, *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, ed. by M. Bradbury and James MacFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991), p.99.

[321] Introduction, p.41.

[322] D. Madden, *James M. Cain: Hard-boiled Mythmaker*, (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011), p.6; see Introduction, p.41.

[323] MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, p.101; see Introduction, p.43.

[324] Ibid., p.101; see Introduction, p.43.

characters who, unlike him, have given in to their primal urges and, in so doing, have abandoned any 'possibility of choice' and surrendered their individual agency.

How, then, do the differing styles and moral positions within the hard-boiled mode relate to film noir? Querying the relationship between hard-boiled fiction and noir, Vernet poses the question as to why Frank Tuttle's 1935 adaptation of Hammett's *The Glass Key* and Irving Reis's 1942 adaptation of Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely*, titled *The Falcon Takes Over*, are not accorded noir status, arguing that these earlier Hollywood adaptations have been 'occulted'.[325] A number of films were, indeed, adapted from hard-boiled sources prior to 1944, including those mentioned by Vernet, along with W.S. Van Dyke's 1934 adaptation of *The Thin Man*, based on Hammett's surprisingly genteel 1934 novel of the same name, which spawned an entire *Thin Man* series. However, the very fact that these texts were adapted at all during the PCA's heyday demonstrates that it was not hard-boiled fiction *per se* to which Breen objected, but the 'adult' themes of Cain's novels, represented from the viewpoint of sympathetic criminal characters, with their potential to scandalise public opinion.[326] It is highly unlikely that Visconti, who adapted *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as *Ossessione*, would have found *The Thin Man*, Hammett's mildly comic crime caper involving the exploits of the husband-and-wife detective team Nick and Nora Charles, a suitable vehicle for his Neorealist critique of Italy under Mussolini.

As noted above, it is also argued that by developing the character of the insurance investigator Barton Keyes, Chandler and Wilder were able to imbue the film with a 'moral centre'. The lack of such in Cain's work, while it was doubtless seen in a positive way by Sartre, Camus, Renoir and Visconti, was frowned upon by Joseph Breen. In the adapted character of Keyes, however, the narrative acquires, effectively, a third protagonist who, as discussed, triumphs over Phyllis and Walter, thereby restoring order and the all-important hegemonic values to the film, seen by the PCA at least to be lacking in the novel.

In terms of the intertextual relationship between film and novel, perhaps the main difference between Cain's version of Barton Keyes and the adapted character is that, in the

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[325] Vernet, 'Film Noir on the Edge of Doom', p.12.

[326] Introduction, p.42.

novel, Keyes colludes with Walter, allowing him to escape to Mexico in order to avoid a murder trial which would have attracted adverse publicity for the insurance company. In the film, Keyes refuses to assist in Walter's escape, but instead offers the would-be usurper fatherly compassion as he expires in the office doorway, and as the 'Oedipal revolt' ends in failure. Despite Cain's 'hard-eyed reluctance to insert such a figure [as Marlowe] into his "low-life" milieu',[327] this did not prevent Wilder and Chandler from doing precisely that, in the form of Keyes, thereby evidencing an ideological shift from source material to film. Additionally, the fact that they were obliged to reconsider the ending of the film due to PCA pressure evidences the 'determinist' nature of the 'real world', as represented in fiction by Cain, and in film by screenwriters Chandler and Wilder.

It is important to note, however, that while such amendments were key factors in enabling *Double Indemnity* to be made, the appeal of the film and the genre it was instrumental in establishing resides elsewhere than within the 'moral centre'. As noted in the conclusion to Chapter One,[328] the complex pleasure derived from noir is, in part, seen to involve the vicarious thrill of witnessing the downfall of characters such as Walter, who resemble the traditional Hollywood hero and are ostensibly 'respectable' members of society, but who it transpires are deeply and fatally flawed, that is to say, prone to irrational urges which lead them to commit outrageous acts. The screenwriters' job was, thus, partly one of achieving a balance between moral 'decency' as embodied by Keyes and the 'indecency' which nonetheless constitutes a large part of noir's audience appeal, as envisaged by Hollywood producers who had been trying to adapt Cain's work for many years. This being so, then Wilder and Chandler are seen to play a key role in redefining the parameters of Hollywood film-making.

In summary of this key point, *Double Indemnity* is highly significant in terms of the relationship between film noir and hard-boiled fiction, given that the screenplay is not merely based on a hard-boiled source, but adapted by another, noted hard-boiled author with a markedly different style, writing for a different medium, almost a decade after the source material first appeared. Bould's observation that noir is a palimpsest, with Weimar

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[327] Ibid., p.34.

[328] Chapter One, p.79.

socio-psychology and Expressionist aesthetics being overwritten onto the Hollywood crime thriller, seems also to apply to the relationship between *Double Indemnity* and its hard-boiled source, with Chandler's version of the mode being overwritten onto that of Cain.

There is another distinctive feature of the adaptation of *Double Indemnity* which relates more broadly to film noir adaptations of hard-boiled sources. The film can be seen to reference, or draw upon, features of Cain's body of work, rather than confining itself to the source novel alone. The 'Hollywood Bowl' scene towards the end of the film involving Walter and Lola can be interpreted as a reference, not to Cain's *Double Indemnity*, where no such scene occurs, but to the author's preoccupation with opera, which critics have noted was reflected in the subject matter and narrative style of his work in general.

As explored in further detail in Chapter Three, which discusses both the MGM and Visconti adaptations of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (the Visconti film is named *Ossessione*), Geoffrey Nowell-Smith argues that the narrative of *Ossessione* is similar to opera, given that it is characterised by 'a series of scenes involving two, or at most three people at a time'.[329] However, the same is seen to apply to the novels *Double Indemnity*, *Serenade* (1937), and *Mildred Pierce* (1941), which all derive their narratives from 'love triangles', leading Naremore to observe that Cain's protagonists 'spoke in deadpan voices and lived in a world of pure kitsch, but they behaved like lovers in *Carmen*'.[330]

Further to this, as the noir cycle evolved, production teams are seen to draw on the hard-boiled mode *per se*, as well as other films noirs, in addition to the direct relationship with the source material. For instance, Cain's *Mildred Pierce* differs from *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Double Indemnity*, and *Serenade*, in that no murders are committed. There is, however, a murder in the 1945 Warner Brothers adaptation, produced by Jerry Wald and directed by Michael Curtiz. Krutnik notes with regard to evolution of the noir cycle how aspects of the genre, such as its motifs, characterisation, and plotting, many of which are seen to derive from hard-boiled fiction, were 'reworked and grafted across cycles onto other types of crime films'.[331] Although *Mildred Pierce* is not a crime thriller but a domestic

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[329] G. Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti*, (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), p.25; see Chapter Three, p.163.

[330] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.83; see Chapter Three, p.163.

[331] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, p.26.

melodrama, producer Wald was so influenced by Paramount's adaptation of *Double Indemnity* that the Warner Bros adaptation includes film noir tropes such as a voice-over narration, flashbacks, and the murder of Mildred's lover Monty Beragon by her daughter Veda, none of which occur in the novel.

Krutnik also makes a key point regarding the relationship between film noir and hard-boiled fiction. He argues that the modifications which took place during the production of *Mildred Pierce* transformed what he sees as 'a relatively atypical James M. Cain novel into something resembling the popular image of Cain's work', which was associated with 'crime-and-passion stories'.[332] Thus, the Warner Brothers adaptation of *Mildred Pierce* was very much in keeping with the 'popular image' of Cain's oeuvre, while differing significantly from the actual source text. By 1945, this 'popular image' is seen to be informed by the adaptation of *Double Indemnity* as much as by the novels themselves, that is, by the work of an author who was equally comfortable depicting the travails of suburban entrepreneurs like Mildred as he was adulterers and murderers like Phyllis and Cora. In the context of Altman's commentary upon the producer's role within the genre system, Wald is seen to be 'locating a successful device', such as an adulterous affair leading to murder, and 'carrying it to another film where, if it again succeeds, still further success is guaranteed'.[333] In so doing, he and Hollywood producers like him were instrumental in regulating, rather than simply acknowledging, the 'popular image' of hard-boiled fiction.

Returning to the 'Hollywood Bowl' scene, the theme of 'opera', to which the film alludes and to some extent invokes, can be interpreted in various ways. It is seen to signify the masquerade which ensues when Phyllis first puts on her make-up, and initiates the 'performance within a performance' which enables her to deceive Walter, and which leads Walter, however reluctantly, to deceive Lola. Also, given that, under different circumstances, Walter might have formed a conventional relationship with her, it associates the 'redemptive power' of Lola, the 'nurturer/homebuilder' with the 'purity' and 'authenticity' of classical music. Conversely, in both film and novel, Phyllis is associated with

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[332] Ibid., p.25.

[333] R. Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 2000), p.44; see Introduction, p.14.

'trashy' consumerism and artificiality. While the proletarian characters, setting, and tough-guy vernacular are typical of hard-boiled fiction and its own 'oedipal revolt' against the classical detective novel, equally, as Madden rightly observes, Cain tends to represent 'mass culture as cheap, shallow, and manipulative'.[334]

The counterpointing of the perceived 'purity', 'authenticity', and 'redemptive power' of classical music with the perceived 'cheapness' and 'shallowness' of mass culture is explored in more detail below in relation to *Scarface*. However, given that Chandler's private eye, Marlowe, is also seen to hold popular culture, particularly the movies, in some disdain, this dichotomy can be seen as characteristic of the hard-boiled mode, itself a form of commercial product which shares many characteristics with the Hollywood genre film.

Thus an affiliation emerges between Cain and Chandler. While both invested their work with social realism and pioneered a writing style which promoted the use of the American vernacular, they are also seen to have a disdain for the mass media and popular culture. Naremore attributes this to the Modernist influence, arguing that the Chandler's novels 'were grounded in a familiar, high-modernist belief that the modern world is cheap, insubstantial, and destructive of true culture'.[335] Despite their valorisation of social realism and the 'tough-talking common man'[336] it appears that both Cain and Chandler may have been prone to a certain cultural elitism, a fact not without irony given the way in which French intellectuals considered their own talents to be somewhat 'unrefined'. Indeed, with regard to European intellectualism, it should be recalled that Weimar film-makers and Expressionist artists also took a fairly dim view of modern industrialised society. There is thus seen to be an affinity between the three writers involved with *Double Indemnity*. As Naremore observes, 'Wilder, Chandler, and Cain shared an outsider's or modernist intellectual's ambivalence to Los Angeles', seen to inform the depiction of the noir city as 'a center of advanced capitalism, instrumental reason, and death'.[337]

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[334] Madden, *James M. Cain: Hard-boiled Mythmaker*, p.22.

[335] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.86.

[336] S. McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p.19.

[337] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.82.

There is one further aspect of the adaptation process which emerges from this discussion. Mason observes in relation to Hawks's Gangster picture *Scarface*, discussed below, that the relationships between 'social restraint and desire, discipline and excess' can be seen to function 'both at a narrative level...and at the level of production'.[338] A reference to the Breen Office's fastidious enforcement of 'the Code', this is seen in every Hollywood production of the period, including, of course, films noirs such as *Double Indemnity*. The question of 'individual agency', or the lack of it, is as relevant to the involvement of the PCA in decision-making at Paramount as it is to the crimes and misdemeanours of Walter and Phyllis. A surreptitious critique is seen to be encoded, via Weimar-inflected techniques, in the mise-en-scene, while, as Chinen Biesen rightly notes, 'the Code' is manipulated through the use of innuendo and wit in the dialogue.

One might reasonably say, therefore, that the making of the film was characterised by a certain artistry which enabled the members of the Paramount team to circumvent PCA guidelines, and to determine, effectively, their own fate and that of the film. Bearing in mind that Breen's main objection to the adaptation, which delayed production by seven years, was that the two protagonists 'cheat the law and then die at their own hands', then his complaint was focused precisely upon the matter of agency. In Cain's novel, Walter, assisted by Keyes, decides upon a suicide pact with Phyllis on board a ship bound for Mazatlan.[339] In Wilder's film, although Walter dies from gunshot wounds, he has made a conscious decision to spend the last hours of his life confessing his crimes to Keyes while slowly bleeding to death. Thus his confession is, in effect, an extended suicide note; not literally of course, as this had been vetoed by the Breen office, but figuratively, nonetheless. In the novel, Walter writes his confession while recovering from his wounds after having been shot by Phyllis in Griffith Park. In the film, however, the confession becomes a final act of atonement. Having disrupted the hegemonic order, this can only be restored by Walter ensuring that its main representative, Keyes, is in full possession of the facts.[340]

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[338]F. Mason *American Gangster Cinema: From* Little Caesar *to* Pulp Fiction (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p.28

[339] Cain, *Double Indemnity*, p.136.

[340] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, p.138.

Wilder filmed an alternative ending which involved Walter's execution in a gas chamber, and the film concluding with Keyes walking into the sunshine of the prison yard 'a forlorn and lonely man'.[341] As Naremore argues, given that Keyes is 'a loyal agent of industrial rationality' who stands for the aspects of 'modern Los Angeles that the film so relentlessly criticises', this would have had the effect of 'raising questions about the criminality of the state',[342] as opposed to an ending where rational order is restored. Although the reason for electing not to include this scene was due allegedly to its being too gruesome, if the PCA were opposed to the sanction of adultery, detailed murder planning, and the climactic suicide of the perpetrators, then it is not difficult to imagine what their reaction would have been to 'talented bureaucrat' and loyal agent of the state being shown as forlorn, lonely, and remorseful following Walter's execution. The fact that Paramount were able to make a film which engages with the controversial themes of Cain's novel while conforming to, and skilfully circumventing, PCA guidelines bears testimony to a 'real life' struggle to exercise individual agency within a determinist system.

The following considers relationships between film noir and the Hollywood Gangster cycle by means of a critical analysis of Howards Hawks's 1932 gangster movie, *Scarface*. The discussion focuses on the relationship between elements of the respective generic practices, such as characterisation, and thematic and stylistic motifs, and upon the intervention of the Hays Office, the forerunner of the PCA, in the making of the film. This approach is designed to situate the discussion of the hard-boiled mode and film noir within the specifics of the Hollywood genre system and the evolution of the Production Code, that is, film censorship.

### *Scarface* (Hawks, 1932)

The title sequence of *Scarface* (Hawks, 1932), directed by Howard Hawks and produced by Howard Hughes, features a diagonal 'cross' motif, one of the dominant stylistic tropes of the film, over which the credits are superimposed (*plate* 19). In a literal sense, the motif can be seen to represent the cross-shaped scar on the face of gangster Tony Camonte (Paul Muni). Screenwriter Ben Hecht based the screenplay upon Armitage Trail's 1929 novel *Scarface*,

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[341]Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.93.

[342] Ibid., p.92.

which concerns the exploits of Al Capone,[343] also known as 'Scarface Al'. However, McCarthy notes the motif had additional significance, being a reference to newspaper reports and the 'habit of marking crime photographs with an X in the spot where bodies were found'.[344] In either case, the referent to which the signifier corresponds is related to 'real-life crime', thus imparting a degree of 'cultural verisimilitude'. Also, the murder of mobster 'Big Louie' Costillo in the opening scene is said to be based on the killing of 'Big Jim' Colosimo, allegedly by Capone, on 11 May 1920. As the noir cycle evolved, the link with 'true crime' became a defining element of generic practice, namely during 'The Location Period and the Semi-Documentary' phase. However, the prevalence of the 'cross' motif during the 'Studio Expressionism' period suggests a certain 'generic verisimilitude' between noir and other examples of the Hollywood genre film, in particular, the Gangster movie, and intertextual connections between films noirs such as *Double Indemnity* and the work of Howard Hawks. This is particularly germane to the thesis, given that Hawks was soon to direct a film noir adapted from a hard-boiled novel by Raymond Chandler, namely *The Big Sleep* (1946), analysed and discussed in Chapter Four.



When 'Big Louie' is executed by Tony, his former bodyguard, Hawks and cinematographer Lee Garmes deploy a continuous shot of over five minutes' duration. The camera tracks from the street into the First Ward Social Club where Costillo and several other gangsters are still drinking after a 'stag' party, and ends with the unfortunate Costillo being gunned down. The assassin does not appear until towards the end of the bravura shot. In fact, Tony himself does not appear at all. He is represented by a silhouette, visible on a screen at the back of the club (*plate* 20), and by his whistling, its casual air making the mood all the more

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[343]T. McCarthy, *Howard Hawks: The Grey Fox of Hollywood* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), pp.137-139.

[344] Ibid., p.143.

sinister. The representational convention of alluding to the presence of evil by means of a silhouette, that is, a stylised two-dimensional image can therefore be traced back from Walter in *Double Indemnity* to Tony in *Scarface*, from Wilder to Hawks, and from film noir to the Gangster cycle. There is also a connection with Weimar cinema, given the similarity between the depiction of Tony in *Scarface* and the eponymous vampire in Murnau's 1922 Weimar film *Nosferatu*, where the looming shadow alludes to the presence of evil, albeit a supernatural monstrosity as opposed to the social 'scourge' of the gangster (*plate* 21).

The silhouette of Tony Camonte – much like that of Walter in *Double Indemnity* – can be interpreted as 'emblematic' of the threat posed to American society by crime. As with Walter, it is as if Tony were lurking behind the projection screen. Although 'absent' from the scene, Camonte is all but present in the movie theatre. Thus, the 'real life' threat of the American gangster would seem to have infiltrated the auditorium, an effect reinforced by the references to 'real life' criminals, both in the opening captions and the mise-en-scene.

However, the actual threat itself remains at a safe distance, with the spectator able to experience vicariously the 'world of the gangster', or rather, the world which moviegoers imagine he might inhabit. As noted in relation to *Double Indemnity*, the spectator is able to derive pleasure both from such 'cultural verisimilitude', but also from a sense of familiarity with generic practice, for instance the sure knowledge that hoodlums such as Tony – and errant insurance salesman such as Walter – are doomed to perish at the end of the film.

The commentary provided by Robert Warshow upon the Hollywood Gangster cycle, in his essay 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero' (1948), can be seen to apply equally to film noir, in particular, regarding the relationship between Realism and what he refers to as the 'city of the imagination' as it occurs in the Gangster film. Warshow notes that the 'fixed dramatic patterns' of the genre impose themselves 'upon the general consciousness', to the extent that 'the real experience of its audience or the real facts of whatever the situation it pretends to describe is of secondary importance'.[345] While there may seem to be a 'realist' element, the audience experiences, and develops a familiarity with, the generic conventions of the Gangster movie (or, equally, the film noir) rather than the 'real facts' which the film

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[345] Robert Warshow, 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero' [1948], in *The Gangster Film Reader*, ed. by Alain Silver and James Ursini (New Jersey: Limelight Editions, 2007), pp.11-18.

'pretends to describe'. Thus, Warshow argues, the Gangster movie appeals 'to previous experience of the type itself: it creates its own field of reference'.[346] Although most Americans were unlikely to have seen a gangster, '[w]hat matters is that the experience of the gangster as an experience of art is universal to Americans'.[347] The conclusion reached by Warshow, summarised in his memorable comment that 'the gangster is the man of the city ... not the real city but that dangerous and sad city of the imagination',[348] has direct relevance to film noir and hard-boiled fiction. It serves to foreground the tensions between generic convention and the representation of reality. The world of *Double Indemnity*, while partly recognisable as contemporary Los Angeles, is also very much a 'dangerous and sad city of the imagination', as are many 'Studio Expressionism' noirs.

The discussion now turns to the use of a recurring 'cross' motif in the film. As noted, the use of recurring visual motifs is seen to be an aspect of Hawks's directorial style which has relevance to the generic practice of noir and its relationship with hard-boiled fiction. Chapter Four analyses and discusses a recurring 'equestrian statue' motif in Hawks's *The Big Sleep*, seen to connote the 'chivalry' of Philip Marlowe. This stylistic trait also bears comparison with the 'marking' of characters in Weimar cinema, for instance with shadow patterns and, indeed, with crosses, which came to form part of noir's generic practice.

In the scene at the First Ward Social Club, Robin Wood interprets Tony's 'squat shadow' in the opening sequence as signifying his 'primitivism', and image which thereby evokes 'ape or Neanderthal'.[349] Wood discusses the film's symbolism, and how Hawks was able to incorporate this 'unostentatiously within the naturalistic conventions' of the gangster genre. Wood argues that the 'images and leitmotifs' are effective in disturbing the spectator's response to excess, particularly the use of a cross, a 'simple and traditional' motif with 'accumulated associations', yet one which is 'all the more evocative because of it'.[350]

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[346] Ibid., p.12.

[347] Ibid., p.12.

[348] Ibid., p.13.

[349] Robin Wood, '*Scarface*' [1968], in *The Gangster Film Reader*, ed. by Silver and Ursini, pp.19-28 (p.19).

[350] Ibid., p.22-23.

When Tony takes on the North Side 'mob' led by Gaffney (Boris Karloff), acting against the orders of his new boss Johnny Lovo (Osgood Perkins), Hawks represents the 'turf war' with a montage sequence. This features multiple instances of the cross motif, all of which signify violent death. In one instance, a shadow is cast on the pavement outside an undertaker's, which also 'marks the spot' where a victim has fallen, in the style of a newspaper report. As Wood notes, due to the fact that Hawks and Garmes shoot the sign from above, the motif takes on a 'Christian shape', appearing to hover over the body 'like a cross at a funeral'.[351] In a scene which references the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, a wooden lattice screen in a store room describes seven separate cross motifs, one for each of the seven victims in the brutal machine gun attack. Regarding the 'accumulated associations' of the motif in the massacre scene, including Christian connotations, Wood observes that Gaffney's 'moral outrage' upon seeing the murder victims is represented by a 'radiant white' cross (*plate* 22), giving the killings 'a particular flavour of profanity'.[352]
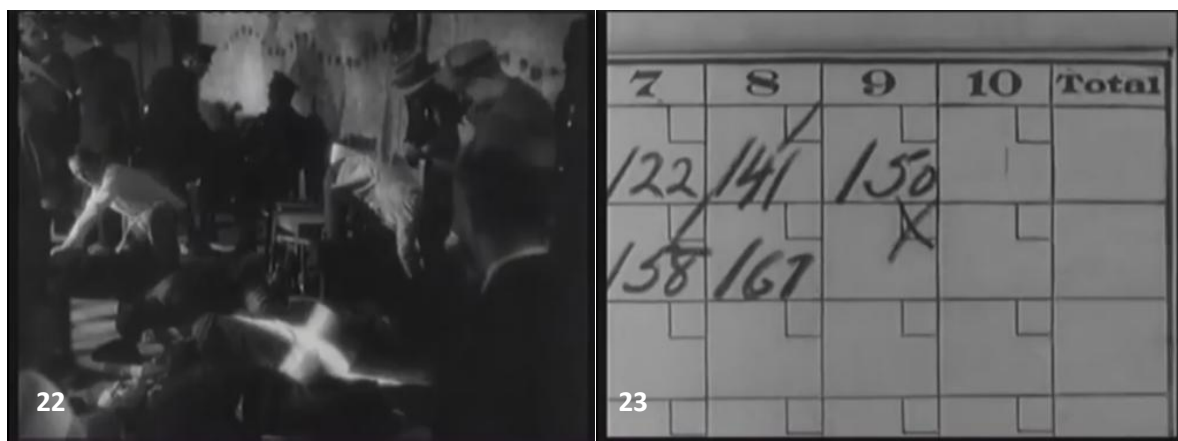


A cross-shaped pattern similar to the 'radiant white' motif appears behind Gaffney in his 'hideout' after the massacre, a symbol which indicates that he is a 'marked man'. In the subsequent scene, where Gaffney is murdered at a bowling alley, a cross marked in pencil on his scorecard by one of his assassins indicates that he has been slain (*plate* 23). As with *Double Indemnity* and film noir, allusion and symbolism have a particular power lacking in direct representation. This seems particularly true of the scene where Gaffney's murder is concerned. There is an element of 'gallows humour' about the marking of his bowling card with an 'X' indicating that he has been eliminated. However, this appears to add to the

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[351] Ibid., p.23.

[352]Ibid., p.23.

horror, perhaps because the cross conveys a mocking cruelty and a sense of arbitrariness, as well as the profanity, of a gangland murder.

Following Tony's abortive attempt upon the life of gangland boss Meehan (uncredited), he gains access to the hospital where his victim is being treated, eventually succeeding in dispatching his rival. Here, as with the 'hit' on Castillo, the signifying practice involves allusion and symbolism. In the moment immediately prior to the assassination, Tony's shadow is cast upon the wall next to Meehan's bed, along with another shadow in the shape of a cross directly above the victim's head. Tony himself does not appear in shot, merely his shadow, representing the interstitial state between his being absent and present. Similarly, the moment of Meehan's death is not represented directly or graphically but by the sound of gunshots. Given also that Tony has a cross-shaped scar on his cheek, the motif acquires an additional significance, that of the murderer's 'signature' or 'calling card'. Tony's whistling of his 'signature tune', a refrain from *Lucia Di Lammermoor*, the Donizetti opera,[353] is another recurring motif, the 'musical accompaniment' to the murders of 'Big Louie', and later Johnny Lovo, when Tony assumes leadership of the gang. This can be interpreted in a number of ways. It could be seen as a reference to the opera, and the libretto which contains the phrase 'Chi me frena?' ('What restrains me?'), and therefore a wittily ironic commentary on the excess of the gangster. As Wood rightly observes, this imparts a 'surrealist quality'[354] to the opening scene, with the 'squat shadow' representative of Tony's 'primitivism' juxtaposed with 'the elegant phrases of Italian opera'.[355]

Besides the intertextual reference to Donizetti, the mise-en-scene involves also a juxtaposition of 'high' and 'low', both aesthetically, in terms of the perceived atavism of the gangster and the beauty of the music, but also as a self-referential commentary on the relationship between the 'plebeian amusement' of cinema and the opera. In another sense, it can be to correspond in symbolic terms with the use of shadows, the interlinking 'leitmotifs' of Tony and the cross, and the juxtaposition of the 'sacred' and the 'profane'.

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[353]Ibid., p.24.

[354] Ibid., p.24.

[355] Ibid., p.24.

Additionally, as discussed above in relation to the adaptation of *Double Indemnity*, the juxtaposition of 'purity', 'authenticity' and 'redemptive power' of opera music with 'trashy' consumerism and artificiality is also characteristic of the work of Cain, who, as noted, was 'inclined to see mass culture as cheap, shallow, and manipulative'. Whereas Phyllis is associated with 'trashy consumerism' in both the source novel and the Paramount adaptation, in this instance, the gangster, with his 'fascinated attraction to gaudy trappings',[356] is seen to represent the 'cheapness' and 'shallowness' of mass culture.

Mason also comments upon the symbolism in *Scarface*, arguing that Tony's rise 'is both graphically symbolised and ironized by the Cook's Tour sign "The World is Yours"', and that 'The Tommy gun also has metonymic value',[357] becoming so closely associated with Tony that it suggests his presence even when he, Tony, does not appear, as in the massacre scene. Mason also observes that 'Tony, thus, becomes a thing rather than a person, his drive for power the product of the object he uses'.[358] The blurring between human beings and gadgetry, in which the consumer becomes an object of consumption is thus seen to be common to the Gangster cycle, Weimar cinema, and film noir.

There is an alternative explanation for the use of the 'cross' motif, and one which is grounded in the technical expediencies of the industry and the working methods of Howard Hawks, rather than aesthetics. McCarthy observes that Hawks wished to use a 'running gag of a visual X in every scene involving a murder', an idea which, as noted, originated with the aforementioned newspaper reports and the 'habit of marking crime photographs with an X in the spot where bodies were found'.[359] Hawks's offer of fifty dollars to crew members for each idea involving the motif, and a further one hundred dollars 'for any clever suggestion that made it into the film',[360] is seen to be a prime example of how films could 'grow from the studio floor', in Elsaesser's words, rather than from strictly aesthetic principles. This

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[356] Ibid., p.19.

[357] F. Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p.24.

[358] Ibid., p.24.

[359] McCarthy, *Howard Hawks*, p.143.

[360] Ibid., p.143.

indicates Hawks's ingenuity as a businessman, as well as a director, although there is no reason to think of the two as mutually exclusive.

Mason notes that the rise of the Gangster film, culminating in the 'classic gangster cycle' of *Little Caesar* (LeRoy, 1931), *The Public Enemy* (Wellman, 1931), and *Scarface*, was due partly to 'the popularity of gangster drama on Broadway from 1927 onwards'.[361] In terms of cinematic influence, the genre was preceded by a number of silent films involving the predecessor of the gangster, notably *Regeneration* (1915), directed by Raoul Walsh and produced by the Fox Film Corporation. Mason argues that *Regeneration* involves 'a blend of old fashioned melodrama and modern values', evidenced respectively by 'the clear opposition between good (the virtuous Marie) and evil (the unrepentant gangster Skinny)' and 'the way that the film attributes criminality to a social environment of deprivation'.[362] It should be noted that the Fox Film Corporation produced Murnau's *Sunrise*, which, as discussed in the preceding Chapter, is also seen to involve the juxtaposition of good and evil, and tradition and modernity.[363]

In terms of the question of the relationship between the nascent Gangster genre and film noir, it is also noteworthy that Raoul Walsh directed the 'proto-noir' *High Sierra* (1941). This involves the misadventures of armed robber, Roy 'Mad Dog' Earle (Humphrey Bogart), who is enlisted by his boss 'Big Mac' (Donald MacBride) upon his release from prison to assist with a robbery at the Californian resort, Tropico Springs. In the course of planning the 'heist' Earle encounters two women: Velma (Joan Leslie), a virtuous, local girl with whom he falls in love, and who is seen to represent good, and Marie (Ida Lupino), who exists on the periphery of the criminal gang, and who is therefore associated with evil. However, Earle's chance of redemption is dashed when Velma, who is already engaged, declines his marriage proposal, upon which he starts a relationship with Marie. Thus, the narrative conventions of *High Sierra*, co-written by John Huston, the director of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and W.R. Burnett, the hard-boiled author who also wrote the source novel, are traceable to the traditions of the Fox Film Corporation, and the Raoul Walsh oeuvre. The respective releases

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[361] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p.1.

[362] Ibid., p.2.

[363] Chapter One, pp.74-75.

of *Regeneration* and *High Sierra* span a period from 1915-1941, that is, from a forerunner of the Gangster cycle to proto-noir. Interestingly, in a scene where Earle discusses the night sky with Velma, he says he learnt about astronomy from a fellow prison inmate. This detail recurs in the Huston-scripted noir *The Killers* (Siodmak, 1946) in a scene where fellow prisoner Swede (Burt Lancaster) and Charleston (Vince Barnett) discuss astronomy.

*High Sierra* is notable for several other, related reasons. First, it was a career-defining film for male lead Humphrey Bogart, a role which saw him progress from a Warner Brothers contract player to a star in his own right.[364] Bogart had become closely associated with the Gangster genre, including two Warner Bros productions, *Racket Busters* (Lloyd Bacon, 1938) and *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Michael Curtiz, 1938), and as 'Baby Face' Martin, a character modelled on 'real life' mobster 'Baby Face' Nelson, in *Dead End* (William Wyler, 1937). Second, it was Bogart's first collaboration with writer John Huston, who went on to direct him in two major noirs, *The Maltese Falcon*, widely viewed as the first example of the genre, and *Key Largo* (1948). Bogart got the part after Paul Muni and George Raft, that is, the star and co-star of *Scarface*, turned it down. *High Sierra* can thus be seen as a 'watershed' film itself, a 'hybrid' of the Gangster film and an emerging genre, soon to be termed film noir. It is interesting to note that Bogart, whom Borde and Chaumeton argue typifies the 'not too handsome'[365] hero of film noir, began his career playing gangsters. When he played Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*, and later Phillip Marlowe in Hawks's *The Big Sleep*, the moral ambiguity of the private detectives would, thus, have been heightened, due to moviegoers being used to seeing Bogart on the wrong side of the law, as opposed to 'midway between lawful society and the underworld'.[366]

There is also a connection between the themes of the gangster genre and film noir. Mason defines the major themes of the former as:

> [T]he dominant rise and fall narrative ... a dominant narrative opposition between the family (and its identification with the law) and the gang (with

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[364] '[Warner Bros.] gave the leading role to a contract player who had never quite managed to find a niche'. M. Harris, *Five Came Back: a Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2014), p.86.

[365] Borde and Chaumeton, 'Towards a Definition of *Film Noir*', p.20.

[366] Ibid., p.20.

its transgressions against official society) in which the Oedipal narrative is reworked through the killing of the 'father'... a cultural and ideological structure which mirrors and inverts the American dream.[367]

The themes identified by Mason can all be located in *Double Indemnity*. In terms of the 'rise and fall narrative', when he first visits Phyllis in Hollywoodland, Walter is a successful insurance salesman, a 'rising star' at The Pacific All Risk, highly thought of by his boss, who deems him worthy of promotion. His moral flaws, his fondness for the opposite sex, and his hubris – all character traits he shares with the gangster – lead to his 'fall'. The 'narrative opposition between the family (and its identification with the law) and the gang (with its transgressions against official society)' is a main theme of *Double Indemnity*, as already discussed. As also noted, this can be seen as an 'Oedipal narrative' which is 'reworked through the killing of the "father"', that is, the actual murder of Mr Dietrichson, and the attempted overthrow of the symbolic father and representative of the state, Keyes.

Mason argues that 'the cultural logic of modernity maps a tension between order and chaos, between liberalisation and control of desires and between excess and discipline'.[368] In this respect, the 'iconic figure of modernity' is the *flaneur*, as typified by the Hollywood gangster, 'the wandering citizen who moves freely about the urban landscape, observing and mapping the city, its buildings, inhabitants, and culture'.[369] However, while the gangster is ostensibly free of social convention, he is ultimately subject to its controls, invariably paying for 'the excessive freedom his uncontrolled desires have engendered'[370] with his life. Terrifying though Tony may appear, there is an unspoken 'contract' between audience member and film-maker that he is doomed from the start, and thus a precursor of the 'dead man walking', Walter Neff. If the tensions between 'order and chaos', 'liberalisation and control of desires' and 'excess and discipline' define the gangster, then they are also elements, both of Walter's character, and moreover of his relationship with Keyes. Regarding literary antecedents, Cain's Walter Huff is an exemplar of the hard-boiled version of the urban *flaneur*, 'observing and mapping the city, its buildings, inhabitants, and

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[367] Mason, *America Gangster Cinema*, p.6.

[368] Ibid., pp.13-14.

[369] Ibid., p.14.

[370] Ibid., pp.14-15.

culture', occupying the interstitial spaces between 'order and chaos', 'discipline and excess', and downtown Los Angeles and the Hollywood Hills.

However, while he also pays for his transgressions with his life, there are significant differences between Walter Neff's character type – the 'male victim' – and that of the gangster. The gangster, the latter-day outlaw, is seen to embody chaos and hedonistic excess in the doomed pursuit of a skewed reimagining of the American dream. Walter, on the other hand, while also an 'outlaw' marked for destruction, is, in another respect, a traditional male lead, as noted above, a good looking and well-dressed insurance salesman with an equally 'snappy' turn of phrase. His transgressions seem all the more shocking for his apparent 'respectability' and his resemblance to the traditional Hollywood hero. Were it not for his involvement with Phyllis, and his own tragic hubris, he would have been the embodiment of the American dream. In terms of Mason's analysis of the 'cultural logic of modernity', he is seen to be quintessentially modern: neither good nor evil, but poised (or marooned) between the two.

The urban *flaneur* Walter Neff is thus seen to have several direct antecedents. Firstly, the gangster hero, as typified by Tony Camonte in *Scarface*. Secondly, the character of Walter Huff in Cain's novel, whom we first encounter navigating the Los Angeles suburbs, selling insurance to truck drivers.[371] Thirdly, the rootless drifter Frank Chambers, narrator of Cain's first novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, with Walter seen to be a middle-class reincarnation of Frank; and lastly, Chandler's private eye Philip Marlowe, perhaps the most well-known Los Angeles *flaneur* of them all. Thus, the Cain character is overwritten with cinematic and literary tropes in the form of the Hollywood gangster on the one hand, and the fast-talking, 'wisecracking' hard-boiled hero so typical of Chandler on the other.

In its representation of sex and violence, including multiple gangland slayings and the 'incestuous relationship' between Tony and Cesca (Ann Dvorak), Mason observes, not unreasonably, that *Scarface* is 'the epitome of excess'.[372] Inevitably, however, such excessiveness attracted the attention of the censors, leading to protracted negotiations

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[371] J.M. Cain, *Double Indemnity* (London: Orion, 2002), p.1.

[372] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p.24.

between producer Howard Hughes and the Hays Office, the forerunner of the PCA. As McCarthy notes, in compliance with the dictates of the Hays Office, Hughes agreed to the shooting of a scene 'showing indignant civic leaders' accusing a 'Hearst-like' newspaper proprietor of 'glamorizing gangsters in print'.[373] As for Hawks, he only agreed to the inclusion of the notorious scene, directed by his assistant, Richard Rosson, due to the fact that it was so poorly done that '[e]verybody will know it wasn't part of the picture',[374] an opinion which is granted validity by even the most cursory viewing of the film. If, as Mason observes, the relationships between 'restraint and desire, and discipline and excess'[375] are seen to apply to the production of *Scarface* as well as the characters and events of the narrative, then, as noted above, this is also the case with film noir, for example, the negotiations between Paramount and the PCA over the adaptation of *Double Indemnity*.

Indeed, the friction between the studios and the Hays Office over the Gangster cycle led directly to the overhaul of the self-regulatory system and the establishment of the PCA. The Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association, referred to as the Hays Office after its head, Will H. Hays, had been formed in 1922. The Hays Office produced a list of recommendations for the studios in 1927, followed by a formal written Code in March 1930. However, as Silver and Ursini observe, the restrictions of the Motion Picture Code 'were easily ignored'.[376] In 1934, the PCA replaced the Hays Office as the administrative body for the enforcement of the Production Code. The preamble of 'the Code' stated that crime 'shall never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime'; that the 'technique of murder must be presented in a way that will not inspire imitation'; and that 'brutal killings are not to be presented in detail'.[377]

The advent of the PCA therefore sounded the death knell for the Gangster cycle, ensuring that the 'unfettered portrayals' of the likes of Tony Camonte 'were no longer possible in

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[373] McCarthy, *Howard Hawks*, p.148.

[374] Ibid., p.148-149.

[375] Mason, *American Gangster Cinema*, p.28.

[376] *Gangster Film Reader,* ed. by Silver and Ursini, p.2

[377] Ibid., p.2.

studio productions'.[378] The constraints entailed by the self-regulatory system, while applicable to all genres, were bound to have a profound effect upon the crime genre, with its reliance upon 'cultural verisimilitude'. Indeed, Krutnik argues that the establishment of the PCA accounted for the lack of a movie equivalent for 'hard-boiled' fiction during the 1930s, stating that the 'principal reason' for this was 'the strengthening of the Hays Code self-regulatory form of censorship in 1933 and 1934 which required the studios to "play it safe" in matters of sexual content and violence'.[379] This evidence reinforces the argument that the adaptation of Cain's *Double Indemnity* was a landmark in Hollywood film-making, and that what became film noir is seen to originate in the minds of Hollywood producers over a decade before it inspired the imagination of French critics.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

The aim of this Chapter has been to set out textual evidence to demonstrate the nature of the influence of Weimar cinema, hard-boiled fiction, and the Gangster movie on *Double Indemnity*, and therefore upon the generic practice of film noir. In summary, Paramount's adaptation is seen to involve both the dialogic exchange between hard-boiled fiction and film noir, but also an incompatibility regarding the representation of 'adult' themes, particularly in Cain's variant of the mode. Furthermore, the adaptation is seen to involve the creation of several palimpsests. Interpreted in this way, Hollywood conventions are seen to be overwritten with the tropes of Weimar cinema in the formation of the emerging generic practice of noir. Regarding the adapted screenplay, the tropes of Chandler's version of the hard-boiled mode are seen to be overwritten onto those of Cain. As the noir cycle developed, films such as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* are seen to have relationships, both with the hard-boiled genre *per se* and other influential noirs, as well as the source novel. Chapter Three now examines the degree to which MGM's adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was influenced by Paramount's groundbreaking adaptation of *Double Indemnity* (which, as will be discussed, is effectively a reworking of the characters and plot of his debut), and the process involved in Cain's first novel 'becoming film noir'.

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[378] Ibid., p.2.

[379] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, pp.35-36.

**Chapter Three**

'The price of fornication': adapting *The Postman Always Rings Twice*

This chapter analyses and discusses *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, the 1946 MGM adaptation of Cain's first novel, directed by Tay Garnett. It includes an analysis of the intertextual relationship between the film and novel, focusing upon the modifications which took place during the adaptation process, and the ideological shifts which these changes are seen to involve. As noted in the conclusion to the preceding Chapter, *Double Indemnity*, Cain's second novel, is effectively a reworking of the plot, themes and characterisation of his first, which also involved an adulterous affair, on this occasion between Cora Smith and Frank Chambers, resulting in the murder of Cora's husband Nick.[380]

The evolution of the noir cycle and its emergent signifying practice is also examined, along with the influence of the hard-boiled mode on the developing genre. As discussed in relation to *Double Indemnity* in Chapter Two, Paramount's film is considered to be groundbreaking in terms of its representation of adultery, fraud, and murder from the perspective of the perpetrators and the sympathetic way in which Walter and Phyllis are portrayed.[381] These innovations can be viewed both in terms of Hollywood history *per se* and a new era of more 'explicit' film-making, but also of the arrival of a new crime genre, that is, film noir. The thesis argues that they are also partly attributable to Cain's work and thus to the hard-boiled mode, as well as to Weimar cinema and the Gangster cycle. As also noted previously, the studios might have exploited the full commercial potential of adapting the controversial subject matter of hard-boiled fiction in the mid-1930s but for the presence of the PCA.[382] Paramount led where others followed. As Chinen Biesen observes, '[t]he box office revenue for *Double Indemnity* (some $2.5 million in North American rentals) offered studios tangible incentives for jumping on the noir bandwagon'.[383]

The thesis proposes that, by 1946, the film noir cycle was sufficiently evolved for the MGM adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* to absorb influence from other noirs, particularly *Double Indemnity*, released in 1944. The arguments presented in the previous Chapter regarding the adaptation of *Double Indemnity* and Cain's work foreground several

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[380] Chapter Two: '"Dead man walking": adapting *Double Indemnity*', p.125.

[381] Ibid., pp.81-82.

[382] Introduction, p.11.

[383] S. Chinen Biesen, *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir*, p.97.

key points regarding the Hollywood adaptation process. Broadly speaking, these include the way in which the film can be viewed as drawing upon Cain's oeuvre in its entirety, rather than exclusively upon the source novel; and, as the noir cycle evolved, how adaptations drew upon other Hollywood films as well as the literary source texts. It was also discussed how, in the Warner Brothers 1945 adaptation of Cain's fourth novel, *Mildred Pierce*, the addition of features such as 'flashback' voice-over narration and Monty Beragon's murder is seen to regulate as well as respond to the 'public image' of Cain's work.[384] By 1946, then, it was no longer just the hard-boiled novels themselves but the adaptations based upon them that informed public opinion. The changes made during the production of the film can also be seen as Warner Brothers' response to the commercial success of Paramount's adaptation of *Double Indemnity*. The additions to the narrative are key elements of the emergent and evolving generic practice of film noir, although the film's producer, Jerry Wald, would not have recognised them as such, given that the film was released in October 1945 and the term was first used in relation to the innovative new crime series in August 1946.

Cain's work supplied Hollywood studios with the 'means, motive, and opportunity' to pressurise the PCA into reform. However, while it was undoubtedly influential upon noir, as previously discussed, certain aspects of it, such as the lack of moral justification for the characters' actions, presented Hollywood screenplay writers with difficulties which even after the release of *Double Indemnity* could not be easily accommodated within the Hollywood crime thriller. Despite the fact that a large part of the audience appeal of the novel derived from the outrageous goings-on at the Twin Oaks diner – the 'tabloid sensationalism' of the themes – this would still have to be balanced in the adaptation with a sense of 'moral decency'. This is seen to be a contributory factor in terms of MGM producer Carey Wilson's assurances to the PCA that physical contact would be kept to a minimum, and that Frank Chambers (John Garfield) would show remorse over the death of his lover and accomplice Cora Smith (Lana Turner) 'to demonstrate the price of fornication'.[385]

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[384] Chapter Two, p.109.

[385] Leff, L.J., and J.L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), pp.134-135.

In plain terms, the MGM film is seen to be a relatively conservative adaptation compared with Paramount's *Double Indemnity*. Furthermore, it is based upon a more radical novel 'inspired' by a work of nineteenth century French Naturalism, that is, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*.[386] The novel has no 'femme fatale' as such, involving instead two lovers who, while they commit adultery and murder, are very much 'victims' themselves, both of the hardships caused by the Great Depression and their desire for each other. Concerning the links with Naturalism, Zola's commentary in the 'Preface' to *Thérèse Raquin* regarding Thérèse and Laurent, who commit adultery and murder Thérèse's husband Camille, applies equally to Frank and Cora:

> I chose protagonists who were supremely dominated by their nerves and their blood, deprived of free will and drawn into every action of their lives by the predetermined lot of their flesh ... The love between my two heroes is the satisfaction of a need; the murder that they commit is the outcome of their adultery, an outcome they accept as wolves accept the killing of a sheep.[387]

Relating Zola's comments regarding Thérèse and Laurent to Cora and Frank, both are seen to be prone to 'the predetermined lot of their flesh'. In addition, it is possible to view their fate as predetermined, not merely by their own pathology, but by the 'intangible, social networks and systems', which Fay and Nieland argue, 'powerfully determine the course of their lives more than their individual desires or actions'.[388]

This is also true, to a degree, of the two main protagonists of Cain's *Double Indemnity*. However, both have some social standing, Walter being an up-and-coming insurance salesman and Phyllis a 'respectable' suburban housewife. Their social status allows first Cain, then later Wilder and Chandler, to critique capitalism by focusing on its middle-class beneficiaries, who, while ostensibly 'decent' people are, in fact, rotten to the core. In *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Cora is a working class woman who abandons Des Moines for California and ends up a waitress in her husband's diner when her dreams of Hollywood stardom fail to materialise. Frank is an itinerant, a 'hobo', a familiar figure in Depression-era American fiction. While it is not the purpose of the thesis to consider 'the film that never

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[386] Introduction, p.42.

[387] E. Zola, 'Preface', in *Thérèse Raquin* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.4.

[388] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), p.6.

was', for a left-leaning film-maker, say an Adrian Scott or an Edward Dmytryk, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* would have provided an opportunity to critique American society by focusing on the victims of capitalism, rather than its beneficiaries, and to elicit sympathy for a 'down and out' and his married lover, a woman trapped within a loveless marriage waiting tables for her husband. Indeed, Luchino Visconti, the Italian Neorealist who sojourned with Renoir and the Popular Front in Paris in the 1930s, adapted it as *Ossessione* (1943), an uncompromising interpretation discussed in a separate section at the end of the Chapter.

Nevertheless, the purpose of the Chapter is to examine the way in which Garnett's film is seen to apply and thereby consolidate noir's emergent generic practice, rather than to criticise it for being 'unoriginal' on the one hand, or overly conservative on the other.[389] Louis B. Mayer was not left-leaning. However, the fact that MGM were prepared to make a film 'in the style' of *Double Indemnity* despite the potential conflicts with the studio's ethos and 'house style' is in itself a compelling argument in favour of the existence of film noir, both as a Hollywood film genre as well as a critical construct.

As noted above, the Chapter concludes with an analysis of *Ossessione*, Visconti's 1943 adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. The film is seen to engage with and, indeed, develop the controversial aspects of the source material. The comparison between two, markedly different adaptations is helpful as it provides an opportunity to examine two interpretations of the same source text, and how its themes are, or conversely, are not, explored and developed. In the Visconti adaptation, the two main protagonists, Gino (Massimo Girotti) and Giovanna (Clara Calamai), are represented as equally vulnerable, both in terms of their lowly socio-economic status and their powerlessness to resist their sexual desire. They are counterpointed with Giovanna's husband, the boorish trattoria owner, Giuseppe Bragana (Juan de Landa), and the Catholic priest, Don Remigio (Michele Riccardini). Visconti's adaptation is thus seen to situate the murder of Bragana by Gino and Giovanna, both in terms of criminal pathology and the social milieu, much in keeping with the Naturalist treatment of such themes in the Cain text.

It is not intended to favour the source novel over the MGM adaptation discussed here, although it is accepted that the thesis might be seen to 'privilege' *Ossessione* (and *Double*

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[389] Introduction, p.25.

*Indemnity*) over *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. However, the purpose is to conduct a comparative analysis of two adaptations with two differing ideologies, one seen to be radical and the other conservative, in order to offer possible reasons why certain modifications are seen to occur. While 'landmark' films may be instrumental in establishing genres or movements, as is true of *Double Indemnity* and film noir and *Ossessione* and Italian Neorealism, this is not to devalue the many texts influenced by them. If imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery, then Jerry Wald at Warner Brothers and Carey Wilson at MGM are seen to flatter Paramount, and to contribute to the new genre in the process.

By the mid-1940s and the advent of film noir, the Production Code was becoming an anachronism. While the allusive representation of 'adult' themes could be remarkably effective, the PCA's enforcement of 'the Code' was extremely constraining. Despite the fact that *Ossessione* was produced in fascist Italy, it nonetheless manages to be a remarkable adaptation, a courageous indictment of conventional masculinity, the Catholic Church, and Mussolini's regime. As discussed below, the fascist censors' approval was granted under the auspices of *Ossessione* being a critique of American capitalism. The subversiveness of Cain's work can, therefore, be seen to transcend national, cultural, and political boundaries, a potential of which film-makers such as Visconti, Chenal, and Wilder were aware. There can be little doubt that Tay Garnett and MGM were also well aware of the 'subversive potential' of the Cain text. The problem, as ever with Cain adaptations, was how to make a film which would satisfy the PCA while simultaneously meeting audience expectations, not just in terms of the novel's controversial but nonetheless titillating themes, but also the studio's reputation. For there were, as discussed in the Introduction, further audience expectations in terms of the classical MGM 'house style', described by Leff and Simmons as 'all sunshine and splash'.[390] As noted, this is seen to conflict with the 'art house' ethos of film noir. It was within this quite specific production context that Garnett and MGM set about adapting Cain's arguably most successful, and certainly most influential novel.

The analysis of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* which follows starts with a discussion of the modifications which took place during the adaptation process, prior to an examination of the way in which the film is seen to apply and develop noir's emergent generic practice.

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[390] Leff and Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono*, p.135; see Introduction, p.24.

### The Postman Always Rings Twice (Garnett, 1946)

The relationship between *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and its various cultural sources is complex. Whereas MGM's film was released two years after Paramount's *Double Indemnity* in 1946, Cain gained success, notoriety, and the attention of Hollywood, with his first novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, in 1934. His second, *Double Indemnity*, serialised in *Liberty* magazine in 1936, two years after his debut, was written, according to Madden, to finance the stage play of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.[391] Schickel argues that Cain wrote *Double Indemnity* 'in full knowledge that he was doing homage to *Postman*',[392] while Cain himself considered it to have been 'done very slapdash and very quick', due to the fact that he needed money to finance a divorce, as well his play.[393] Cain's second novel is, thus, seen to be a relatively stylised and formulaic reworking of his Naturalist-inspired debut.

The opening titles of the film are superimposed over an image of the cover of Cain's novel, the art deco-style design on the dust jacket identifying it as a representation of the Alfred A. Knopf 1934 first edition (*plate* 1). The prominence of the image indicates the importance attached by MGM, not merely to Cain's hard-boiled crime drama itself, but the sensation it caused due to its candid representation of marital infidelity and murder. Madden argues that the sensationalism of Cain's fiction can be seen as attributable to his background as a journalist, and that reviewers 'frequently commented on the tabloid inspirations of Cain's fictive world'.[394] The reviewer William Rose Benét, for instance, argues that this aspect of Cain's work 'derives from … the sensationalism of America fostered by the daily press'.[395] As discussed throughout the thesis, hard-boiled fiction and film noir both lay claim to a degree of 'cultural verisimilitude'; however, the respective generic practices of these largely complementary modes of popular culture tend to have more in common with each other than they do with 'real life crime'.

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[391] D. Madden, *James M. Cain: hard-boiled mythmaker* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011), p.20.

[392] R. Schickel, *Double Indemnity* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000), p.21.

[393] J. M. Cain in 'James M. Cain: Tough Guy', an interview with Peter Brunette and Gerald Peary, in *Backstory 1: Interviews with Screenwriters of Hollywood's Golden Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp.125-6, reprinted in Schickel, *Double Indemnity*, p.66.

[394] Madden, *James M. Cain: hard-boiled mythmaker*, p.17.

[395] Ibid., p.17.

The legacy of Cain's controversial first novel is discernible in the editing of the opening scene. The sequence starts with a medium shot of the forecourt of the 'Twin Oaks Garage and Lunchroom' and a sign reading 'Man Wanted' (*plate* 2), followed by a wide shot of the forecourt and a proliferation of other advertising signs. It is, thus, a variation on the conventional opening sequence, customarily starting with a long establishing shot, which gives prominence to the medium shot of the 'Man Wanted' sign and its play on words, a not-so-sly reference to the scandalous source text. The *double entendre* 'Man Wanted' foreshadows the arrival of Frank Chambers at the Twin Oaks and the resulting affair with Cora Smith who is unhappily married to a much older man, Nick Smith (Cecil Kellaway).



Just as the customers of the Twin Oaks are greeted by a welter of information regarding the various goods and services available, the film wastes no time in 'advertising' its own wares, promising not to disappoint by interfering unduly with the subject matter of Cain's story, and reassuring the audience that the notorious Cora Smith still wants a man. Thus, the *double entendre* can be interpreted as a reference to the publicity, negative or otherwise, which Cain's novel had garnered in the twelve years since its publication.

During the opening scene, Frank encounters Nick, the ageing proprietor of the Twin Oaks, and Cora, to whom he is instantly attracted. After he has accepted Nick's offer of employment as the Twin Oaks handyman, he is shown burning the 'Man Wanted' sign. As the sign burns, Nick imparts to him the shocking news that Cora, whom, due to the age difference between her and Nick, Frank may have taken to be a waitress, is in fact his wife. Frank removes the sign from the fire, clearly rueing his decision to accept the job, which it seems was largely influenced by his attraction to Cora. When Cora appears on the front steps of the lunchroom, she and Frank exchange 'knowing' glances, a silent

acknowledgement of their mutual attraction and, moreover, of their complicity in the adulterous affair. This prompts Frank to put the sign back into the fire. The final image of the opening scene, echoing the first, is of the sign being consumed by flames. The burning sign has further connotations in respect of the narrative, that is, the 'fiendish' plots of Frank and Cora, and the 'hellish' consequences for the adulterous couple.

The 'set-up' of the MGM adaptation is, in one sense, what one would expect from a film noir and a 'pulp' novel: the preamble to a lusty affair and a violent murder. However, while it seems to resemble *Double Indemnity* in this respect, there are subtle but telling differences in the way the central couple are portrayed. Notably, in *Double Indemnity*, neither Walter nor Phyllis shows any genuine reluctance over starting their affair, although Walter does have doubts about the insurance fraud. This applies to both the film and the novel. The 'Man Wanted' scene in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, however, insinuates Frank's apparent reluctance to pursue an affair with another man's wife which he does not display in the novel. Although he seizes and kisses Cora passionately after a mere eight minutes, the film's plot involves a relatively lengthy courtship; in the novel, the couple consummate their relationship after only two days, with Frank showing neither hesitation nor remorse. Interestingly, as discussed below in the section on *Ossessione*, Gino and Giovanna initiate their affair with the same urgency as the characters in the novel. In the MGM film, however, Cora justifies her rejection of Nick and her availability to Frank by contextualising her attraction to the latter in terms of the romantic love which is not merely lacking from her marriage, but which she has never experienced before. She makes a speech about the unsolicited attention she has received from men throughout her life but which she has never reciprocated. She makes it clear to Frank that hers is a loveless marriage, saying 'I told Nick I didn't love him'.

The ensuing exchange is a pivotal moment in terms of the way the adulterous affair is represented in the film vis-a-vis the novel. Frank reflects on Cora's statement that she doesn't love her husband, saying 'The undefeated champ'. Cora replies 'Not 100% undefeated – not now'. There is, therefore, more than a suggestion in the phrase 'undefeated champ' that Cora might still be a virgin, and that her marriage to Nick has never been consummated. This may account for the many white outfits worn by Lana Turner during the course of the film. Indeed, MGM producer Carey Wilson proclaimed in a press

release that the film would be '"a study in white"'[396] with Turner wearing forty-one white costumes. In the opinion of screenwriter Harry Ruskin, the reason for Turner's predominantly white wardrobe was 'so that the public understood the girl's pure'.[397]

These statements provide a valuable insight into the Hollywood adaptation process during the PCA era. Leff and Simmons maintain that once Ruskin and fellow screenwriter Niven Busch had produced a temporary script which 'cut much of the anger and feeling out of the novel',[398] producer Carey Wilson entered into negotiations with Joseph Breen in order to establish parameters regarding 'the Code'. As noted above, Wilson gave assurances to Breen that instances of physical intimacy between Frank and Cora would be minimised and that Frank would be remorseful over Cora's death 'to demonstrate the price of fornication', whereas Nick would become 'a coarse and cheap man whom even a woman less venal than Cora would wish out of the way'.[399]

While one might argue that these are all questionable decisions given the nature of the novel, which is defined by its frank and earthy depiction of human behaviour, it is important to note the specifics of the adaptation process and the possible reasons why such decisions were made. These are attributable to production issues, such as adherence to 'the Code', but also the 'house style', the distinctive 'sunshine and splash' of MGM. In addition to plot, characters, and dialogue, this also applied to the shooting style. As Leff and Simmons note, had Tay Garnett shot the film 'in the brooding style of film noir'[400] then he may have incurred the wrath of the Breen Office and derailed the production of the film. However, Garnett was not only attempting to accommodate the PCA, but also to comply with MGM's commitment to represent Cora Smith as 'pure' and 'virginal'.

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[396] Leff and Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono*, p.135.

[397] Ibid., p.135.

[398] Ibid., p.135.

[399] Ibid., pp.134-135.

[400] Ibid., p.135.

In the novel, when Frank first meets Cora, she is indeed wearing white, as Frank says, 'one of those white nurse uniforms'.[401] However, by the end of Frank's first day at the Twin Oaks, when Cora is serving him dinner, and with the sexual tension between them mounting, Frank remarks that 'it was a little bit rumpled now, and mussy', adding that 'I could smell her'.[402] Far from representing her so-called 'purity', then, Cora's white uniform in fact signifies quite the opposite, that is, an outward show of 'decency' which belies the 'baseness' of her sexual arousal and 'thinly-veiled' physical attraction to Frank, as signified by the dishevelled state of her uniform.

By contrast, Lana Turner's white outfits in the MGM film are intended to signify the 'purity' of a woman who, despite being married, may yet be a virgin. Ruskin's remark in relation to Cora's virginity and the Wilson press release regarding 'a study in white' suggest the white wardrobe can be seen as a means of addressing Cora's perceived lack of moral 'decency' and therefore a part of the studio's strategy to gain the approval of the PCA. While this strategy may or may not be effective in making Cora appear more 'pure' or 'virginal', it certainly renders problematic her representation as a 'femme fatale', the stereotypes being patently in conflict with each other.

There is a sense, then, in which the MGM film resorts to the conventions of classical Hollywood rather than embracing fully the changes taking place post-*Double Indemnity*. Wilder said of *Double Indemnity* that he wanted to get away from 'the white satin décor associated with MGM's chief set designer, Cedric Gibbons'.[403] It is between these luxuriant but distinctly conservative environs and the iconoclastic world of noir that the adaptation hovers. However, given that the PCA guidelines prohibited 'a definite indication of illicit sex and adultery without sufficient compensating moral values',[404] adapting the novel was an inherently problematic undertaking, even after the successful adaptation of *Double*

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[401] J. M. Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (London: Orion, 2004), p.6.

[402] Ibid., p.6.

[403] Billy Wilder, Interview by Cameron Crowe, in *Conversations with Wilder* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), p.53, in Chinen Biesen, *Blackout*, p.108.

[404] M. Stokes, *Gilda*, BFI Film Classics (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), citing Joseph I. Breen to Harry Cohn, 20 November 1944, 'Gilda', PCA Records, p.20, p.111n22.

*Indemnity*. Frank and Cora would have been subject to 'aesthetic mainstreaming',[405] an integral part of Hollywood's screenwriting process which demands sympathetic, conventional characters. This is seen to account for the addition of 'compensating moral values', such as the justifications for the affair and character modifications. However, the process is clearly at odds with film noir, which portrays thoroughly villainous protagonists sympathetically, and which thus involves complex, unconventional characters.

In the novel, Cora is a high school beauty queen who, as noted, leaves Des Moines, Iowa, for Hollywood. After a failed screen test, she finds work in a 'hash house' (or 'cheap' diner), where she meets Nick, summing up the reasons for their relationship by saying he simply 'came along'.[406] Cora also admits to Frank that she used to accept invitations from clients of the hash house to attend what she refers to as parties, adding 'You know what I mean about them parties?',[407] the insinuation being that she was also a prostitute, and possibly that Nick was one of her clients. In the film, only traces of Cora's back-story survive, such as one, fleeting reference to the 'hash-house'. The PCA prohibited any reference to prostitution. However, the important point to note here in relation to the 'conservative' MGM stance is this is not even alluded to in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, as it is in Lang's *The Woman in the Window* (1944) and *Scarlet Street* (1945), and Dmytryk's *Crossfire* (1947) with regard to the 'femmes fatales' Alice, Kitty, and Ginny, respectively. Cora professes to love Frank in the novel, too. However, as noted, there is no protracted courtship, with Cain adopting an uncompromisingly frank approach to their relationship, such as when Cora, shortly after she and Frank first have sexual intercourse, remarks 'You're hard all over. Big and tall and hard'.[408] Frank replies that he honed his physique by 'socking railroad detectives',[409] thereby equating his itinerancy with his sexual power – a connection explored in more detail below.

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[405] R. Stam, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, eds., Robert Stam and Alessandro Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p.43.

[406] Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, p.13.

[407] Ibid., p.12.

[408] Ibid., p.14.

[409] Ibid., p.13.

'The Code' concerned itself with a variety of controversial topics, besides simply sex and violence. Doherty observes that the PCA 'set down precise guidelines on flash points such as blasphemy, obscenity, vulgarity, costuming, and national and ethnic sensitivities'.[410] Although the notoriety of Cain's first novel was due largely to the stark portrayal of adultery and murder, its treatment of race is equally controversial. However, the overtly racist attitude displayed by the couple towards Nick is completely expunged from the adaptation. For instance, in the novel, after the couple have sex in eucalyptus grove, alluded to in Frank's narration by the phrase 'We did plenty',[411] Cora says to Frank 'I hate that Greek'.[412] This line, which could be construed as representing Nick's murder as racially motivated, is excised from the adaption. The same applies to racial stereotyping, such as Frank's description of Mexican women as having 'yellow skin and hair that looks like it had bacon fat on it'.[413] While *Double Indemnity* heralded a loosening of PCA restrictions, although this may have applied to 'obscenity' and 'vulgarity', and sympathy for an adulterous couple, this was clearly not the case in respect of 'national and ethnic sensitivities'.

Besides the interracial issues which, in the novel, Cora perceives as arising from her marriage to Nick, she also makes a number of defamatory remarks about her native Iowa and her hometown of Des Moines as they relate to her identity, describing herself as a 'Des Moines trollop'.[414] Thus, although Madden argues that in the adaptation many of the scenes are 'a literal transcription of the novel, excluding the sex scenes',[415] this is far from the case. Indeed, a sizeable proportion of Cain's dialogue is excised from the film, including all racial epithets, as well as Cora's prejudicial and potentially offensive representation of the American Midwest.

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[410] T. Doherty, *Hollywood and the Production Code* (Woodbridge, CT: Thomson Gale, 2006), p.viii.

[411] Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, pp.11-12.

[412] Ibid, p.12.

[413] Ibid., pp.4-5.

[414] Ibid., p.12.

[415] Madden, *James M. Cain: hard-boiled mythmaker*, p.153.

Turning now to Frank Chambers, in Cain's novel he is depicted as an itinerant, in common parlance, a 'tramp' or 'hobo'. The marked difference in tone between novel and film is partly attributable to the fact that the former is set during the Depression era of the 1930s. The setting for the film is updated to the present day, although precise details of the time and place are not given, merely that the Twin Oaks is situated somewhere in suburban Los Angeles. The social focus of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* foregrounds the representation of class and the proletarian characters' attitudes towards sex, money, race, and the bleakness of existence during the Depression. Described by Fay and Nieland as an 'itinerant hustler',[416] Frank, much like Walter Huff in *Double Indemnity* and John Howard Sharp in *Serenade* (1937), is a marginal figure, well-adapted to the interstitial space of the American highway. He knows where the boundaries are, both literally and figuratively, because he hovers permanently around them: city limits, interstate boundaries, national borders, and the blurred distinctions between good and evil.

When, in the novel, Frank first proposes that he and Cora elope together – that they 'ditch this Greek and blow'[417] – he boasts about his knowledge of 'the road' and the skills he has acquired while travelling it, saying 'I know every twist and turn it's got. And I know how to work it, too'.[418] The term 'the road' can thus be interpreted literally, that is, as a means of escaping domestic drudgery, and as a metaphor signifying Frank's sexual adventurousness, interlinked with his itinerancy. Whether taken literally or metaphorically, it can be seen to represent Frank as 'experienced'. This worldliness, which he shares with Cora, serves to counterpoint the adulterous couple's resourcefulness with Nick's relative naivety.

In the novel, when he first arrives at the Twin Oaks Tavern, Frank has made the journey from 'Tia Juana' to California as a stowaway on board a hay truck. He describes the Twin Oaks as consisting of 'a roadside sandwich joint' and 'a half dozen shacks that they called an auto court',[419] his first-person narration typifying the cynical, world-worn vernacular of the hard-boiled mode. Situated in suburban Los Angeles, the diner and auto court occupy an

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[416] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, p.4.

[417] Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, p.13.

[418] Ibid., p.13.

[419] Ibid., p.1.

interstitial space inhabited by socially marginal characters poised between good and evil – in classic Cain style. The run-down 'joint' is the ideal setting for the sordid goings-on of the plot, the one-sided battle between Frank's proletarian wiles and opportunism and Nick's poorly conceived and badly executed strategies – both in love, and in business.

If Frank is associated with 'the road' then there are also connections, both literally and metaphorically, between Cora and the diner. While this is partly true of the film, it is particularly so in the novel, where Frank's description of the Twin Oaks as a 'low class' establishment with bourgeois pretensions makes a rather obvious association between the diner and Cora, an ex-beauty queen and social climber from Des Moines, forced to abandon hopes of being a movie star but who still has aspirations of social advancement. The omission of such lines from the adaptation, the relatively 'up-market' appearance of the Twin Oaks, and the under-emphasis of Cora's back story, all serve to weaken this association and therefore to promote the image of Cora as 'wholesome' and 'decent' (despite the fact that she is also represented as a 'femme fatale'). Nonetheless, in both texts, the metaphorical association between the doggedly determined, would-be movie star and the failing business with hidden potential becomes manifest when Cora transforms the Twin Oaks into a successful business. The fact that she achieves her ambition by investing the insurance payment obtained from her ex-husband's murder can be seen as a critique of the capitalist system characteristic of Cain's work, the hard-boiled mode, and film noir.

Turning now to Frank's adapted character, in the MGM film he is a hitchhiker, not a 'tramp' or 'hobo', travelling from San Francisco to San Diego. He arrives at the diner in a car, driven, rather ominously, by District Attorney Kyle Sackett (Leon Ames). Regarding his appearance, he is well-groomed, clean-shaven, and dressed smartly in a sports jacket, shirt, and slacks. The text of the novel contains no direct reference to Frank's appearance, but after a three-week, Mexican drinking binge and a ride in a hay truck, this is not hard to imagine. As noted, the Twin Oaks also appears to be relatively affluent and not the 'joint' described by Frank in the novel. Thus, the Twin Oaks, Frank, and Cora are all relatively 'well presented' when compared with their depiction by Cain.

As Frank leaves Sackett's car, he says 'Well so long mister, thanks for the ride, the three cigarettes and for not laughing at my theories on life'. Sackett replies 'Why do you keep

looking for new places, people, and new ideas?' Frank, who is sufficiently engaging for his 'opinions on life' to have interested his middle-class travelling companion, and whose demeanour exhibits a certain jaunty optimism, replies that he has simply never found the right job. This exchange is followed by a shot of the 'Man Wanted' sign, with the jauntily upbeat Frank remarking 'Maybe my future starts right now'. Frank makes pointed reference to his 'itchy feet', a recurrent motif in the dialogue. Thus, the character of 'hitch-hiker' Frank (as opposed to 'hobo') is imbued with a sense of youthful optimism. In a later scene when Frank and Cora dance together, accompanied by Nick playing 'She's Funny That Way' on his guitar, Nick says 'My brains are not in my feet', a tacit reference to the romantic appeal of Frank's nomadic lifestyle, a considerable factor in terms of Cora's attraction to him.

The District Attorney also appears at the end of the film, along with the priest, Father McConnell (Tom Dillon), to whom Frank has been confessing his sins in the 'flashback' narration. Thus, in addition to the 'framed' narrative, Frank is quite literally flanked by the forces of law and order and the church, thereby containing his restless opportunism and subversive energy. In the novel, Frank has written a 'memoir' rather than a confession which he submits to McConnell simply that he may check the grammar.[420] This alteration is attributed to the requirement to conform to PCA guidelines, and to honour Carey Wilson's commitment to Joseph Breen that Frank would show remorse over Cora's demise in his 'death-bed confession'. There is a sense in which the establishment figures in the MGM film can be seen to represent the various institutions which exerted such a powerful influence over Hollywood at the time, including Breen and the producers who were obliged to appease him. Frank's confession, which bears a marked resemblance to Walter's in *Double Indemnity*, acquires additional significance when one considers that the head of the PCA, Joseph Breen, was a catholic.

In both novel and film, Cora's attraction to someone who is, effectively, a rootless drifter, is attributable to the drudgery of her domestic life and the frustration of her ambitions; both romantically and professionally, due to her marriage to an older man by whom she is repelled, and Nick's lack of business acumen. Fay and Nieland argue that, in the novel, Frank's nomadic lifestyle and his libidinous nature are interconnected, stating that 'Frank's

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[420] Ibid., p.115.

vagabondage and his sexual appetites are metaphors for each other – twinned species of wanderlust'.[421] This would also appear to be true of the character in the film.

However, in addition to his own desires, Frank himself exerts a powerful attraction. This can also be seen as attributable to his 'vagabondage', with his nomadic wandering and his sexual 'adventurousness' as 'twinned species' relating to his own appeal. Cora is seduced by the freedom which Frank seems to embody, both in terms of his sexual boldness and, in the film, his jaunty, free-spirited optimism. Indeed, the 'aesthetic mainstreaming' process, which diminishes the more menacing aspects of the character as he appears in the novel, transforms Frank into an attractive anti-hero, albeit one who is marshalled at every turn by the forces of law and order. In terms of the MGM film, and moreover the innovation which film noir was instrumental in bringing to the characterisation of the male lead, Frank exerts an attraction, not in spite of the fact that he is a 'vulnerable loser', but because of it. The casting of the bullishly virile, yet boyishly charming, John Garfield as Frank opposite the genial, sedate and avuncular Cecil Kellaway as Nick serves to foreground Frank's youthful vigour, as well as his vulnerability.

Furthermore, in terms of the innovativeness of film noir, the subversive nature of Frank's relationship with Cora can also be seen as a departure from Hollywood convention. Harvey notes that the representation of marriage in film noir tends to involve 'routinised boredom and a sense of stifling entrapment'.[422] She discusses this trope in relation to Fritz Lang, but it is also seen to apply more generally to film noir, including *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. In Lang's *The Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street*, and also Siodmak's *Phantom Lady*, it is a middle class, professional male who is stifled by domesticity, and who is lured away from it by a dangerously seductive woman, customarily from a lower social class. *The Postman Always Rings Twice* involves a variation on this theme, given that Frank, a free-spirited hitchhiker, provides Cora with an opportunity to escape domestic drudgery.

Regarding Cora, she does not share Frank's values with regard to 'the road' and the freedom it seems to represent in either the film or the novel. Her notions of free will and individual

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[421] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, p.4.

[422] Sylvia Harvey, 'Woman's place: the absent family of film noir', in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. by E. Anna Kaplan, (London: British Film Institute, 1992; first Edition 1978; revised Edition 1980), p.29.

identity are linked intrinsically with social status, business success, and a degree of economic independence from men. A life 'on the road' represents a direct threat to her values and sense of identity which would undoubtedly involve a retrograde step in terms of her social status. In the novel, Cora says to Frank 'That road don't lead anywhere but to the hash house',[423] a line which appears as 'It's back to the hash house for me' in the adaptation – the film's one, passing reference to prostitution. In the novel, when Cora agrees to elope with Frank after the failed murder attempt – an endeavour which also ends in failure – she says 'Just you me and the road'.[424] Frank responds 'Just a couple of tramps', to which Cora adds 'Just a couple of gypsies, but we'll be together'. Thus, Frank is content to refer to himself as a 'tramp' whereas the term has negative connotations for Cora regarding sexual promiscuity. The conflict between their respective values ensures that Frank and Cora's brief excursion into the Californian countryside, as either 'tramps' or 'gypsies', is short-lived, and that the two lovers, as ever in Cain's novels and film noir adaptations of them, are headed inexorably towards disaster.

Although Cora is undeniably cruel towards Nick, and certainly calculating, in addition to her openness and honesty, she also demonstrates compassion towards Frank. She is not prepared for him to undertake the kind of menial work he has accepted hitherto, that is, to 'wear a smock with Service Auto Parts printed on the back',[425] a line appearing in the film as 'a smock with "Super Service" on it'. Her circumstances are so dire that she is willing to resort to murder to extricate herself and to become Frank's partner and the owner of the Twin Oaks. She tells Frank that 'I've made one mistake. And I've got to be a hell cat, just once, to fix it'.[426] Disabusing Frank of any notions he may have that she is a 'hell cat' (or indeed a 'tramp'), she insists 'I'm not what you think I am, Frank'.[427] Thus, far from representing Cora as a 'femme fatale' who exploits her male victim for financial gain, Cain shows her as a woman who is forced to confront an intractable problem: the seeming

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[423] Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, p.14.

[424] Ibid., p.27.

[425] Ibid., p.14.

[426] Ibid., p.14.

[427] Ibid., p.14.

impossibility of her self-fulfilment within the hegemonic order. For Cora, murdering Nick involves removing the main impediment to her self-fulfilment, which, in turn, can only be achieved through business success, social advancement, and a secure, loving relationship.

These character details are in clear conflict with the stereotype of the 'femme fatale', both in hard-boiled fiction and film noir. Taking Phyllis from *Double Indemnity* as an example, she does not even consummate her affair with the hapless Walter, who is lured into performing her bidding in the mistaken belief that they are a 'couple', despite the absence of any physical intimacy. Unlike Phyllis, Cora does not attempt to hide her motives for murdering her husband from Frank, with whom she is, on the contrary, perfectly open about her intentions. Cora also reveals compromising details of her former life to Frank, thereby placing her trust in him, whereas Walter finds out about Phyllis's previous exploits, involving the murder of the former Mrs Dietrichson and quite possibly several children too, from Lola. Phyllis is thus represented as a dissembler, a manipulator, a liar, a cheat, and a sexually promiscuous serial murderer, and therefore as an exemplar of the 'femme fatale'.

Perhaps the most telling fact of all regarding the characterisation of Cora in the novel and how this relates, both to her adapted character and to Phyllis in *Double Indemnity*, is that she did not know that Nick had taken out an accident policy.[428] Katz, Frank's lawyer, tells him that the District Attorney had manipulated him into confessing against Cora by suggesting that she had murdered Nick for the insurance money, when, in fact, Cora was not present when he renewed the policy. The payment which provides Cora with the funds to renovate the Twin Oaks is thus the unforeseen consequence of Nick's murder. Unlike Phyllis, Cora does not 'dupe' her lover into assisting her with the murder of her husband in order to collect against the policy. Interestingly, while there is no reference in the dialogue of the film to Cora having known about the policy, neither is there any indication to the contrary. This omission permits speculation on her moral character which serves to ally her surreptitiously with the 'femme fatale', particularly Phyllis, in the minds of the audience.

The MGM adaptation, as discussed in detail below, deviates significantly from the source novel by attempting to represent Cora as a 'femme fatale' in line with the emergent generic conventions of film noir. *Ossessione*, on the other hand, fully embraces the 'intractable

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[428] Ibid., p.77.

problem' of Giovanna's existence, foregrounding her lowly socio-economic status, and counterpointing it with hegemonic power, as embodied by Bragana and Don Remigio. As with the Cain text, the existential problem Giovanna faces is directly related to her dire socio-economic circumstances and her pathological desires. Additionally, it is firmly rooted in gender issues, namely, that in order 'to work and be something',[429] that is, to fully exist, a woman is seen to face different challenges to a man.

Having examined the modifications which took place during the adaptation process, the chapter next examines the way in which the film incorporates elements of generic practice first established in earlier 'Studio Expressionist' noirs such as *Double Indemnity*.



The opening scene contains some notable examples. When Nick welcomes Frank into the lunchroom and he takes a seat at the counter, he is framed by a 'criss cross' shadow pattern cast by a lattice window onto the wall behind him (*plate* 3). Seen to signify an impending encounter with fate, this visualisation of a major hard-boiled theme was fast becoming a component element of film noir. As noted in relation to *Double Indemnity*, where the device is deployed extensively, the shadow pattern is in the form of a sloping rhombus, angled downwards from left to right. The higher of the two sides is behind Frank, to the left of shot, and the lower behind Nick, to the right. The same lighting and compositional effects appear during later scenes: first, when Frank is hospitalised following Nick's murder and is confronted by Cora's lawyer Arthur Keats (Hume Cronyn) who asserts his authority by telling Frank repeatedly he is 'handling it' (*plate* 4); second, when Cora visits him in a courtroom cell, deriding Frank as a 'so-called man' for apparently 'double-crossing' her (*plate* 5).

In all three cases, the raised side of the rhombus is behind the more dominant character, signifying their authority. Thus, while the motif connotes Frank's entrapment and doomed

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[429] Ibid., p.14.

fate, the lopsided shape also provides a visual cue relating to the 'power dynamic' of the scene, functioning in a similar way to the 'venetian blind' effect in *Double Indemnity*. It also suggests a further reading. While Nick is a victim of a murderous young couple, Frank and Cora are themselves both vulnerable to and exploited by the American legal system, as represented by Kyle Sackett and the sinister figure of Arthur Keats.

The visual styling of the film is, thus, seen to be effective in conveying the sense of alienation and displacement which affects the main characters in both novel and film. These are, respectively, a free-spirited drifter, a high school beauty queen and failed starlet who married badly, and a struggling, Greek immigrant businessman. The 'window' motif can be interpreted in various ways. It can be seen to reflect 'the dynamism of modern life' during the interwar years and the existential issues which this involved in terms of 'dislocation, displacement, or migration from tradition or ancestral home'[430] as Fay and Nieland propose. However, it can also be seen to represent the influence of *Double Indemnity*, and the contribution of director Billy Wilder, cinematographer John Seitz, and art directors Hans Dreier and Hal Pereira to noir's emergent generic practice.

Janey Place also identifies the prevalent 'world view' of film noir as a cultural response to the specific conditions of modernity in a world where '[m]an has been uprooted from those values, beliefs and endeavours that offer him meaning and stability'.[431] As previously noted, officials such as Sackett, Keats and McConnell can be seen to represent the apparatuses of state, the 'intangible, social networks and systems' which characterise the modern era, and which, where the main characters are concerned 'powerfully determine the course of their lives more than their individual desires or actions'.[432] Gabriel Miller has argued that 'only once does Garnett's camera manage to present a graphic image of the impending doom that shadows his characters', referring to the scene where Cora and Frank murder Nick on the coastal highway, concluding that the 'ominous darkness' embodies 'the frightened, doubtful, and pessimistic mood of the forties'.[433] However, as the foregoing examples show,

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[430] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, p.5.

[431] Janey Place, 'Women in Film Noir', from *Women in Film Noir*, ed. by E. Anna Kaplan, p.41.

[432] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, p.6.

[433] G. Miller, *Screening the Novel* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Ltd., 1980), p.57.

the visual appearance of the film provides many cues which relate not merely to 'impending doom' but also to the underlying power dynamic, that is, between Frank, Cora, and Nick, and between Frank and Cora and the state.

The influence of *Double Indemnity* is also very much apparent in the representation of Cora Smith. The initial encounter between Frank and Cora takes place in the lunchroom. The first indication of Cora's presence, and sexual power, is a close-up of her lipstick rolling across the floor to where Frank is sitting, followed by a panning shot which ends by focussing upon Cora's bare legs (*plate* 6). Concerning the intertextual connections between *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity*, as discussed in Chapter Two, Phyllis also applies lipstick during her first meeting with Walter.[434]



As also discussed in relation to *Double Indemnity*, Place observes that the iconography of noir tends to involve 'cues of dark and immoral sensuality', for example, make-up, jewellery, and cigarettes, and 'a directed glance'[435] at parts of the female body, often 'an appreciative shot' of her legs. The opening scene of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is exemplary in this respect. The composition of the 'appreciative shot' of Cora's legs is also significant given that she is filmed against a background which includes a light oval rug with a dark fringe, and which, due to foreshortening, resembles the concentric circles on an archery target. Thus, the gaze of Frank and the spectator is quite literally 'targeted' on the 'femme fatale'. Frank picks up the lipstick and hands it back to Cora, whereupon she stands in the doorway and applies it in a seductive manner (*plate* 7).

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[434] Chapter Two, p.93.

[435] Place, 'Women in Film Noir', p.45; see Chapter Two, p.95.

In a later scene, after Frank has forcefully seized and kissed her, she calmly reapplies her lipstick, thereby reasserting her authority. Place proposes that Cora's lipstick can be seen to signify her 'unnatural phallic power'.[436] However, the various phallic symbols concerned, including the lipstick and, as discussed below, a cigarette, are signifiers of the 'power struggle' between Cora and Frank, rather than Cora's superiority. Indeed, one of the issues relating to the representation of the 'femme fatale' in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* vis-à-vis *Double Indemnity* is that Cora is not wholly successful in usurping male authority. While she succeeds in one respect, displacing Nick as the owner of the diner, she is, arguably, unable to assert her dominance over Frank. Phyllis, by contrast, is largely successful in her overthrow of the hegemonic order, that is, until she encounters her inevitable fate in the form of Barton Keyes.

To explore this point further, the 'cigarette' motif in the scene where Frank convinces Nick to purchase a new, neon sign for the Twin Oaks can be interpreted as a phallic symbol. Frank remarks of his success in persuading Nick that 'I could sell anything to anybody'. Cora, realising the sexual connotation of Frank's boast, replies scornfully 'That's what you think'. She then attempts to light a cigarette. She declines the offer of a light from Frank, but, when her own match fails, is obliged to accept Frank's assistance. The sequence can thus be seen to represent the struggle for 'phallic power' between Frank and Cora, that is, before their encounter with the American legal system diminishes and supplants their individual agency.

Although the signifying practices of noir objectify women, as discussed in relation to *Double Indemnity*, they are seen to make the 'sexually expressive woman … extremely powerful'.[437] However, MGM did not invest fully in the concept of the 'femme fatale' any more than they did in the notion of a 'hobo' who seduces another man's wife. This is observable in a number of ways, all of which conflict with – rather than conform to – the conventions of the 'femme fatale'. Besides Lana Turner's white wardrobe, connoting her 'purity', the use of conventional lighting, photography, and make-up is more in keeping with the traditions of MGM, with its reputation for 'glamour and glitz', than it is with film noir. Billy Wilder makes a telling observation about the respective female leads in his and Garnett's films,

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[436] Ibid., p.45.

[437] Ibid., p.36; see Chapter Two, p.95.

commenting that Lana Turner 'was made up to look glamorous instead of slightly tarnished the way we made up Barbara Stanwyck for *Double Indemnity*'.[438] A close-up of Turner during a scene following Nick's murder when the couple return to the diner, complete with telephoto lens, soft-focus 'glow', and backlighting, and with the actress 'made up to look glamorous' (*plate* 8), substantiates Wilder's argument.

As noted, Cain's novel is also seen to involve a critique of the capitalist system, another theme which was not easily accommodated within the Hollywood crime thriller during the PCA era. It represents the struggle of three American citizens from disparate ethnic backgrounds and with conflicting ideals to forge an existence during the Great Depression, a period of history 'which laid bare the effects of a fluctuating capitalist world market'.[439] Whereas Wilder and Visconti seized upon the subversive potential of Cain's fiction in order to engage in a critique of the capitalist system, this is not the case with the MGM film, which is seen to foreground the affair between Frank and Cora while underemphasising the social focus, both of the novel, but of a number of 'Studio Expressionist' noirs, too.

However, with regard to socio-economic context, certain details from the novel are retained, such as Cora's ambition to run the Twin Oaks, and, perhaps even more significantly, her efforts to involve Frank in the running of the business, effectively, to integrate him back into the capitalist system he has rejected. It is entirely in keeping with the representation of the 'femme fatale' for her to be materialistic, self-serving, and a social climber. Nonetheless, given Cora's desire to reintegrate Frank into mainstream life, the adapted version of her character appears as an intriguing hybrid of the 'femme fatale' and another film noir character type, categorised by Place as the 'nurturing woman'.[440] Place views the 'nurturing woman' as the 'opposite female archetype' of the 'femme fatale', given that she provides 'the possibility of integration for the alienated, lost man into the stable world of secure values, roles and identities'.[441] Regarding the character of Ann (Virginia

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[438] Billy Wilder, interview by Gene D. Phillips, *Literature/Film Quarterly* (winter 1976), in Chinen Biesen, *Blackout*, p.108.

[439] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, p.5.

[440] Place, 'Women in Film Noir', p.50.

[441] Ibid., p.50.

Huston) in *Out of the Past* (Tourneur, 1947), Spicer argues that she is an exemplar of the 'nurturer/homebuilder' in that she offers Jeff Bailey (Robert Mitchum) 'the promise of a stable world of faithfulness, loyalty, and loving security', identifying her as 'the antithesis of the femme fatale'.[442] The conflict which inheres in MGM's representation of Cora can thus be viewed in terms of an unwieldy 'hybrid', seen to draw upon two opposing stereotypes.



Unlike many films noirs of the 'Studio Expressionist' phase (although not *Double Indemnity*), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* contains a relatively high proportion of scenes shot on location. The most notable example involves the adulterous couple's elopement from the Twin Oaks. Cora agrees reluctantly to accompany the free-spirited Frank. However, it soon becomes apparent that she is ill-suited to a nomadic lifestyle. The scene involves a combination of studio and location shots. In the latter, Cora, sweating profusely in her white blouse and pencil skirt, high heels, and dyed hair appears to be utterly alienated from the natural environment, whereas 'hitchhiker' Frank seems very much at home (*plate* 9). Filmed in the full glare of the Californian sunlight, Turner's white outfit and peroxide-blonde hair seem to radiate a positively toxic glow. The fact that Cora has agreed, against her not inconsiderable will, to accompany Frank indicates the 'nurturing woman' aspect of her character. However, as Spicer argues, the 'nurturer/homebuilder' is associated with 'daylight, nature, and open spaces'.[443] The shots of Cora amidst the broiling heat and rugged countryside therefore invite the interpretation that she is a bona fide 'femme fatale', torn from her natural (or rather, 'unnatural') habitat of 'cheap dives' and 'shadowy doorways'.

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[442] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.91.

[443] Ibid., p.91.

It is also worthy of note that Lana Turner appears in her much-vaunted white outfits in each of the aforementioned scenes. Gabriel Miller argues that the 'hard whiteness' of Turner's wardrobe connotes 'the heat of the sun', furthermore, suggesting intertextual connections with Melville's *Moby Dick* and the 'whiteness of the whale' and that Cora's 'hot radiance seems to symbolize the mysterious, frightening, and irresistible nature of her evil influence'.[444] While she certainly exerts a powerful sexual attraction, in keeping with generic tropes, the film draws attention to the artificiality of Cora's sex appeal and the 'shadiness' of her character by associating her with interior rather than exterior spaces. If she emits a 'hot radiance', it is argued that it is an artificial light rather than 'the heat of the sun'.

There is also a sense, however, in which Turner's wardrobe jars with the generic practice of film noir and conforms to the standards, both aesthetic and moral, of 'classical' Hollywood that is, the 'white satin décor' of Cedric Gibbons and cautionary tales about 'the price of fornication'. From an MGM producer or screenwriter's vantage point, the white wardrobe was a means of indicating Cora's 'purity'. From a critical perspective, however, it provides evidence of a conflict between the production values and moral ethos of MGM and the generic practice of the bold new series that was becoming film noir.

The film also contains a memorable sequence in which Cora and Frank are lit by the neon 'Twin Oaks' sign flashing intermittently (*plate* 10). When Frank persuades the parsimonious Nick to purchase a new sign, his display of business acumen is also effective in convincing Cora that he would make a more suitable 'partner', that is, in both the domestic and professional sense of the word. Cora believes that the arrival of a more dynamic, younger man will help her to realise her life goals, that is, in terms of the business and the social mobility she craves, but also to extricate herself from a loveless marriage. However, the lighting effect achieved by a flashing neon sign is also a feature of the generic practice of film noir. For instance, in *Murder, My Sweet* (Dmytryk, 1944), when Phillip Marlowe (Dick Powell) first encounters Moose Malloy (Mike Mazurki), he is lit by a neon sign flashing on and off in the street outside.[445] There are further examples of the trope in hard-boiled fiction. For instance, in Cornell Woolrich's *Phantom Lady* when Scott Henderson approaches

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[444] Miller, *Screening the Novel*, p.59.

[445] Chapter Four, p.204.

the bar where he meets the eponymous heroine, the narrator observes 'He probably wouldn't have even noticed the place if the intermittent neon hadn't glowed on just then'.[446] The motif is thus seen to constitute a further exchange between the two modes. One might ask: surely the 'real' Los Angeles was full of neon signs, in which case, isn't a sign just a sign rather than a motif? However, the prevalence of such devices in both modes indicates that it is characteristic of popular culture's representation of the urban environment, that is, the merging of real cities with 'cities of the imagination'. It can be seen to represent the 'cheap' glamour of American motels, diners and nightclubs, alternatively, the duality and artificiality of the 'femme fatale', and furthermore, given that it is an 'intermittent glow', the way in which the protagonists are neither wholly good nor bad, but complex, and distinctly 'human', characters who submit to their baser instincts.

In addition to its place within the emerging generic practice of noir, the adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* can also be viewed in relation to the broader context of the Hollywood genre system, for example, in relation to the 'screwball comedy'. The narrative conventions of the two genres may appear to differ significantly, given, for instance, that comedy demands a happy ending. Despite these ostensible differences, however, the stereotypical representation of gender is remarkably similar. For instance, regarding RKO's *Bringing up Baby* (Hawks, 1938), which involves the pairing of the palaeontologist David Huxley (Cary Grant) and 'screwball heroine' Susan Vance (Katharine Hepburn), Richard Gollins observes that it pairs 'a conventionally repressed person' such as David with an 'apparently flea-brained but in fact instinctually shrewd' character such as Susan.[447] In the course of the narrative, Susan 'overturns various plans', among them David's intention to marry his equally repressed fiancée Alice Swallow (Virginia Walker), thereby enabling 'a future together, laced with impulsive vitality, sportive fun'.[448]

It is helpful to note how the 'screwball heroine' compares and contrasts with the 'femme fatale'. In terms of the differences between the two stereotypes, the 'screwball heroine'

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[446] C. Woolrich, *Phantom Lady* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982; first published Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1942), p.2.

[447] R. Gollin, *A Viewer's Guide to Film: Arts, Artifices, and Issues* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1992), p.127.

[448] Ibid., p.127.

brings the male hero love and self-fulfilment, while the 'femme fatale' destroys him. The former is physically active, or 'sporty', embodying a certain spontaneity and *joie de vivre*, whereas the latter is furtive, scheming, and duplicitous. David meets Susan on the golf course, whereas Walter and Frank meet Phyllis and Cora in the shady interiors of their respective suburban lairs. Regarding the similarities, however, both the 'screwball heroine' and 'femme fatale' throw the male hero's life into turmoil, occasioning a 'series of misadventures'. In both instances, they reunite their male counterparts with their instinctive desires, albeit with differing outcomes. Despite these superficial differences, they are both ciphers, projections of male desire, the one involving salvation, the other, destruction. In Freudian terms, the instinctive 'screwball heroine' and the predatorial 'femme fatale' may thus be seen to represent 'Eros', that is, sex, reproduction, and survival, and 'Thanatos', or the 'death drive', respectively.

In addition, the 'femme fatale' stereotype tends to occur in a binary pairing with the 'nurturer/homebuilder'. The 'screwball heroine' resembles closely the 'femme fatale' in this respect, given her binary opposition with a staid and conservative female, for example, Alice in *Bringing up Baby*. With her sombre wardrobe, short dark hair, and clipped and precise diction, Alice, like David, is overly serious, made all the more unforgivable due to her being a woman. Conversely, given that noir's 'nurturer/homebuilder' is the male hero's only chance of 'salvation', as exemplified by Ann in *Out of The Past* with whom Jeff seems happy and contented until his past catches up with him, she corresponds directly with the 'screwball heroine', seen to represent 'reproduction' and 'survival'. It would thus appear that Hollywood simply could not decide whether to sanctify or demonise women through varying forms of stereotypical representation. This may have been a contributory factor in the perplexing case of Cora Smith, where MGM settled on doing both.

In addition, the 'fractious-but-fun' relationship between David and Susan is indicative of the work of Hawks as well as the genre system in which it flourished. It is comparable with that of Harry Morgan (Humphrey Bogart) and Marie Browning (Lauren Bacall) in the romance thriller and proto-noir *To Have and Have Not* (1944), as well as of Philip Marlowe and Vivian Rutledge (also played by Bogart and Bacall) in the film noir *The Big Sleep* (1946), discussed in

detail in Chapter Four.[449] Whether Hawks was working within the generic conventions of screwball or noir, the male and female leads adopt adversarial roles in the initial stages of a romance before the inevitable consummation of their relationship. In addition, all three Hawks films can be seen as career vehicles for the hugely successful pairings of Grant and Hepburn, and Bogart and Bacall, respectively. Whether interpreted from the perspective of genre or auteur theory, or the Hollywood star and studio system, the male and female leads of *Bringing up Baby*, *To Have and Have Not*, and *The Big Sleep*, are all physically active, enterprising, self-reliant characters, worthy of success in their romantic as well as professional endeavours, with the lines between these two areas of activity being indistinct. There is a sense of camaraderie which makes certain Hawks films, including the noirish *The Big Sleep* resemble 'buddy' movies as much as they do romances.

That the success of the male and masculinised female leads, in love as well as money, was the norm in Hollywood films made during a period when the capitalist system was beset by catastrophe, and when masculinity was in crisis, is indicative of the gulf between genre films and 'real life', that is, between social and aesthetic norms. However, it is this very gulf which affords cinema-goers a sense of escapism, an essential part of the pleasure derived from watching genre cinema.

### *Ossessione* (Visconti, 1943)

Despite the fact that MGM had purchased the rights to Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in 1935,[450] it was nonetheless adapted in 1939 by Pierre Chenal as *Le Dernier Tournant*, and then in 1943 by Luchino Visconti as *Ossessione*. The latter is discussed here in order to foreground Visconti's vividly contrasting approach to Cain's source material.

Regarding the 'global travel'[451] of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Fay and Nieland propose that the fact that Cain's first novel had already been adapted, albeit illegally, in France and Italy before the MGM version was made is useful in providing an accurate picture of 'the phenomenon of film noir as heterogeneous, polyglot, and, indeed,

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[449] Chapter Four, p.220.

[450] Madden, *James Cain: Hard Boiled Myth Maker*, p. 136.

[451] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, p.2.

cosmopolitan'.[452] However, it also indicates the global relevance of the themes of Cain's work, in addition to situating film noir within an international context. Viewed in this way, hard-boiled authors such as Hammett, Cain, and Chandler are seen to be '"modern" experimentalists steeped in the highly innovative aesthetic cultures of early-twentieth century modernity'.[453]

The 1930s is seen as a 'period of crisis' for Modernism, when the formal experimentation of the 'high modernist' period came to be regarded as redundant in light of the 'dark and desperate realities of world-wide depression'.[454] This resulted in 'the convergence of Anglo-European Modernism' with 'a range of documentary, "realist" artistic practices'.[455] Both hard-boiled fiction and film noir are seen to be part of this pan-global cultural phenomenon, which, Fay and Nieland argue, involves 'the cosmopolitan visions of modernism becoming more realist … and various realisms imbued with a spirit of cosmopolitan innovation'.[456] *The Postman Always Rings Twice* exemplifies this phenomenon, given its social focus and innovative pared-back style, both of which can be attributed to the influence of Modernism, along with its realist roots in French and American Naturalism. Fay and Nieland also propose that, due to the Visconti adaptation, Cain's novel is 'at the heart of … Italian realism'.[457] Thus, hard-boiled fiction – especially Cain's unflinchingly realist version of it – is seen to be central to the formation, not merely of film noir, but also Italian Neorealism.

Hard-boiled fiction, being itself representative of the exchanges taking place during the interwar years, was ideally suited to adaptations which, likewise, combine 'Anglo-European Modernism' with '"realist" artistic practices'. This would apply equally to *Ossessione* and film noir. Cain's first novel can be regarded as a response to the conditions of modernity, such as 'displacement', 'migration', and the 'catastrophic effects of a fluctuating capitalist

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[452] Ibid., p.2.

[453] Ibid., p.2, p.115, n1.

[454] Ibid., p.3.

[455] Ibid., p.3.

[456] Ibid., p.3.

[457] Ibid., p.9.

world market'. Chenal and Visconti both adapted it, while Camus was directly influenced by it. In each case, the Europeans concerned were engaging with the work of an American author, and at the same time with ideas which had global significance.



The titles of *Ossessione* are superimposed over a continuous shot of the Italian countryside from the cab of a truck taking Gino towards a trattoria, where Giovanna and her husband, the trattoria owner, Giuseppe, await (*plate* 11). The sequence appears to reference the opening scene of Jean Renoir's French Poetic Relist adaptation of Zola's *La Bête Humaine* (1938),[458] filmed from a train as opposed to a truck, travelling at high speed from Paris to Le Havre (*plate* 12). It is noteworthy that these views belong to a truck driver and train engineer, respectively, providing realist detail both in respect of locations and working class occupations, situating the films immediately within a social and geographic context. The opening sequence of *Ossessione* is thus effective in establishing a sense of the 'real' Italy.

Visconti had worked with Renoir during the 1930s, the period of the Popular Front, serving as assistant director on *Partie de campagne* (1936), and also collaborating with him on *Les Bas-fond* (1936), and *La Tosca* (1939), when their partnership ended due to the outbreak of war.[459] Fay and Nieland observe that Visconti's time in France and his relationship with Renoir provided him with an introduction to realist cinema, but also 'an apprenticeship in the leftist politics of the Popular Front and in politically committed filmmaking'.[460] Indeed, it was Renoir who gave Visconti a French translation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and

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[458] Ibid., p.22.

[459] Ibid., p.23.

[460] Ibid., p.22.

suggested he adapt it.[461] *Ossessione* thus involves the interpretation of an American hard-boiled novel by an Italian film-maker subject to the influence of his French counterpart, and is therefore exemplary of the 'transnational cultural flows, and cross-cultural imaginings'[462] of the period. Regarding the cultural significance of the hard-boiled mode and its popularity amongst Italian readers during the interwar years, Fay and Nieland argue that this was a response to the isolationism and cultural conservatism of Mussolini's fascist state. Thus, to certain Italian readers, including the anti-fascist literary group known as the *Americanisti* due to the members' fondness for contemporary American fiction, marginal figures such as Frank Chambers were seen to offer 'a radical break from the fascist predilection for *übermenschen* and healthy middle-class family men'.[463]

Where Hollywood film-makers had to contend with the PCA, Visconti had to gain the approval of fascist censors before he could proceed with the adaptation of Cain's novel, with its representation of marginalised characters in a determinist world, and therefore, its subversive potential. According to Fay and Nieland, approval was granted because 'the foreignness of its source novel ... could be read, in fascist terms, as a sign of American decadence rather than an indictment of fascist Italy'.[464] However, the relocation from suburban Los Angeles to the fringes of Ferrara, and the 'recasting' of Frank, Cora, and Nick as Gino, Giovanna, and Giuseppe, ensured that it was the Italian, and not the American, system which became the focus of the socio-political critique. As Fay and Nieland observe, through the figure of Giuseppe Bragana, Visconti represents 'the fascist household as ruled by intertwined forms of economic and patriarchal exploitation'.[465]

It is interesting to consider here the influence of French Naturalism, particularly of Émile Zola, upon Cain, and that of French Poetic Realism on Visconti, especially given that Zola was the author both of *La Bête Humaine* and *Thérèse Raquin*, the novel which 'inspired' *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. The influence of realism in its various guises, as noted above,

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[461] Ibid., p.19.

[462] Ibid., p.2.

[463] Ibid., p.21.

[464] Ibid., p.23.

[465] Ibid., p.23.

is seen to account for the congruence, in terms of theme, style, and ideology, between *Ossessione* and Cain's novel. For example, unlike the aesthetically and ideologically transformed Frank in the MGM adaptation, Gino is a lowly figure, described by Bragana as a 'tramp', and therefore approximate to Cain's 'hobo'. Like Frank, he arrives on the back of a truck, in his case, following a stay in the Italian port of Trieste, whereas Frank is travelling from Tijuana. As previously mentioned, in the MGM film, Frank arrives at the Twin Oaks escorted by the District Attorney while hitchhiking from San Francisco to San Diego, thus safely contained, both within national borders and by the authority of the law. Many of the scenes in *Ossessione* are shot on location in Northern Italy in the countryside surrounding the River Po. Thus, *Ossessione* differs fundamentally from 'Studio Expressionist' films noirs such as MGM's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, where studio shooting predominated. This allows Visconti to counterpoint the destructiveness of the Gino-Giovanna relationship, associated with sultry interiors and particularly the trattoria, with the physical, emotional and psychological freedom of life 'on the road'.

While there are distinct differences between the Visconti and MGM adaptations, there are also, perhaps surprisingly, some similarities, too. When Gino dismounts from the truck and wanders into the trattoria, Visconti shoots him directly from behind. The mise-en-scene focuses attention upon Gino's dishevelled appearance, as well as the rustic interior of the trattoria and its clientele, mostly game hunters, but amongst them the catholic priest, Don Remigio. However, it also reserves the first view of Massimo Girotti's exceptionally handsome face for Giovanna, which, of course, she shares with the spectator. The drama, and indeed, eroticism, of the moment are intensified by a zoom-in to a close-up on Gino (*plate* 13). Gino has entered the kitchen without licence upon hearing Giovanna singing. As Nowell-Smith observes, this can be seen as an intertextual reference to Dante's Circe, who entices Ulysses, also a wanderer, with her singing.[466]

In relation to film noir, Spicer observes how male protagonists such as Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* and Frank Chambers in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* are beguiled by the 'femme fatale', also referencing the 'erotic display' of a 'modern Circe'.[467] When Gino first

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[466] G. Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), pp.21-22.

[467] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.91.

sees Giovanna, she is sitting on the edge of a table, applying nail varnish as her legs swing back and fore, thereby presenting a beguiling and seductive image, with the 'over the shoulder' shot associating the respective viewpoints of Gino and the spectator (*plate* 14). Notably, however, Gino's body is situated in front of Giovanna's, inhibiting rather than facilitating the spectator's view, with only Giovanna's legs and high-heeled shoes visible. Thus, the shot focuses upon, and eroticises, female body parts, in much the same way as film noir tends to do. Given that Giovanna is applying make-up, it also associates her with duplicity and masquerade, also allying her with noir's 'femme fatale'. The first encounter between the two lovers is also characterised by a visual strategy which partially obscures details of their appearance while tantalisingly revealing others – once again the obfuscation of detail in order to eroticise the representation of the female body is associated with noir.



There is, however, a significant difference in terms of Visconti's use of mise-en-scene, which eroticises both Giovanna and Gino by subjecting both to the 'male gaze'. The first shot of Giovanna's face is the briefest of close-ups as she looks up from painting her nails to see Gino entering the kitchen. Clara Calamai's theatrical 'double-take' is followed by a zoom-in which privileges the spectator with a lingering close-up of the beautiful Gino from Gina's point of view, resembling the soft-focus 'glamour' shot of Lana Turner in the MGM adaptation (*plate* 8). The eroticisation and fetishisation of the male body continues when Gino removes his shirt and Giovanna remarks he is 'built like a stallion'.

As previously noted, Gino and Giovanna consummate their relationship shortly after their first meeting. The Cain and Visconti texts are thus seen to be compatible in terms of the treatment of 'adult' themes. In addition, the Realist-inspired texts of both seem informed by a fatalistic determinism that views both men and women alike as lacking individual agency

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and prone to the vagaries of the respective socio-economic and political systems, that is, American capitalism and Italian fascism. By contrast, in the MGM adaptation the focus tends to be upon the 'pathological psyche' rather than the socio-economic circumstances of the characters. As is generally the case in film noir, the 'femme fatale' is held accountable for, and seen as representative of, society's ills, rather than their victim.

If anything, *Ossessione* gives additional emphasis to the social focus of the hard-boiled novel by representing the male and female characters as being equally powerless due to their lowly social status. Gino is a tramp, mistrusted by the locals, led by Bragana. The trattoria owner and ex-soldier, or *bersagliere*, is, in turn, closely associated with the catholic priest, Don Remigio. Indeed, the pairing of Bragana, referred to by Fay and Nieland as 'normative Italian masculinity in the sweaty flesh',[468] and the catholic priest can be seen in binary opposition to the adulterous couple, with the former as representatives of, and the latter exploited by, the Italian establishment and the hegemonic power of the catholic church and fascist state. In *Ossessione*, far from being immoral or tawdry, the affair between Gino and Giovanna can be seen as an act of insurrection by the marginalised and dispossessed couple against the repressive institutions of family, church, and state.

The binary structure, and sympathy for the adulterous couple, is exemplified by an extended point-of-view shot of some forty seconds duration, when Gino watches Bragana and Don Remigio cycle off towards Ferrara together, affording him and Giovanna the opportunity to consummate their illicit relationship. The deep focus photography, allied with the lengthy duration of the shot, shows Bragana and Don Remigio gradually disappearing from view. Meanwhile, Gino, who removed the distributor cap from Bragana's truck, prompting him to visit Ferrara to acquire a replacement, thereby engineering the opportunity to be alone with Giovanna, waits patiently for them to leave and for the last customer to exit the trattoria.

While waiting for Bragana to return, Giovanna explains to Gino that she married in order to extricate herself from dire, socio-economic circumstances. Just like Cora in the novel, she reveals she resorted to prostitution, a detail to which *Ossessione* makes direct reference, unlike the MGM adaptation. Indeed, the dialogue gives an indication that Gino himself might also have been involved with prostitution. During the conversation, Giovanna asks

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[468] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, p.24.

Gino 'Do you know what it means when men buy you a meal?' reprising Cora's line from the novel 'You know what I mean about them parties?' Gino replies 'Yes I know'. Giovanna continues 'You can't imagine what an old man is like', to which Gino responds 'I can imagine'. Whereas, ostensibly, Gino might simply be comforting Giovanna, there is a suggestion that his empathy with her situation runs deeper than he is willing to admit openly, and is based upon his own personal experience of male prostitution.



Indeed, the film contains a number of instances in which the mise-en-scene not only reinforces the 'alliance' between Gino and Giovanna, but also associates the disenfranchised wanderer with the female 'other'. The bedroom scene in question opens with a shot of Gino combing his hair, with Giovanna reflected in a bedside mirror to right of shot (*plate* 15). As discussed in relation to film noir, the reflected image connotes duplicity, in this instance, of the Circe-like Giovanna, who has beguiled the latter-day Ulysses, Gino. However, the shot of Gino's semi-naked torso also subjects him to the 'male gaze', thereby objectifying him. Furthermore, whereas previous scenes have accentuated Gino's dishevelled appearance, here Girotti's impressive musculature is emphasised to full erotic effect. Also worthy of note is the similarity between the respective poses of Gino and Giovanna, both with right arms raised and elbows outstretched, yet another visual cue seen to ally the two characters, not merely as lovers, but as social 'others'.

Once again, there are seen to be similarities between the representation of Gino and Giovanna and film noir, particularly the pairing of Walter and Phyllis in *Double Indemnity*, in the use of mirrors to signify duplicity and masquerade. However, in a subsequent shot, Visconti deploys the 'doubled image' for a radically different effect. After the lovers discuss the possibility of eloping, and Giovanna resigns herself to the fact that, due to economic

exigencies, she is condemned to stay with Bragana at the trattoria, she gazes into the wardrobe mirror (*plate* 16). Her pained expression indicates that she has realised, perhaps for the first time but almost certainly due to meeting the itinerant Gino, to what extent her freedom has been curtailed by her circumstances, both as a woman and a member of the working class. As Fay and Nieland note, Visconti represents her as 'Bragana's property – to be defended anxiously against the lurking threat of social unrest embodied by wanderers like Gino'.[469] The notion that Giovanna is represented as Bragana's property is connoted by the wardrobe door swinging open to reveal a rail containing her husband's clothes, followed by a slow dissolve to the 'owner', cycling home from Ferrara. Thus, the film suggests that, due to her financial dependence upon Bragana, her marriage, far from enabling her to escape prostitution – the view held by Cora in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* – is merely an ongoing form of it.

The feminisation and 'othering' of Gino is seen to occur throughout the film. After his abortive attempt at eloping with Giovanna, he meets a fellow traveller and street performer, the Spaniard (Elio Marcuzzo), whom, it is implied, might be a homosexual,[470] and who, Fay and Nieland propose, 'joins together all the promises of movement: liberty from the nation and its restrictive political and social realities, and homoerotic freedom'.[471] As mentioned in relation to the Gino-Giovanna relationship, *Ossessione* equates personal liberty with sexual freedom. However, as evidenced by the decline of the affair once the wanderer Gino is faced with a monogamous relationship and a 'conventional' life at the trattoria, it also suggests that domesticity is a form of incarceration, and perhaps an unacceptable bourgeois compromise.

If the affair between Giovanna and Gino can be seen as a subversive undermining of the fascist establishment, then the relationship between Gino and the Spaniard is doubly so, developing the themes of Cain's novel with regard to the 'twinned species' of Frank's libidinousness and wanderlust in the context of homosexuality. When the two take a room together in Ancona, the homoerotic subtext is foregrounded when Gino's suitcase opens

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[469] Ibid., p.24.

[470] Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti*, p.23.

[471] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, p.26.

and items of Giovanna's clothing, including underwear, shoes, and stockings, fall to the floor. When the Spaniard jokes that Gino is selling women's clothing, he becomes angry, prompting his friend to remark ambiguously 'Your face has changed'. The notion that Gino may be involved in a relationship with a woman, and that his 'homoerotic freedom' may therefore be constrained, prompts him to add 'I'm surprised you're mixed up in that'.

The equation of Gino's personal liberty with sexual freedom is again foregrounded when he abandons Giovanna and the trattoria, and embarks on a relationship with Anita in nearby Ferrara. When Gino pays a surprise visit to Anita's lodgings prior to the start of their affair, and is informed by her landlady that she is not in, he asks to be admitted, to which the landlady agrees. Gino casually inspects the interior of Anita's room, which contains pictures of her family, signifying the domesticity by which Gino is so repelled. He lingers in front of Anita's dressing table, where he applies her perfume to his hands and rubs it into his clothes. Having established a degree of independence from Giovanna, Gino appears to revel, not merely in the sensuality of the moment, but in the interstitial state between the end of one relationship and the start of another, and possibly between the masculine and feminine aspects of his identity. As with Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* and other film noir anti-heroes, he is a marginal character. Unlike Walter and his ilk, however, he is clearly gratified by the experience, and thus is seen to have more in common with Cain's 'hobo' than the socially marginal, yet psychologically tormented, figures of noir.

The work of both Visconti and Cain, as noted in Chapter Two, is seen to have associations with opera.[472] Nowell-Smith reflects that the narrative in *Ossessione* is similar to classical theatre and opera, given that it is characterised by 'a series of scenes involving two, or at most three people at a time',[473] with the formal structure of the narrative emerging from the development of the relationships between the pairings, or couples, involved. This is also true of Cain's work, of which *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is exemplary. However, the same can be seen to apply to *Double Indemnity*, *Mildred Pierce*, and *Serenade*, all of which derive their narrative structure and impetus from the conflicting relationships of several couples. Cora is married to the older, conservative Nick, but starts a relationship with the

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[472] Chapter Two, p.108.

[473] Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti*, p.25; see Chapter Two, p.108.

younger, free-spirited, but deeply-flawed Frank. Likewise, Mildred leaves the conservative (but also womanising) Bert, and meets the more dynamic, exciting, but nonetheless unscrupulous Monty. In terms of the relationship between Cain and Visconti, like *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Ossessione* can thus be seen as a marriage of contemporary realism with traditional narrative structure, resembling that of classical theatre and opera. *Ossessione* also involves an extended middle section filmed on location in Ancona at a singing contest, where the first contestant performs a song from *Carmen* – a point of interest considering Naremore's comment that Cain's protagonists 'behaved like lovers in *Carmen*'.[474] It should be recalled that Wilder's *Double Indemnity* also contains an opera scene overlooking the Hollywood Bowl. Considering that these scenes are all additions to the narrative of the films concerned, both adaptations are seen to draw upon Cain's body of work, rather than simply the source novel.

In summary, *Ossessione* not only engages with but also develops the controversial aspects of the novel. This is due to the congruence between Visconti's realism and Cain's Naturalist-inspired fiction. The protagonists are shown to be equally vulnerable in terms of their social status, irrespective of gender, and both prone to their desires, which have the potential to liberate, but ultimately end up destroying them. Here we have a sense of how Cain's novel could have been adapted in different circumstances in the United States. In *Ossessione*, the opposition of the adulterous couple with Bragana and Don Remigio enables Visconti to critique the fascist regime, whereas in the MGM adaptation, the church and state function so as to contain the couple's subversive energy.

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Chapter Four now considers 'the advent of noir style', bringing together the main points arising from the respective discussions of Weimar cinema, the establishment of noir's generic practice in *Double Indemnity*, and its development in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. It tests Stam's notion that the adaptation process is seen to involve 'an orchestration of discourses' resulting in a '"hybrid" construction mingling different media and discourses and collaborations'.[475] In anticipation of this discussion, among the discourses involved are

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[474] Naremore, *More Than Night*, p.83; see Chapter Two, pp.108-109.

[475] R. Stam, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, p.9.

directorial style, screenwriting, cinematography, the studio and genre systems, and compliance with PCA guidelines. The 'mingling of different media' involves, in the main, the relationship between the film and the source novel.

Where *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is concerned, while broadly speaking this is seen to involve the same discourses as earlier 'Studio Expressionist' noirs, the film-historical context is different. By 1946, studios such as MGM were responding to the success of films such as *Double Indemnity*[476] thereby consolidating the as yet nameless genre. In terms of the pertinent discourses, priorities are seen to be divided between making a film 'in the style' of *Double Indemnity* (genre), conformity with their own traditions (studio), and appeasement of the PCA (censorship). Paradoxically, Visconti was afforded relative freedom in terms of censorship due to *Ossessione* being passed off to fascist censors as an indictment of American 'decadence'. Once they had seen the film, the censors tried to ban it. Although they did not succeed, the director's cut was withdrawn, not because of its portrayal of 'un-Fascist image of Italian life'[477] but because the rights to the novel belonged to MGM.[478] Notwithstanding this, Garnett's film was successful in following where *Double Indemnity* had led and in contributing to the development of the genre which, three months after its release in May 1946, was first termed film noir.

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[476] Despite receiving seven nominations in the 1945 Academy Awards, *Double Indemnity* failed to win a single award. However, Paramount's *The Lost Weekend* (Wilder, 1945) won four awards the following year, including two for Billy Wilder; one for Best Director and another for Best Adapted Screenplay.

[477] Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti*, p.16.

[478] Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, p.28.

**Chapter Four**

The advent of noir style: 'Portraits and Doubles' and the 'femme fatale'

This Chapter examines the evolution of generic practice – the 'advent of noir style' – and to this purpose focuses in the main upon the tropes of 'Portraits and Doubles' and the 'femme fatale'. It involves the critical analysis of a number of films noirs, including *The Woman in the Window* (Lang, 1944), *Scarlet Street* (Lang, 1945), *Phantom Lady* (Siodmak, 1944), and *The Big Sleep* (Hawks, 1946). Proceeding from previous discussions of the Weimar influence on noir, it considers the impact of Lang and Siodmak on the 'Studio Expressionist' phase, and thus the convergence of generic practice with the directors' work. In addition, in order to broaden the frame of reference, the Chapter also examines several other films, namely the period crime drama *The Spiral Staircase* (Siodmak, 1945), and the noirs *The Killers* (Siodmak, 1946) and *Gilda* (Vidor, 1946). *The Spiral Staircase*, while not considered a film noir, shares many traits with the genre, such as the brooding, Weimar-inflected style, and the depiction of violent crime quite literally from the criminal's point of view.

The question that first comes to mind is how the discussion of the origins of noir's visual style relates to the primary topic of the thesis, namely the adaptation process. The basic argument is that the adaptation process needs to be understood as involving a number of determinants, what are referred to here as 'discourses'. In other words, the production of the adapted screenplay from a pre-existing text is one of several discourses, all of which are seen to affect the film in different ways, and to various degrees. The thesis argues that one must view each of the various discourses in the adaptation process in relation to each other. Besides providing a comprehensive overview of the process, this approach is useful in that it compels one to identify the individual discourses concerned, and how each is seen to affect the adaptation.

What does this mean in plain terms? In the studio-based, producer-led Hollywood of the 'Studio Expressionist' era, that is, the mid-1940s, a number of 'discourses' are seen to prevail. First, there is the involvement of the studio and the influence of production heads over content; second, the need to satisfy the criteria of 'the Code'. Indeed, where film noir is concerned, there is seen to be a dialectical relationship between these two 'discourses'. When the PCA moderated its stance towards the depiction of 'adult' content, this paved the way for more permissive films to be made. Nonetheless, the PCA still exerted considerable influence post-*Double Indemnity*, as did the values of 'classical' Hollywood, which, as discussed below in relation to *The Big Sleep* and *Gilda*, are seen to run counter to those of

noir. While the vying between the studios and the PCA, and between 'classical' Hollywood and the progressive new genre, were significant to the 'birth' of noir, other key 'discourses' are seen to originate from the production staff, including the directors discussed here, the modalities of the genre system, and the relationship between noir and hard-boiled fiction.

Notwithstanding the connections between film and other modes of popular culture, one of the premises that the thesis argues for is that the medium responds to its own traditions and conforms to its own conventions.[479] This Chapter explores the various ways in which this is seen to occur, and how this relates to the evolution of noir's generic practice. For example, the discussion of Lang's work considers the way in which Lang's *The Woman and the Window* and *Scarlet Street* are seen to provide a self-reflexive commentary on the production and reception of the cinematic image. Similarly, Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase* is seen to engage self-reflexively with the representation of cinematic violence. Furthermore, in *The Woman in the Window*, Lang is seen to reference directly a shot from his 1931 Weimar film *M*, while the characters and plot of Siodmak's 1944 film noir *Phantom Lady* are seen to bear a marked resemblance to those of his 1939 French film *Pièges*.

In this respect, this Chapter also examines the working methods of Howard Hawks, the director of *The Big Sleep*, and his screenwriting colleague, Jules Furthman. Much like Lang, Hawks and Furthman are seen to reference elements of former collaborations, including dialogue, shots, and occasionally entire scenes, in addition to a wealth of other cinematic sources. In light of such examples, cinema is seen, effectively, to 'adapt' itself, whether or not the screenplay concerned is based upon a pre-existing literary text. Taking *The Big Sleep* as a case in point, the 'pre-existing texts' are seen to be cinematic, for instance, the 1944 Hawks-directed Warner Brothers adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*, as well as literary, that is, the 1939 Chandler novel.

There is another important way in which cinema is seen to 'reference' itself – one particularly germane to this thesis, of which Hawks's work is exemplary. The innovative recombination of familiar motifs is, of course, an integral part of the Hollywood genre system. As noted in the Introduction, genres do not 'spring magically' from the minds of

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[479] Introduction, p.26.

production staff. Rather, they are assembled from pre-existing sources.[480] In addition to the referencing of former collaborative projects by members of production teams, and self-reflexive commentaries on the art of film-making, the Hollywood genre system itself bears testimony to the self-referential – indeed self-replicating – nature of commercial cinema.

In relation to this, the discussion of Columbia's 1946 film noir *Gilda* argues that, by 1946, generic practice was sufficiently mature for the film to involve a self-reflexive and ironic commentary on the conventions of the 'femme fatale'. However, the discussion of *Phantom Lady* argues that Siodmak's film, released in January 1944, also contains such a commentary, with secretary Carol Richman (Ella Raines) adopting the 'disguise' of the 'femme fatale' to obtain police evidence in order to exonerate her boss, Scott Henderson (Alan Curtis), of his wife's murder. The thesis considers the seeming paradox that *Phantom Lady* was released seven months prior to *Double Indemnity*, the film credited with establishing many aspects of generic practice, including the depiction of the 'femme fatale'. The thesis argues, however, that key elements of noir's generic practice, such as the 'femme fatale' and 'Portraits and Doubles', can be seen to be 'adapted' from pre-existing cinematic convention. It is proposed that while the self-reflexive commentary upon the 'femme fatale' in *Phantom Lady*, that is, upon one of noir's 'genre-defining' motifs, may seem paradoxical in light of the development of film noir, it only appears so when such elements of generic practice are viewed in isolation from the history of cinema, and from the workings of the Hollywood genre system.

This leads to one of the main arguments of the thesis. In that it situates the genre within a film-historical context, it is argued that these precursors of generic practice provide a compelling argument for film noir as an event in the history of cinema. Allied to this, ideas are seen to permeate between different media by means of porous boundaries and the infinite permutations of intertextual connections. The identification of pre-existing motifs, that is, of cinematic precedents, which, like the 'femme fatale', may be the product of the dialogic exchange between film and literature, thus facilitates a greater understanding of the way genres work. It is also argued, therefore, that by dispelling the sense of 'artificial

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[480] Introduction, p.15.

purity'[481] which, Vernet maintains, has surrounded the study of film noir, one can be seen to strengthen the case for, rather than against, the existence of the genre.

In order to extend the argument, the Chapter also explores a number of different types of intertextual relationship between the films and source texts. The discussion of Siodmak's *Phantom Lady* contains some examples where Woolrich's novel is seen to have a direct influence upon visual style, with the cinematography adhering closely to descriptions in the novel. *The Killers*, also directed by Siodmak, is based on a short story by Hemingway in which former boxer, Ole Andreson, is murdered by two contract killers, with no explanation given as to why he was slain. By contrast with *Phantom Lady*, however, Siodmak's film takes the ten-page story merely as the starting point for the narrative, involving the former exploits of the protagonist 'Swede' (Burt Lancaster). In addition, the discussion of *The Big Sleep* explores the way in which a thematic motif from the novel involving a 'knight', seen to represent the 'chivalry' of private eye Philip Marlowe, is interpreted in the film, which also features a 'knight' motif, that is, a recurring visual device involving equestrian statues.

Further, the Chapter also argues for the influence of Alfred Hitchcock upon noir through an analysis of *Rebecca* (1940), and with further reference to *The Lodger* (1927) and *Suspicion* (1941). While Hitchcock's work is not considered to be film noir, it is seen to share several key characteristics with the genre, including the use of 'Portraits and Doubles'. Occurrences span the British and American periods of his career, from *The Lodger* to his Hollywood features *Rebecca* and *Suspicion*. Orr has written persuasively on the distinction between Hitchcock's work and film noir.[482] It is not intended to dispute the distinction, or to argue that Hitchcock's suspense thrillers should be considered noir. However, it is argued that there are shared tropes, including the use of 'Portraits and Doubles' and the representation of gender identity. The Chapter suggests possible reasons for the resonance between Hitchcock's body of work and film noir, and explores the development of these aspects of his film-making in parallel with, and in relation to, the generic practice of noir.

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[481] Vernet, 'Film Noir on the Edge of Doom', p.14; see Introduction, p.28.

[482] J. Orr, *Hitchcock and Twentieth-Century Cinema* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), pp.154-164.

### *The Woman in the Window* (Lang, 1944)

The following analysis and discussion of Lang's *The Woman in the Window* focuses upon the use of the trope of 'Portraits and Doubles'. This develops an argument that the trope is seen to figure prominently in a number of films noirs, including Lang's own *Scarlet Street*, Siodmak's *Phantom Lady*, and Vidor's *Gilda*, and also in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* and *Suspicion*. In terms of the connotative meanings of the trope, the thesis concurs with the respective viewpoints of Durgnat and Hirsch that while the 'Portrait' can be seen to be 'the mirror of the split personality',[483] reflections, for instance, in windows and mirrors, 'suggest doubleness, self-division' and therefore relate to 'confusion of identity'.[484] Regarding the trope's origins, it is argued throughout the thesis that the practice is traceable to Weimar cinema and to films such as the 1924 UFA release *The Last Laugh*, directed by F.W. Murnau.

In *The Woman in the Window*, Alice Reed (Joan Bennett) watches psychology professor Richard Wanley (Edward G. Robinson) as he drives from her apartment block, the body of Alice's boyfriend Claude Mazard (Arthur Loft), whom the timid Wanley killed in self-defence, in the trunk of his car (*plate* 1). This shot corresponds with another from an earlier scene when Wanley sees Alice for the first time, looking at her portrait in a shop window and beholding the sitter's smiling face reflected next to the painting (*plate* 2). Spicer notes of Alice's appearance in this scene that she 'is dressed like the archetypal vamp with her dark hair, hat that frames her face in dark feathers and her black, sheath-like dress'.[485] As discussed below in relation to *Sunrise* and The Woman from the City, these conventions tend to involve fashionable clothes and hairstyles with a predominantly dark palette.

However, the representation of Alice Reed can be seen to involve another convention, that is, the use of 'Portraits and Doubles', a central thematic as well as stylistic element of the film, as referenced in the title. The scenes which follow the initial encounter between Alice and Wanley invite the spectator to speculate upon Alice's part in Mazard's killing, moreover,

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[483] Raymond Durgnat, 'Paint it Black: The Family Tree of Film Noir', in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. by Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996), p.47; see Chapter One: 'Weimar Cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir', p.72.

[484] F. Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir* (Cambridge, MA., DA Capo Press, 2001), p.89.

[485] A. Spicer, *Film Noir* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), p.123.

upon her morally ambiguous character. Not only has she invited Wanley, a stranger, back to her apartment, but she receives a visit there from Mazard, whom she sees several times a week but only ever in private. The implication is that Alice is a prostitute, with the outward 'show' of respectability thus concealing her 'double life'.

*The Woman in the Window* is therefore seen to contain a paradigmatic example of the trope, involving both 'Portraits' and 'Doubles'. Indeed, in the scene where Alice and Wanley meet, the process of 'doubling' is complex, to the extent that it can be seen to provide a self-reflexive commentary upon the various representational processes concerned. This involves Wanley's gaze alternating between a romanticised oil portrait of a beautiful woman in a gallery window, clad in a dark evening gown, and the reflection of the same woman, similarly dressed, whom it transpires is 'real' despite seeming to be an apparition, and who appears to be 'respectable' but who may be a prostitute. If the 'mise-en-abyme' were not sufficiently complex, then the use of a 'framing' device involves Wanley waking up at the end of the film to find that the so-called 'events' of the narrative were all part of a dream.



It would appear that the self-reflexive commentary is concerned both with the production and reception of the image. In terms of the former, the romanticised portrait, with its traditional subject matter, composition, and chiaroscuro lighting, is 'mirrored' by the cinematic image. This highlights the respective representational processes while simultaneously drawing parallels between them, that is, between painting and film-making. It is discussed below how Siodmak, who, like Lang and Hitchcock, had worked in the German film industry during the Weimar period, referred cinematographer Woody Bredell to the use of chiaroscuro in the work of Rembrandt. It seems, then, that during the 'Studio Expressionist' phase of noir, the film-makers of the period were not merely aware of the

parallels between the two representational processes, that is, film and visual art, but were incorporating this self-reflexive theme into the signifying practice of the films concerned.

Regarding the reception of the image, the painting of Alice hangs in an ornate frame in a salon in an affluent neighbourhood, with a gentleman's club nearby. Professor Wanley, a lecturer in psychology, is also 'doubled' with his reflection in the gallery window, seen to signify the latent homicidal tendencies concealed beneath his 'civilised' façade. The commentary would therefore seem to be focused upon the commoditisation of the plastic arts, specifically the female image, and the middle class valorisation of 'high culture'.

The fact that the 'beautiful woman' is also, in all likelihood, a prostitute, suggests art-historical precedents, such as *Olympia* (1863) by Édouard Manet, which shocked visitors to the Paris Salon in 1865 due to the implication that the nude subject was a prostitute. The painting and its reception are associated with the advent of Modernism, which, in turn, has links with Weimar cinema via the connections with German Expressionism. *The Woman in the Window* can be interpreted as a Modernist meditation upon art and its reception, in particular, its valorisation and consumption by the middle classes, especially given that this was a theme explored by Lang in *Scarlet Street*, discussed in further detail below.

The 'Portraits and Doubles' trope is found in Weimar cinema, for instance, in Murnau's *The Last Laugh*. As previously discussed, the film contains a scene where The Doorman (Emil Jannings), who loses his position but continues to attend work in his uniform, is exposed as a fraud when it emerges he has been demoted to toilet attendant.[486] The figure of The Doorman is framed by spotlights, imparting a sense of an actor in 'make-up' preparing for a performance (*plate* 3). As discussed, the 'doubled' image is seen to represent the 'divided' protagonist, that is, the public persona he feels obliged to maintain and the secret truth he tries to conceal. The device also serves to represent gender anxiety and the character's sense of diminished masculinity, due to his demotion and loss of social status.

Like Hawks, Lang also references his own work. In *The Woman in the Window*, the sequence where Wanley encounters, respectively, the portrait of Alice, her reflection, and the eponymous Woman in person, also includes a shot of the psychology professor staring into

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[486] Chapter One: 'Weimar Cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir', p.70.

the gallery window – or alternatively, given the use of the mise-en-abyme device, into the 'abyss' (*plate* 4). This appears to reference a shot from *M* (Lang, 1931) where serial child murderer Hans Beckert (Pete Lorre) looks into a shop window and espies another potential victim (*plate* 5). Filmed from the respective interiors looking into the street, the diminutive figures of Robinson and Lorre are superimposed with images of the gallery and shop displays, reflected on the inside of the window. Given that both sequences precede murder scenes, the physical similarity between Robinson and Lorre, and the continuity of theme and visual style, it is argued that Lang's film noir is seen to reference his Weimar crime thriller.







The Freudian element of Lang's work is of additional interest. It was noted in the Introduction how French critical reception and Hollywood production are seen to be subject to broad cultural trends, including Freudianism.[487] Considering that *The Woman in the Window*, one of the five wartime releases which led to the 'birth' of the genre, involves the story of a psychology professor's nightmare, this confirms that a preoccupation with Freudian psychoanalysis is an aspect both of the production and reception of this prominent film noir, and of American as well as French (and, indeed, German and Austrian) culture.

To expand upon this point, Wanley's club, which is frequented by doctors, academics, and the District Attorney Frank Lalor (Raymond Massey), is seen to be a veritable bastion of hegemonic values. Lalor, like Barton Keyes in *Double Indemnity*, provides the film with its moral centre, standing for reason, state power, and male authority. When Lalor tells Wanley

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[487] Introduction, p.9.

that the investigation is closing in on Mazard's killer, Lang and cinematographer Milton Krasner shoot him from a low angle, from the professor's point of view, with a table lamp in the foreground and an ornate clock on the mantelpiece behind him. The low angle, the lamp, and the clock are all seen to signify Lalor's male power and Wanley's intensifying castration anxiety. The 'lamp' motif in film noir, as in this instance, tends to represent the search for the truth. As discussed below, the trope also occurs in Siodmak's *The Killers*, suggesting links between the films of the two ex-Weimar personnel. The 'clock' motif, which recurs throughout *The Woman in the Window*, can be interpreted as a phallic symbol. The most notable example involves a large clock which presides over the shady goings-on outside Alice's apartment, an emblem of the conscious mind, and perhaps a *memento mori*, too, counterpointed with the dark, rain-soaked streets, which connote the unconscious drives which brought Wanley to Alice's apartment, and his irrational urge to cover up Mazard's death. In addition, Lalor, Mazard, and Mazard's bodyguard, ex-cop and blackmailer, Heidt (Dan Duryea), all appear at various points in the film wearing a straw boater. The repetition of the motif contributes to the film's hallucinatory quality, one might also say, an instance of the Freudian 'Uncanny'.

When Heidt is shot and killed by the police, afraid of being exposed by Heidt as Mazard's killer, Wanley takes an overdose, then gazes 'wanly' from a drug-induced stupor at photographs of his wife and children. The binary opposition of Alice and the Wanleys can be interpreted in gender and class terms, that is, as the family versus the 'femme fatale', and patrician versus proletarian values. The counterpointing of the 'femme fatale' with the middle-class family also occurs in *Double Indemnity* during the scene in Norton's office when Phyllis is shown juxtaposed with photographs of the insurance boss's children, suggesting further links between the work of Lang and Wilder.

However, as Wanley's 'final moments' are actually the 'closing scenes' of his nightmare, the framing device offers up a further interpretation. In *The Woman in the Window,* each character is, effectively, a 'double'. Alice is simultaneously a 'femme fatale', a psychology professor's fantasy, nurtured by anxiety and desire, and, given the self-reflexivity of the text, also a character in a film. The same is seen to apply to the other characters. In the final scene, when Wanley leaves the club, he encounters the 'real' Mazard and Heidt, namely Charlie the cloakroom attendant and Ted the doorman, whereby it transpires that the two

workers at the gentleman's club are 'doubled' with a homicidally jealous lover and a crooked ex-cop turned blackmailer in the dream. That Charlie and Ted are shown as a cloakroom attendant and a doorman may be a covert reference to the two occupations of the Emil Jannings character in *The Last Laugh*. This is open to conjecture. However, it is proposed that both characters and Alice are seen to represent the threat to middle-class, male authority in class and gender terms. On the basis of the framing of the narrative as a psychology professor's nightmare, the film can be interpreted as a critique of hegemonic values, which includes a self-reflexive commentary on Freudian psychoanalysis. As discussed below in relation to the 'proto-noir' *Suspicion*, the latter is also seen to be characteristic of the work of Hitchcock.

The critical analysis of *Scarlet Street* which follows suggests that Lang's next noir, released in 1945, involves a self-reflexive commentary upon bourgeois attitudes towards the production and reception of art. The discussion focuses upon the way in which this commentary is incorporated within the visual style of the film, including, once again, the use of 'Portraits and Doubles'.

### *Scarlet Street* (Lang, 1945)

The opening scene of the *Scarlet Street*, directed by Fritz Lang, produced by Fritz Lang Productions and adapted from the novel *La Chienne* by Georges de la Fouchardière, involves bank teller Christopher Cross (Edward G. Robinson) receiving an award for twenty-five years' loyal service from his employer, J.J. Hogarth (Russell Hicks). On the way home from the commemorative dinner, Chris saves Katharine 'Kitty' March (Joan Bennett) from a beating at the hands of her boyfriend Johnny Prince (Dan Duryea). When, in a later scene, the couple share a Rum Collins at Tiny's Bar below Kitty's Greenwich Village apartment, the timid Chris asks the husky-voiced 'femme fatale' what her occupation is, she states she is an actress, but, as she is unable to say in which play she is appearing, this seems a spurious claim. Kitty surmises Chris must be a painter, given that Greenwich Village is 'full of artists', a mistaken assumption with which Chris plays along.

In the preceding scene, Chris, who paints in his spare time, confesses two things to his friend Charles Pringle (Samuel S. Hinds): that he wonders what it would be like to be loved by a younger woman; and that he once dreamt he would be a famous painter. Thus, the meeting

with Kitty, a much younger woman who believes he is an artist, gives Chris an opportunity to fulfil both of his unrealised ambitions. As Spicer observes, Lang's early noirs 'use Freudian themes and concentrate on individual desire'.[488] As with *The Woman in the Window*, the narrative involves the enactment of a fantasy, a projection of unfulfilled desire, which plunges the mild-mannered, middle-aged, bourgeois male into an unfamiliar and menacing environment where his values are challenged, and where his identity is rendered unstable.

Hirsch argues that the work of directors such as Lang and Wilder, 'who began their careers during the heyday of German Expressionist film', tends to exhibit 'a cynical view of human nature; good characters in their films are often shown as weak, unknowing, and defenceless against a pervasive corruption'.[489] This is indeed the case in films such as *Double Indemnity*, *The Woman in the Window*, and *Scarlet Street*. However, besides exhibiting a 'cynical view of human nature', the film discussed here also involves an excoriating critique of middle class values, including a distinctly Modernist attack on bourgeois attitudes to art, arguably unrivalled in either film noir or hard-boiled fiction.

*Scarlet Street* counterpoints the two pairings of Kitty March and her fiancé Johnny Prince, and Chris and his wife Adele (Rosalind Ivan). The younger couple, Johnny and Kitty, are defined by their desire for material wealth and social status. Despite the fact that they are both jobless (or perhaps because of it), dialogue between them focuses on money, and various means of obtaining it. When Chris, the film's main protagonist and narrator, first encounters the young couple while walking home through rain-soaked streets late at night, a scenario typical of Lang and film noir, he sees Johnny administering a beating to Kitty.

While Johnny physically abuses Kitty, Adele subjects Chris to psychological cruelty, focusing in the main upon his lack of 'manliness', or traditional masculine traits. Chris is a bank teller, and therefore has a sedentary and 'unmanly' occupation. He is often shown in a domestic environment, wearing a pinafore apron and doing housework. This is seen to be a typical noir representation of married life. Harvey's comment that generic modalities involve

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[488] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.121.

[489] Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen*, p.115.

'routinised boredom and a sense of stifling entrapment'[490] is exemplified by *Scarlet Street*. Similarly, Porfirio observes of Lang's noirs how '[e]ven ostensibly happily married men ... become alienated from the comforts of home, usually for the sake of a beautiful woman'.[491]

While there are little in the way of 'comforts' in the family home, Chris's attempts to escape the 'stifling entrapment' of domesticity provide the film's main narrative arc. The morning after his meeting with Kitty, Chris receives a visit from Charlie Pringle. While the subservient Chris tidies the breakfast table, Charlie's attention is drawn to a large portrait which commands the room (*plate* 6). Chris confirms that it is a picture of his wife's former husband, Detective Sergeant Homer Higgins, who supposedly drowned in the East River trying to rescue a woman (although neither body was ever found). Homer thus embodies traditional masculine qualities, given his profession, physical attributes, and heroic bravery.



The scene shows Chris in a domesticated setting to which his mild-mannered character seems well-suited, but from which he wishes to escape into his fantasy of attractive young women, late-night drinking, and art. The use of a portrait as the third figure in a group of three is characteristic of the 'Portraits and Doubles' trope in noir. In the case of Chris, Charlie, and Homer, it is seen to signify 'otherness' and the instability of identity. In 'real life' Chris is dominated by his wife Adele and the 'real man' to whom she was once married, who appears to have died saving a woman, and who therefore represents the feminised Chris's

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[490] Sylvia Harvey, 'Woman's place: the absent family of film noir', in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. by E. Anna Kaplan (London: British Film Institute, 1992; first edition 1978; revised edition 1980), p.29.

[491] Robert Porfirio, 'No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the *film noir*', in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. by Alain Silver and James Ursini, p.86.

traditionally masculine 'other'. In his fantasy, Chris would abandon domesticity, walk out of Homer Higgins's shadow, and be loved by the woman whom he 'saved' from Johnny.

Regarding Kitty March, her flatmate Millie Ray (Margaret Lindsay) criticises her for leaving her job as a fashion model, which she blames on her affair with Johnny. During Kitty's conversation with Chris after he prevents Johnny from beating her up, when Chris asks her why she happened to be out so late, she claims to be an actress, returning home from work. However, 'actress' might well be a euphemism for prostitute, particularly as, in a later scene, Mille refers to Kitty as 'a working girl', and given also that the character in the novel upon whom Kitty is based, Lulu, is a prostitute. Kitty professes to love paintings. However, she talks about art purely in terms of its monetary worth, such as a Cezanne painting which she saw in a Fifth Avenue art gallery and which cost fifty thousand dollars. There is a binary opposition between Kitty, the ex-model, alleged actress, and 'working girl', and her flatmate, Millie Ray, who still has her career as a model, and who is industrious, judicious, thrifty, and morally upstanding. Millie can thus be seen as an example of the noir character type identified by Spicer as the 'girl next door',[492] a version of the 'nurturer/homebuilder' and counterpart to Kitty's 'femme fatale'.

However, the representation of character in *Scarlet Street*, whether stereotypical or otherwise, is closely connected with socio-economic status, as evidenced by the feckless and opportunistic Kitty and Johnny, and the hard-working and conscientious Millie Ray. Individual desire, as Spicer observes, is one of the main themes of Lang's early noirs. However, it is only Chris who is driven by sexual desire, and even then, the bitterly satirical tone of Lang's film makes his attraction to Kitty, identified correctly by Naremore as 'one of the most disturbing noir femmes fatales',[493] seem hopelessly misguided, and even darkly comic. Besides Chris, all the other main characters in *Scarlet Street* – and most of the minor ones – are driven by a desire for wealth and/or social status, including the only vaguely sympathetic character in the film, Millie Ray.

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[492] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.91.

[493] J. Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), p.279.

If *Scarlet Street* provides a critique of modern consumer society and its 'unblinking look at middle class life',[494] then the focus is perhaps most intense where Johnny Prince is concerned, a character referred to by Higham and Greenberg, not unreasonably, as 'one of Dan Duryea's stripe-suited pimps'.[495] Johnny is an opportunist, a gambler who plays at the 'crap' tables and squanders Kitty's money on drink. He also claims to have aspirations to be a businessman, telling Kitty that he needs four thousand dollars to go into partnership with 'the boys at the Acme Garage'. When Millie Ray visits Kitty's Greenwich Village apartment, which unbeknownst to her Chris pays for, she finds Johnny there. She remarks sarcastically that he must have 'made a killing in Wall Street'. The reference to Wall Street is significant. In the opening scene, Chris, a cashier at a New York banking institution, is presented with a gold watch commemorating twenty-five years of service by his boss, J.J. Hogarth. Pointed reference is thus made to his period of employment, which spans the years 1909-1934, and which therefore includes the Wall Street Crash of 1929, a reference which would appear to reinforce the film's indictment of capitalism.

Johnny also has aspirations to become an actor – a Hollywood 'tough guy'. This is due neither to artistic ambition nor talent, but to the huge salaries he imagines actors earn. As noted, Lang's noirs are characteristically self-reflexive, as typified by 'real' Hollywood tough-guy, Dan Duryea, being given this line of dialogue. When Kitty, who is devoted to Johnny, tells him that Chris, to whom she refers ironically as 'my hero' for having saved her from being beaten up, is a famous painter, Johnny pressurises Kitty to take advantage of Chris's infatuation in order to obtain money from him. It is arguable whether or not this is the starting point for a sequence of events which will result in both his and Kitty's deaths, as this might equally be attributable to Chris's misguided and ill-fated attraction to Kitty. It is certainly true, however that, in either case, desire is the root cause of the problem – Chris's for Kitty, and Kitty's and Johnny's for money. With regard to the connection between money and sex, further to Millie Ray's comments about Kitty being a 'working girl', when an affronted Kitty tells Johnny that Chris – by whom she is repelled – tried to kiss her, he reacts dispassionately. If the film implies Kitty is a prostitute, then Johnny, as noted by Higham and Greenberg, is a procurer, or 'pimp'.

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[494] Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, '*Noir* Cinema', in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. by Silver & Ursini, p.31.

[495] Ibid., p.31.

The representation of the relationship between Chris and Adele involves a satirical commentary, both upon materialism and the philistinism of a consumerist society. As with Kitty and Johnny, dialogue involving the two tends to focus on money matters. Their relationship is, in fact, based upon economic contingency, Adele having rented out a room in the apartment she used to share with her ex-husband Homer, rather than use the insurance bonds he bequeathed to her, to provide herself with an income. While Adele may assert her dominance over the submissive Chris, the dialogue between the two concerning the visual arts represents her philistinism and his knowledge of and genuine love for the subject. When Adele mocks Chris for copying postcards in his paintings, he responds that Utrillo used to do the same, thereby displaying his 'cultural credentials'. His knowledge of painting is the only area where Chris displays any authority, and the only means by which he might gain some respect, would the film allow. However, given that *Scarlet Street* also satirises bourgeois attitudes towards art, viewed by Kitty and Johnny in terms of its monetary worth and by Adele as a pointless and 'unmanly' pastime, his ability and knowledge merely earns him the resentment and derision of his wife, while presenting Kitty and Johnny with a means of exploiting him. Adele and Kitty both struggle with the idea of art, as they do with the pronunciation of artists' names, Kitty pronouncing 'Say-Zan' in a broad New York accent. The name of Chris's boss, Hogarth, is another tacit reference to the art world, that is, to the eighteenth century English painter and satirist William Hogarth.

The film contains a second shot featuring two characters and a painting. After Chris delivers a parcel of paintings to Kitty's apartment, Johnny and Kitty stare incredulously at Chris's expressionistic street scene with a snake coiled around a subway bridge (*plate* 7). The film's own cinematic representation of the New York City skyline appears in the background. This is seen to be indicative of the self-reflexive aspect of Lang's noirs, and a visual style which incorporates paintings within artfully composed static shots, 'frames within frames' which parallel and reinforce the themes of the film. The shot of Kitty and Johnny gazing at the painting, a modernistic rendering of the 'Temptation of Eve', echoes that of Chris and Charlie regarding the portrait of Homer. The repetition of the visual motif is thus seen to highlight the film's critique of petit-bourgeois attitudes towards art.

*Scarlet Street* has further precedents in two of the main cultural influences on noir, that is, French Poetic Realism and hard-boiled fiction, supporting Fay and Nieland's observation

that 'noir's artistic translations and appropriations extend across the Atlantic in both directions'.[496] The novel had been adapted previously by Jean Renoir as *La Chienne* ('The Bitch') (1931). This concerns the story of amateur painter Maurice Legrand (Michel Simon) and his romantic involvement with Lucienne 'Lulu' Pelletier (Janie Marèse), a prostitute who exploits the artist's naivety to sell his paintings under her own name. The Lang adaptation, including characters, narrative themes, and plot, can therefore be attributed to a variety of sources, including the novel, the previous adaptation, and therefore the work of Renoir, who, in turn, was a pre-eminent figure within French Poetic Realism. Interpreted in this way, *Scarlet Street* is seen to be a prime example of the 'transnational cultural flows' of film noir, having connections with both French and German cinema of the interwar years.

There is also a further link with hard-boiled fiction. The source novel is seen to involve tropes similar to those of the hard-boiled mode, such as the exploitation of the 'male victim' which recurs throughout the *Black Mask* stories of Dashiell Hammett. In 'The Tenth Clew' Creda and Madden Dexter hatch a plot to deprive Leopold Gantvoort, a wealthy, older man who falls in love with Creda, of his fortune. Again, in 'The Girl with the Silver Eyes', Jeanne Delano and Fag Kilcourse subject the poet Burke Pangburn and his wealthy brother-in-law, R.F. Axford to similar mistreatment. As previously noted, Hammett's criminal gangs tend to consist of a mix of class, race and gender, perhaps most notably in *The Maltese Falcon* (1929), with the female member of the 'crew' acting as a lure for male victims.[497] These males might be young bank clerks, as in 'The House on Turk Street', vain middle-aged men like Gantvoort, or romantic idealists like Pangburn. However, they are always vulnerable, and always able to provide the gang with access to large sums of money.

There is a marked similarity between these vulnerable males and the character of Chris Cross. Indeed, Chris is actually a combination of all three: a bank clerk, a vain middle-aged man, and a romantic idealist. Thus, the trope of the 'male victim' as it appears in *Scarlet Street* is traceable to cinematic influences, that is, Jean Renoir and French Poetic Realism, but also hard-boiled fiction, due to the similarity between elements of the mode and the source novel, *La Chienne*.

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[496] Fay and Nieland, 'Preface', in *Film Noir*, Routledge Film Guidebooks (London: Routledge, 2010), p.xi.

[497] Introduction, p.40.

In *Scarlet Street*, however, it is not simply the two lovers who are shown as exploiting the older man for financial gain, but the art world, too. When Johnny and Kitty are visited by art dealer and gallery owner, Dellarowe (Arthur Loft), and art critic David Janeway (Jess Barker), both seeking the artist responsible for the work, Johnny tells them that Kitty is the painter. In a conversation between Kitty and Janeway, Kitty repeats verbatim Chris's thoughts on painting. Janeway, who remarks upon his ability to distinguish the work of a man from that of a woman, attributes 'a masculine power' to paintings the 'actress' has convinced him are hers. Thus, the critic is also exposed as a fake. In this respect he is no different from most of the other characters in the film: Kitty, the failed model and alleged actress; Homer, who, it transpires, did not die heroically saving a woman from drowning but who eloped with her instead; Johnny, the swindler and bully who wants to be a 'tough-guy' in the movies; and Chris, the bourgeois bank-teller who wants to be a painter but who ends up being a 'dupe' and a murderer. In terms of the generic modalities of noir, the trope of 'mistaken identity' thus features prominently. As discussed below, this is also the case in *Phantom Lady* and a number of films directed by Hitchcock. In the case of *Scarlet Street*, however, it involves the characters mistaking themselves, as well as others, for someone else. The use of 'Portraits and Doubles' is an effective visual means of representing this theme.

**Alfred Hitchcock: *The Lodger* (1927); *Rebecca* (1940)**

The following involves an overview of the relationship of the work of Alfred Hitchcock to the generic practice of film noir. This begins with a discussion of *The Lodger* (1927), and leads onto a critical analysis of *Rebecca*, which focuses upon the use of 'Portraits and Doubles'.

As discussed below, the 'Portrait and Doubles' trope forms part of the signifying practice of Hitchcock's first Hollywood feature, released by Selznick Productions in 1940. The central thematic motifs of *Rebecca* are seen to be the overshadowing of the present by the past, the private by the public, and the worldly by the other-worldly. This is reflected in the visual style of the film which contains a variety of devices, including 'Portraits and Doubles', seen to signify these divisions and conflicts as they affect the lives of the main characters, Maxim De Winter (Laurence Olivier), his new wife, Mrs De Winter (Joan Fontaine), and their housekeeper, Mrs Danvers (Judith Anderson). The identity of each of these characters is rendered fragmented and unstable by the encroachment of the past upon the present, by

the intrusion of their public roles into their private lives, and the spectral presence of the former occupants of Manderley, including Max's recently deceased first wife, *Rebecca*.

Tom Ryall observes that the work of Hitchcock can be seen as a nexus for broad-ranging influences. These include the 'classical narration'[498] of early Hollywood, Soviet Montage, Weimar cinema, the early British documentary film, and the European 'art cinema' of the 1920s, for example, the films of the French Surrealist, René Clair. This discussion considers the notion that Hitchcock's films transmuted influence to film noir, and to the work of directors such as Wilder, who aspired to 'out-Hitchcock Hitchcock' with *Double Indemnity*. This influence is discernible in the semiotic practices of the genre, including some of the central motifs such as 'doubling' and the 'femme fatale'. However, as already discussed, this is also a prominent aspect of the work of Murnau and Lang. The intertextual connections may well be attributable to the time that Hitchcock spent working in Germany, for UFA in Berlin and the Emelka studio in Munich. With regard to the German influence upon Hitchcock's 1927 Gainsborough production *The Lodger*, which is loosely based on the story of Jack the Ripper, Ryall notes affinities with the work of Paul Leni, the director of *Waxwork* (1924), also based on the exploits of 'the Ripper' and which was screened at the London Film Society in 1925, which Hitchcock was known to attend.[499]

Additionally, Ryall observes that *The Lodger* displays 'links with documentary cinema in the opening sequence in which the various media of communication … are shown spreading to the public the news of the murder that occurs at the beginning of the film'.[500] The scene contains a shot of a newspaper delivery van with the two occupants in silhouette against the windscreen, filmed from behind through two, small aperture windows (*plate* 8). As Hitchcock imparted to Francois Truffaut, the shot is meant to suggest a face with the drivers' heads representing two eyes, which move as the van sways from side to side.[501]

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[498] T. Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), p.26.

[499] Ibid., p.25.

[500] Ibid., p.26.

[501] F. Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p.45.

This seemingly whimsical stylistic flourish is effective in conveying the underlying theme of media interest and the ensuing public clamour, the gossip and 'tittle-tattle'. This 'visual storytelling' suggests a connection with Weimar cinema and the *Kammerspielefilme* ('intimate filmed drama') which, Spoto notes, was a type of pure cinema that attempted 'to convey universal values without resorting to titles',[502] exemplified by *The Last Laugh*. Indeed, Hitchcock visited the set of *The Last Laugh* while he was in Berlin, working for UFA as art director on *The Blackguard* (Cutts, 1925), where Murnau escorted him around the gigantic studio complex and provided him with illuminating insights into the technical aspects of film-making, which appear to have been influential upon the young Englishman.

When 'The Lodger' (Ivor Novello) first arrives at the Bunting home, his presence is indicated by a shadow cast across the front door. This trope is characteristic of Weimar cinema, for instance, *Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens*, directed by Murnau and released in 1922. There is a further similarity between *The Lodger* and *Nosferatu*. When Mrs Bunting (Marie Ault) opens the door to 'The Lodger' (*plate* 9), the mise-en-scene appears to reference the shot from the Murnau film when Nosferatu/Graf Orlok (Max Schreck) first visits Hutter (Gustav von Vangenheim) in his bedroom (*plate* 10). The Lodger and Orlok are both shown just beyond the threshold of an archway, adopting an unusually erect posture. The liminal quality of both spaces is accentuated by the flooding of the adjoining area beyond the archway with a spotlight which 'shrouds' the Lodger and Orlok in opaque light. There is a sense here in which we are looking at the forerunner of the liminal spaces of noir, and the crossing of the threshold between good and evil as exemplified by *Double Indemnity*.[503]

When the 'mysterious stranger' reveals that he wishes to rent a room, he is invited into the house by 'The Landlady' who shows him to his room. This involves a further liminal space – the stairwell – which features prominently in Weimar cinema, the work of Hitchcock, and film noir. As Ryall notes, the 'staircase' motif is 'a key figure in German silent cinema',[504] for instance, in *The Last Laugh*, where it is seen to demarcate the private and public worlds of The Doorman. In *Nosferatu*, the liminal space is effective in separating the worldly from the

[502] D. Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: the life of Alfred Hitchcock* (London: Plexus, 1994), pp.66-68.

[503] Chapter Two, pp.101-102.

[504] Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, p.25.

other-worldly domain, the 'real' from the fantastic, and the lovers Hutter and Ellen (Greta Schröder) from the vampire, seen to represent the latent threat of the social 'other' to the family. There would, thus, appear to be thematic and stylistic similarities between these examples from Weimar cinema and the scene from *The Lodger* involving the arrival of the new tenant, and the perceived threat posed to the Buntings and the Daisy-Joe pairing.



The intrusion into the family home of a sinister presence is one that recurs throughout Hitchcock's work, for instance, in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) when Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten), the 'Merry Widow' serial killer, 'lodges' with the Newtons. However, Hitchcock tends to play capriciously upon the motif, as with Johnnie Aysgarth in *Suspicion*, and indeed, 'The Lodger'. While both are suspected of wrongdoing, the matter of their guilt is left open to question. Spoto points towards the influence of Weimar cinema upon this aspect of Hitchcock's work, and that the recurring thematic motif of 'security at home against outer social chaos' was characteristic of the German 'Street Film' and that the contrasting of 'the security of home life with the dangers outside'[505] became embedded in Hitchcock's narratives. In addition to 'non-espionage' films such as *The Lodger*, this is seen to provide thematic focus for the Gaumont-British spy thrillers *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935), and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). However, it is also characteristic of Universal's *Shadow of a Doubt*, thereby suggesting stylistic and thematic continuity between the director's work during his British and American periods.

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[505] Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius*, p.67.

In terms of how this relates to noir, the sinister and/or vampiric intruder is a central motif, often embodied by the 'femme fatale' who tends to lure a susceptible male away from 'stifling domesticity', and who is also seen to represent the threat of the 'other' to hegemonic values. The stiff and 'unnatural' body posture of Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* is reminiscent of the unusually rigid and upright posture of Schreck in *Nosferatu* and Novello in *The Lodger*.[506] This suggests connections between Weimar cinema, in this case early horror films such as *Nosferatu*, the Hitchcock suspense thriller, and film noir.

Indeed, *The Lodger* also contains an early example of the use of 'Portraits and Doubles' when the eponymous 'Lodger', while inspecting the room in the Bunting house, discovers that the walls are adorned with portraits of blonde women, the serial killer's victim type. The sequence contains a shot in which 'The Lodger' appears next to a mirror in which is reflected the portrait of a blonde woman. Thus, the use of both a 'Portrait' and a 'Double' provides a hint regarding the 'secret identity' of the Lodger, that is, that he and the serial murderer might be one and the same. However, in this instance the visual cue is intentionally misleading, an example of the Hitchcockian 'MacGuffin' or 'red herring'.

A further suggestion of a link between the work of Hitchcock and film noir occurs during the famous sequence in which 'The Lodger' is pacing the floor of his room, causing the light fitting in the room below, where Joe, Daisy and Mrs Bunting are gathered, to shake. A shot showing the three looking up at the ceiling is followed by a brief point-of-view shot of the light-fitting, which is then superimposed with an image of the pacing lodger, filmed from below, an effect which Ryall observes, was achieved by filming through a plate glass ceiling.[507] This is succeeded by a shot-reverse-shot sequence of the group of three still gazing upwards, and the image of 'The Lodger' as imagined by Joe, Daisy, and her mother. Observing that these are not point-of-view shots as such but that they 'represent mental impressions',[508] Ryall makes a comparison with the French Surrealist film *Entr'Acte* (1924) directed by René Clair, which, he argues, exhibits a similar preoccupation with the depiction

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[506] Chapter One, p.63; see also Chapter Two, p.96.

[507] T. Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, p.25.

[508] Ibid., p.25.

of the 'interior life of the mind'.[509] He contends that there is thus seen to be a 'visual stylistic association' between Hitchcock and 'the subjective and impressionist trends in film style coming from the French Surrealist and Dadaist film makers'.[510] Considering the connections between the Hitchcock and Surrealism, and considering also the cinematic precedents in his work seen to anticipate film noir, then this seems to add weight to the argument that Hollywood film-makers and the French critics such as Borde and Chaumeton and their Surrealist editor Duhamel were subject to the same broad cultural influences.[511]

Hitchcock informed Francois Truffaut that the 'pacing Lodger' sequence was a visual means of representing, not the 'mental image', but the sound of feet on floorboards, and that in his opinion this visual device would have been superfluous after the introduction of sound.[512] Whether the device was used in order to suggest the sound of footsteps, or to approximate the 'mental image' of 'The Lodger', it is, in either case, a means of representing the 'interior life of the mind', which, in turn, is a prominent characteristic of film noir. Films such as *Stranger on the Third Floor* (Ingster, 1940) and *Murder, My Sweet* (Dmytryk, 1944) involve the use of montage sequences to represent the 'mental impressions' of the narrator, that is, the respective nightmare visions and drug-induced hallucinations of Mike Ward (John McGuire) and Philip Marlowe (Dick Powell).

The discussion now turns to Hitchcock's *Rebecca*. When the newly-wed De Winters watch home movies of their honeymoon, their viewing is interrupted by a malfunctioning film projector. When it resumes, an argument ensues after Mrs De Winter mentions gossip about her husband's private life, causing Max to become agitated and upset. At this key point in the narrative, an instance of 'mirroring' occurs between the 'real' Max and his image in the home movie (*plate* 11). The camera is situated behind the film projector, facing the projection screen. To right of frame, the 'real' Maxim, his face illuminated by the chiaroscuro lighting cast by the projector, and partially silhouetted against the projection screen, appears disturbed and angry. Mrs de Winter is shown to the left of shot, all but

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[509] Ibid., p.25.

[510] Ibid., pp.25-26.

[511] Introduction, p.9.

[512] Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, pp.46-47.

obscured by the enveloping darkness. In the 'mirrored' – or literally 'projected' – image Maxim seems the very embodiment of a happily married man. The shot is seen to represent his inner and outer selves; one haunted by the past, the other, carefree and contented.





There are many examples of this trope in noir. This tends to involve a shot in which one of the figures is represented by either a reflection in a mirror or window, a shadow, an oil portrait, or, as with this example, a cinematic image. As with the scene from *Rebecca*, this often involves a group of three in which one of the figures is 'doubled' with another. In summary, the third figure, represented by the portrait and/or double, is either: also physically present (*The Woman in the Window*, *Rebecca*); absent and alive (*Suspicion*); absent and dead (*Phantom Lady*, *Rebecca*); or absent, presumed dead, but actually alive (*Laura* and *Scarlet Street*).

The splitting of Maxim's image signifies that he is both physically present yet also 'absent', that is, occupying a domestic role which he is struggling to fulfil due to the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of his first wife, Rebecca. His private torment is thus seen to conflict with his public persona, his 'fun-loving' other who is also 'the very image' of a devoted husband, as it were. Walker observes that the 'home movie' motif is effective in representing 'the contrast between the couple's happiness in the movie and the tension and unease between them in the present'.[513] The fact that the viewing is interrupted by a malfunctioning projector signifies Max's difficulty in performing his domestic role and to 'project' an image of happiness and contentment. The positioning of the camera behind the projector creates a 'mise-en-abyme' which draws attention to the representational process,

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[513] M. Walker, *Hitchcock's Motifs* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p.26.

and to the production and reception of the cinematic image. The ensuing dialogue appears to support this interpretation as Maxim voices his doubts as to whether he can be a companion for his new wife and confesses that 'happiness is something I know nothing about'. The self-reflexivity of Hitchcock's work is seen to ally it with that of Lang and Siodmak. Indeed, given that Hitchcock regularly made cameo appearances in his own films, his work is seen to be quite famously self-reflexive.

If the 'home movie' scene shows how Max is oppressed, not merely by his public persona but by the memory of Rebecca, then the same applies to his wife. This is apparent during a scene in the west wing, when housekeeper Danvers terrifies the incumbent Mrs De Winter by telling her she often hears her deceased predecessor, Rebecca, walking the corridors of the house. If Max seems metaphorically haunted by his past in the preceding scene, here Hitchcock applies another 'turn of the screw', as it were, by having Danvers suggest that Manderley is actually haunted. Having represented the divisions within the character of Max De Winter, the process continues as his wife is made to feel the 'presence' of the absent Rebecca, marginalising as well as terrifying her as the past encroaches upon the present. A subsequent bravura shot shows the interior of Rebecca's old room divided in two by a gauze curtain, a spotlight silhouetting Danvers and imparting an ethereal quality to the adjacent space (*plate* 12). The shot suggests a further division similar to that in the preceding scene involving Max and the movie projector. Here the mise-en-scene, in particular the lighting, signifies two opposing dimensions at Manderley; not just the past and present, but the worldly and other-worldly. Although Danvers is located on the 'worldly' side of the gauze curtain, she is gazing into the 'other worldly' space, in which, due to her obsession with the past, she is permanently marooned. Connections with the scenes from *Nosferatu* and *The Lodger* involving a similar demarcation of space are apparent.

Despite Mrs De Winter's efforts to assert her authority as 'the lady of the house', Danvers is undeterred in her bid to marginalise and torment her employer. As preparations are made for a costume ball, the housekeeper suggests to her current employer an outfit based upon a portrait of yet another former Mrs De Winter, Lady Caroline, who in this case is 'absent and dead' (*plate* 13). It transpires that Rebecca once wore the same costume. As with Max's 'othering' during the home movie scene, Danvers attempts to displace and alienate Mrs De Winter by 'doubling' her with Rebecca, who herself had assumed the identity of one of her

predecessors. It is not merely the burden of the past which oppresses Mrs De Winter, but the weight of tradition, with the identity of each successive heir overwritten by those of their predecessors. De Winter's initiation into the aristocracy thus involves the subsuming of her individual identity within her public role, her present within the traditions of the past.



As with *Suspicion* (discussed below), the spectator is invited to engage with a wife's doubts about her husband. Whereas Maxim turns out to be innocent of his wife's murder, one is never entirely sure of the intentions of the shady Johnnie Aysgarth in this respect. This suggests an affinity between the respective narrative strategies of Hitchcock and noir, as the spectator is drawn into an emotive, subjective, and irrational world of obsessive desire and distorted perception. Mrs Danvers's deranged obsession with Rebecca is also seen to prefigure *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), and Norman Bates's fixation with his deceased mother.

The climactic sequence where Danvers is killed in a house fire contains, effectively, a reverse of the corresponding shot from the 'west wing' scene when the housekeeper stares into the other-worldly space through the gauze curtain in Rebecca's old room (*plate* 12). Danvers is once again shown in silhouette, but against an 'infernal' blaze rather than 'ethereal' light, as her 'shrine' to Rebecca burns (*plate* 14). Forced to abandon her illusions of the past, and unable to exist in the present, the fire signifies the 'hellish' state of mind by which Danvers has already been consumed.

The work of Hitchcock also involves another aspect of 'Portraits and Doubles' with relevance to the themes and visual style of noir. John Orr argues that the success of Hitchcock's films is linked to the spectator's pleasure in 'perceiving how perception operates in imaginary

others', or in other words, a 'perceptual doubling'.[514] As *with The Woman in the Window*, this involves the spectator's identification with the protagonist's subjective point of view, including their misperception of events.

As Orr observes, Hitchcock's plots 'always take us to the crucial moment when customary ways of thinking and acting fall apart'.[515] He argues convincingly with regard to the influence of David Hume and Empiricist philosophy upon Hitchcock, and how his narratives tend to arise out of 'the vexed relations between sense-experience and knowledge'.[516] Regarding these 'vexed relations', Hitchcock is seen to draw 'on a culture of meaning which originates in the eighteenth century and which stresses the primacy of experience as the fragile basis for understanding'.[517] Thus, Hume's Empiricism is particularly relevant to the cinema of Hitchcock. In the traditions of the Weimar *kammerspiele*, his work seems to aspire towards a form of purely visual storytelling, in which the spectator participates quite directly in the various acts of perception, and in gaining knowledge based on 'sense-experience'.

In relation to film noir, this technique is also evident in Lang's *The Woman in the Window*, a film characterised by the 'vexed relations between sense experience and knowledge' and the 'perceptual doubling' of the spectator with the protagonist, given that Wanley and the audience are invited to speculate upon Alice's moral character of Alice, and given also that the 'events' of the narrative turn out to be a dream.

### *Gilda* (Vidor, 1946)

The following involves a brief analysis the 1946 Columbia release *Gilda*, which is seen to contain an ironic and self-reflexive commentary on the representational conventions of the 'femme fatale' and which also provides several examples of the use of 'Portraits and Doubles'. While this would appear to indicate that the signifying practice of film noir was sufficiently mature by 1946, that is, two years into the genre cycle, for such instances to occur, as the subsequent section dealing with the work of Robert Siodmak aims to show,

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[514] J. Orr, *Hitchcock and Twentieth-Century Cinema* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), p.27.

[515] Ibid., p.30.

[516] Ibid., p.27.

[517] Ibid., p.26.

*Phantom Lady* and *The Spiral Staircase*, released in 1944 and 1945, are also seen to provide a self-reflexive commentary, both upon the representation of the 'femme fatale' and the production and reception of cinematic violence, respectively.

As previously noted, the work of directors such as Lang, Hawks, Hitchcock and Siodmak runs in parallel, and intersects with, the Hollywood genre system. In some cases, the various discourses are seen to be conflicted. This is seen to be the case with *The Big Sleep*, which, as argued in the concluding section of the chapter, Hawks and Warner Brothers transformed into a love story, and which appears to have a greater affinity with *To Have and Have Not* and other collaborations between director and studio than with either film noir or hard-boiled fiction. In a similar vein, *Gilda* can be seen to adhere to 'classical' Hollywood convention, and to be representative of former Columbia projects with which executive producer Virginia Van Upp and female lead Rita Hayworth were involved, as well as to conform to the generic conventions of film noir, as discussed in further detail below.

*Gilda* involves the relationship, or *ménage à trois*, between the three main characters, Gilda (Rita Hayworth), her former lover Johnny Farrell (Glenn Ford), with whom she resumes her romance, and her current husband, Ballin Mundson (Charles Macready). Besides the Gilda-Johnny romance, and the homosexual undertones of the friendship between the two men, the film's sub-plot involves a tungsten cartel headed by Ballin. Given his implied Nazi background, *Gilda* is one of several noirs of the period involving Nazis who take refuge in Latin America, for example, *Cornered* (Dmytryk, 1945). In a scene where Ballin tells Johnny about the shady dealings with which he is involved, the two appear in front of a portrait of the cartel boss (*plate* 15). The portrait conceals a wall safe, for which Ballin gives Johnny the combination, thus taking him entirely into his confidence. Ballin's public persona as a 'respectable' businessman hides the fact that he is part of an 'international monopoly' trading in tungsten, just as his portrait conceals the safe which contains important documents regarding his covert business dealings. As noted, this public persona might also serve to conceal his homosexuality.

Another instance of doubling occurs in a scene involving Johnny, Ballin and Gilda, when Gilda returns to the Mundson home after a night of revelling, and when Johnny provides her with an alibi, telling Ballin that the two of them had been swimming. Gilda seizes upon the

opportunity to embarrass Johnny by insinuating that his use of the term 'swimming' is a sexual innuendo. The scene contains a shot of Johnny and Ballin gazing after Gilda as she makes a dramatic exit (*plate* 16). Johnny is lit by a spotlight from the right, which submerges the figure of Ballin in silhouette. As both figures are in three-quarter profile and looking in the same direction, this has the effect of making Ballin look like Johnny's shadow – or 'double'. The 'doubling' of Johnny and Ballin takes place after Johnny has referred to Gilda as Ballin's 'laundry', the insult prompting her to be more candid about her past association with Johnny, and to foster antagonism and rivalry between the two men. Thus, the shot provides a visual cue for Gilda's insinuation that Johnny is a rival or 'match' for Ballin.



The Marion Parsonnet screenplay, based on Joseph Eisinger's adaptation of E.A. Ellington's story, is studded with 'one-liners' which seem to summarise key aspects of the genre, such as Johnny's comparison between the transformative powers of the 'femme fatale' and a swordstick, thereby equating female sexuality with duplicity, predation, and death. Additionally, when Johnny finds out Ballin has married Gilda his voice-over narration includes the line 'You'd think a bell would have rung or, you'd think I'd have had some instinct of warning, but I didn't. I just walked right into it'. Thus, Johnny appears to voice the sentiments of every film noir hero from Mike Ward in *Stranger on the Third Floor* to Joe Gillis in *Sunset Boulevard*.

The 'knowingness' of the film is perhaps most apparent in the scene in which Gilda sings 'Put the Blame on Mame' to Uncle Pio (Steven Geray), the men's room attendant at the casino, who befriends Gilda but antagonises Johnny routinely. Uncle Pio serves a function similar to that of the Shakespearean fool in providing a self-reflexive commentary upon characters and plot. As Richard Dyer says, he 'is signalled throughout the film as the wise

man, down to earth, of the people' and who, unlike Johnny or Ballin, 'understands Gilda',[518] whereas Stokes identifies his 'phatic role'.[519] The ironic lyrics of the song, written especially for the film by Allan Roberts and Doris Fisher, in which Mame is held responsible for the Chicago Fire of 1871, the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, and the dance which 'slew McGrew' during the Yukon Gold Rush, also function self-reflexively, providing a critique of the 'femme fatale' and the way in which gender is represented in film noir. As Dyer says '[t]he song states the case against the way film noir characteristically constructs women'.[520] In terms of a Freudian interpretation, two of the film's central signifiers, Ballin's swordstick and Gilda's guitar, can be seen as phallic symbols. That they can be interpreted as signifying the latent homosexual relationship between two men and the 'phallic power' of a woman indicates the daring sexual ambiguity which pervades the text. However, the juxtaposition of the image of Gilda playing the guitar with the ironic song lyrics offsets and subverts the references to her 'femme fatale' status.

In certain respects, *Gilda* conforms to film noir convention, for example, its representation of sexuality – including, in this instance, thinly-veiled homoeroticism – and the use of the aforementioned tropes. In addition, director Vidor and cinematographer Rudolph Maté both worked in the German film industry during the Weimar period before their respective moves to Hollywood. Indeed, Maté worked with *Caligari* producer Erich Pommer on the Decla-Bioscop feature *Michael* (Dreyer, 1924). However, as discussed in relation to *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in Chapter Three and *The Big Sleep* below, in other respects, *Gilda* is seen to adhere to the production values of 'classical' Hollywood, and to conflict with noir's generic practice. Executive producer Virginia Van Upp, whom Lizzie Francke notes specialised in creating 'snappy roles'[521] for female performers, was instrumental in shaping Rita Hayworth's career, having been the screenplay writer on Columbia's *Cover Girl* (Vidor, 1944), the musical which established Hayworth as a major star, and which was also directed by Vidor. The musical *Cover Girl* and film noir *Gilda* can both be seen as career vehicles for

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[518] Richard Dyer, 'Resistance through charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*', in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. by Anna E. Kaplan, p.93.

[519] M. Stokes, *Gilda*, BFI Film Classics (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p.71.

[520] Dyer, 'Resistance through charisma', p.95.

[521] L. Francke, Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood (London: BFI, 1994), p63, in Stokes, Gilda, p.19.

Hayworth, as well as products of the 'classical' studio system, just as *The Big Sleep* was a vehicle for Bogart and Bacall in the Warner Brothers tradition. The film's glamorous images of Hayworth, backlit by Maté, where it appears as if the sexually adventurous Gilda has 'a halo around her hair'[522] (*plate* 17), are much in keeping with these practices. Indeed, the tensions between noir convention and Hollywood tradition seem reminiscent of MGM's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, where, as noted by Wilder, Lana Turner 'was made up to look glamorous', as opposed to the 'slightly tarnished'[523] look of Barbara Stanwyck as Phyllis Dietrichson, Paramount's genre-defining 'femme fatale'.

The following involves an overview of the work of Robert Siodmak. The analysis of *The Spiral Staircase* focuses on a self-reflexive commentary on the representation of cinematic violence, and how this relates to the 'Studio Expressionist' noir. The analysis of *The Killers* explores the film's respective relationships with the Hemingway short story upon which it is based, as well as with other stories in the 'Men Without Women' collection, while arguing that the character of Swede is seen to be 'condensed' from a number of physically imposing yet vulnerable males in hard-boiled fiction. Finally, the analysis of *Phantom Lady* examines various aspects of Siodmak's pivotal noir, including its contribution to the establishment of generic practice, and the aforementioned anomaly regarding a self-reflexive commentary on the 'femme fatale'. The discussion develops the argument that noir's generic practice is seen to be assembled from pre-existing tropes, while also focusing on the various discourses of the adaptation process, including a number of cinematic precedents as well as the relationship with Woolrich's hard-boiled source novel.

**Robert Siodmak: *The Spiral Staircase* (1946); *The Killers* (1946)**

The opening credits of the 1946 RKO/Vanguard Films period crime drama[524] *The Spiral Staircase* are superimposed over an overhead, wide-angle shot of the 'mute heroine',[525] Helen (Dorothy McGuire), descending a spiral staircase in a thunder storm. As noted above,

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[522] Dyer, 'Resistance through charisma', p.20.

[523] Billy Wilder, interview by Gene D. Phillips, *Literature/Film Quarterly* (winter 1976), in Chinen Biesen, *Blackout*, p.108; see Chapter Three, p.149.

[524] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.116; see Introduction, p.28.

[525] Ibid., p.116.

the representation of such liminal spaces is traceable to Weimar cinema. Spicer notes of Siodmak's early career that he was 'one of a number of Jewish film-makers who fled from Nazi persecution, working in Paris from 1933 until his move to Hollywood when France was occupied in 1940'.[526] In addition, cinematographer Nicholas Musuraca had worked on Val Lewton's 'B' Unit at RKO.[527] The Unit is seen to have had an influence on the visual style of film noir, for instance, the use of 'low key' lighting and extreme camera angles, as exemplified by opening sequence of *The Spiral Staircase*.

This vertiginous shot can be interpreted in various ways. As the narrative involves the murder of several young women, it is seen to signify Helen's 'descent' into intrigue and danger. In addition, as discussed below, the film contains intertextual references to early cinema, for instance, the work of D.W. Griffith. The 'descent' can therefore be seen to signify this self-reflexive element, with the visual style deploying a 'mise-en-abyme' device, by means of which the film is seen to explore the production and reception of the cinematic image, particularly the depiction of violence.

The next scene takes place in the Village Hotel where the main protagonist, Helen, is part of the audience watching a screening of a silent film, billed as *The Kiss*, but which is composed of actual footage from D.W. Griffith's *The Sands of Dee* (1912). As discussed below, the intertextual reference is significant, given that Griffith's film involves the death of a young woman. After a shot-reverse shot sequence of Helen watching the film, a crane shot sweeps upwards from a close-up of Helen to the interior of a hotel bedroom, where a woman with a pronounced limp is getting dressed. A shot-reverse-shot sequence shows the respective viewpoints of the woman looking into, and a concealed man looking out of, a wardrobe. A zoom-in to an extreme close-up of the eyeball of the man, whom it transpires is a serial killer, is then superimposed with a reverse, 'fish-eye' shot of the woman dressing. The image of the woman in the bedroom is moulded to the contours of the image of the eyeball with which it is merged (*plate* 18).

The distorted point of view shot can be interpreted as signifying the killer's disturbed state of mind, and is thus an exemplar of the 'hyper-reality' one associates with Weimar cinema.

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[526] Ibid., pp.112-113.

[527] Chapter One, p.71.

The shadows twisting menacingly on the far wall reprise the shot of the spiral staircase in the opening credits, while recalling the visual style of Weimar films from *Caligari* onwards. The woman is attacked as she puts on her dress. The camera remains with the assailant's point of view, focusing on the woman's arms as they contort grotesquely into a cross during the attack (*plate* 19). Spicer notes the 'choreographic expression'[528] which gives Dorothy McGuire's performance a balletic quality, reminiscent of silent cinema, but also the expressionist acting style of Weimar cinema. As *The Sands of Dee* reaches its denouement, which involves the female protagonist's death by drowning, a crash from upstairs is heard in the makeshift cinema below. In the next scene, a policeman announces that a woman has been murdered, the latest victim in a spate of killings targeting physically impaired women.



The two scenes, one involving a woman watching a film in which the female protagonist dies, the other, a man watching a woman he intends to murder, are skilfully intercut. By juxtaposing the two films, a framing effect occurs. The spectator is distanced from the action taking place via the use of the 'mise-en-abyme' device. Attention is drawn to the representational process, moreover, to the production and reception of images involving violent death. In addition, the murder is represented in a stylised and 'choreographed' manner, reminiscent of silent film, further accentuating the self-reflexive element, and foregrounding the perceived commentary upon the representation of violence.

One of the central points of interest in respect of Siodmak's adaptation of the Hemingway short story 'The Killers', which appears amongst thirteen other brief 'vignettes' in the collection *Men Without Women* (1928), is that only the film's opening sequence is, in the

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[528] Spicer, *Film Noir,* p.116.

strict sense, 'adapted' from the ten-page source text.[529] This involves Ole 'Swede' Anderson being informed by Nick Adams (Phil Brown) that two 'hit-men', Max (William Conrad) and Al (Charles McGraw) are on their way to kill him. Rather than escaping, Swede, apparently resigned to his fate, awaits the arrival of the two killers. The plot of the film, however, concerns the 'missing' story of Anderson's former exploits, and the reason why he did not heed Nick's warning and escape. This, in turn, concerns his involvement with the criminal underworld in the form of gang boss, Big Jim Colfax, and the 'femme fatale' Kitty Collins (Ava Gardner), and is thus the envisioning of the details of the story, omitted from the Hemingway text, by screenwriters Anthony Veiller, John Huston, and Richard Brooks, and their interpretation by director Siodmak and the rest of the production team.

The Siodmak adaptation of the Hemingway short story is of interest in terms of the broader issues of adaptation theory. As noted, most of the material, including characterisation, plot, and the analeptic narrative device, has been added rather than strictly 'adapted'. The direct relationship between the film and short story ends when Nick exits Swede's room, this being the last scene which appears in both the short story and the film. However, additions to the source text comprise an integral part of the adaptation process. Of further interest is the way in which the screenplay appears to reference other stories in the Hemingway collection. Stam argues that 'a comparative narratology of adaptation also examines the ways in which adaptations add, eliminate, or condense characters'.[530] *The Killers* provides an excellent example of this process as it is seen to draw upon the themes of the collection as a whole, to reference dialogue from other short stories, and also to 'condense' aspects of various Hemingway protagonists in the character of Swede.

While most of the vignettes are remarkably brief, the collection also features two longer stories, 'The Undefeated' and 'Fifty Grand', which concern the exploits of two sportsmen: the bullfighter, Manuel 'Manolo' Garcia, and the boxer, Jack Brennan. There are connections between the themes and characters of the two main stories, given that both Manolo and

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[529] *The Killers* is also analysed in my undergraduate dissertation 'To Have or Have Not: The Hemingway-Hollywood Intertext', pp.22-30. The idea that the adaptation references Hemingway's collection as a whole was explored briefly, but is expanded upon significantly here. This also applies to the critical analysis, which is seen to form the basis of the analysis here, but which has been expanded upon and incorporated within the theoretical arguments of this thesis.

[530] Stam, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Film*, p.34.

Jack are veterans preparing for sporting encounters which will test their courage and, certainly in the bullfighter's case, endanger their lives. The themes of heroism and, conversely, the diminishing of male potency and phallic power, are thus common to both texts, which also involves world-worn and 'ring weary' veterans considering the implications of 'one last fight'. The phallic power of both ageing 'gladiators' is symbolised by the bullfighter's *coleta*, or pony tail, whereas the diminishing of male potency is encapsulated in a comment made by the picador, Zurito, who tries to persuade the matador not to fight, entreating 'Why don't you cut off your coleta, Manolo?'[531]

These connections impart a sense of thematic unity to the collection as a whole. In addition, Jack Brennan is missing his wife while training for the fight, thereby indicating another of the main themes, as indicated by the title *Men Without Women*. Several of the other stories, namely 'In Another Country' and 'Hills Like White Elephants' featuring respectively a recently-widowed major in the Italian army and a couple considering an illegal abortion, are also seen to involve the absence, or aftermath, of romantic love. This is also a central theme of Hemingway's first two novels, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), which concern the 'doomed affairs' of Jake Barnes and Lady Brett Ashley, and Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley, with the former being set in Pamplona during the 'bull run' and thus also involving the 'bullfighting' theme.

In terms of the adaptation process, then, the screenwriters are seen to draw upon the themes of the collection and the work of Hemingway as a whole, and to 'condense' aspects of characterisation, including those of veteran sportsmen, Brennan and Garcia, in the main protagonist, ex-boxer and 'male victim' of the 'femme fatale', Swede. The screenplay is also seen to reference dialogue from the collection as a whole. In the dressing room after Swede's last fight, when manager Packy Robinson says 'I don't like wakes' he appears to reprise a line from 'Fifty Grand' when Brennan says 'I never like to go to these wakes'.[532] There are, thus, parallels between this aspect of the adaptation and the way in which the Warner Brothers screenplay writers who worked on *Mildred Pierce* (Curtiz, 1945) are seen

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[531] E. Hemingway, 'The Undefeated', in *Men Without Women* (London: Arrow Books, 2004), p.9.

[532] Hemingway, 'Fifty Grand', in *Men Without Women*, p.73.

to draw upon Cain's body of work as well as the source novel itself, and how this involves a form of 'shorthand' which both caters to, but also regulates, audience expectation.

There are also resonances between the physically imposing but emotionally vulnerable Swede and other characters from hard-boiled fiction, which broadens the intertextual frame of reference still further. One of the main characters of Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* is Moose Malloy, recently released from prison after serving eight years for robbing the Great Bend Bank, and who is described as 'not more than six feet five inches tall and not wider than a beer truck'.[533] Additionally, there are marked similarities between Malloy and Babe McCloor, another armed robber who appears in Hammett's short story 'Fly Paper' (1929). McCloor is described as 'two hundred and fifty pounds of hard Scotch-Irish-Indian bone and muscle' who had recently completed 'a fifteen-year hitch in Leavenworth' for robbing 'most of the smaller post offices between New Orleans and Omaha'.[534]

While both characters appear to be the very embodiment of traditional masculinity, they are both 'undone', as it were, by romantic love, with McCloor falling for Sue Hambleton and Malloy for the 'femme fatale' Velma Valento. It transpires that Swede also spent a term in jail after refusing to provide evidence which would have incriminated Kitty Collins. Thus, there appear to be intertextual connections between McCloor, Malloy, and Swede. This indicates that the latter, the main protagonist of *The Killers*, has been 'condensed' from a variety of sources, ranging from examples of Hemingway's literary Modernism to the hard-boiled fiction upon which his work is seen to exert an influence.

In keeping with Hollywood convention, the film contains a scene in which the female lead, Ava Gardner, performs a song, in this case, 'The More I Know of Love'. The song was written by the film's musical director, Miklós Rózsa, who also worked on *Double Indemnity*, with lyrics by Jack Brooks. As with a similar instance in *To Have and Have Not* where Lauren Bacall sings 'Am I Blue', the performance of the song merges with the narrative of the film as Swede falls under Kitty's spell. The characters' gaze can be tracked back and fore along the diagonal configuration of the shot, with Swede's girlfriend, 'girl next door' Lily Lubinsky

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[533] R. Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely* (London: Penguin, 2005), p.1.

[534] D. Hammett, 'Fly Paper', in *The Big Knockover* (London: Penguin, 1969), p.56.

(Virginia Christine), looking disapprovingly at Swede, who, in turn, is looking longingly at Kitty (*plate* 20). A self-reflexive 'show within a show', the self-aware 'performer' looks out of the frame, conscious she is the focus of attention, that is, of the characters within the diegesis, and the movie-going public. Thus, the black-clad 'femme fatale' becomes the object both for disapproval and desire. The thesis shares Ian Jarvie's view that this is indicative of 'a culture in which Puritanism and the demand for license go hand-in-hand'.[535]



During her interview with insurance investigator Jim Reardon (Edmund O'Brien), the 'femme fatale' appears 'disguised' as a 'respectable wife and mother' (*plate* 21). The presence of the candle connotes that this is an interrogation rather than an interview, with Kitty's moral code under scrutiny. As is seen to be characteristic of the work of Siodmak, and as evidenced by a similar treatment of Carol Richman in *Phantom Lady*, there is a self-reflexive element in the visual means of representing gender. In addition, the fact that Kitty is interrogated by an insurance investigator suggests intertextual links with the work of James M. Cain, and by association, the adaptation of *Double Indemnity*.

### *Phantom Lady* (Siodmak, 1944)

Discussing the 1944 adaptation of *Phantom Lady*, directed by Siodmak for Universal, and adapted from the hard-boiled novel by Cornell Woolrich, Elsaesser notes the influence of the source text upon the visual style of the film, observing how Woolrich 'meticulously

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[535] Ian Jarvie, 'Knowledge, Morality and Tragedy in *The Killers* and *Out of the Past*', in *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, ed. by Mark T. Conard (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), p.180.

describes … many of the most noirish effects of Siodmak's *mise-en-scene*',[536] including lighting details, sound effects, and the appearance of 'secretary-turned-*femme fatale*' Carol 'Kansas' Richman. The plot involves businessman Scott Henderson being wrongly accused of his wife's murder and Richman's efforts to prove him innocent, whereby she assumes the role of the 'femme fatale' as part of a plan to obtain evidence.

Another example of the source text providing visual cues for the mise-en-scene of the adaptation occurs in Dmytryk's *Murder, My Sweet*. Following a contretemps with 'Psychic Consultant' Jules Amthor (Otto Kruger), Philip Marlowe awakes from a drug-induced stupor to find himself in a cell, watched over by Amthor's henchmen. Parts of Marlowe's voice-over narration are based directly upon the first-person narration in the novel. For instance, in the novel, when Marlowe first awakes, he says 'Two windows seemed to be open in the end wall, but the smoke didn't move'.[537] In the film, he says 'The window was open but the smoke didn't move'. In the novel, Marlowe refers to the hallucination of 'smoke' as 'a grey web woven by a thousand spiders',[538] a description which appears verbatim in the film. The voiceover narration also includes Marlowe's observation that his fingers 'were just a bunch of bananas that felt like fingers', another line transcribed directly from the novel.[539]

In terms of the way in which the mise-en-scene itself draws upon the passage from the Chandler text, one of the shots in the corresponding sequence shows Powell's outstretched palm in close-up, giving a distorted, 'banana-like' appearance to his fingers (*plate* 22), with a special effect representing the 'smoke' mentioned in the novel superimposed over the recumbent private eye. The Chandler text thus provides the starting point for the mise-en-scene of a sequence representing Marlowe's subjective point of view. The 'cell' scene is preceded by a dream sequence where Marlowe is pursued by an orderly brandishing a syringe. This includes a visualisation of the spider's web in Chandler's version of Marlowe's hallucination (*plate* 23). The harsh spotlighting, deep shadows, and black-and-white wardrobe all contribute to the sense of skewed subjectivity.

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[536] T. Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London & New York, Routledge, 2000), p.433.

[537] Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely*, p.172.

[538] Ibid., p.173.

[539] 'They might just as well have been a bunch of bananas', Ibid., p.173.

In other respects, the film is a radical departure from the Chandler text, for example, the restructuring of the narrative, with Marlowe beginning his analeptic narration in a police cell, under arrest for suspected murder, in a scene which was added to the film. Here we see the tropes of film noir supersede those of the hard-boiled mode. For instance, Marlowe narrates in 'flashback', whereas, in the novel, he does so in the present tense. The initial 'flashback' accompanies a series of location shots of the 'real' Los Angeles at night, in the vein of 'Studio Expressionism', particularly *Double Indemnity*. Most notably of all, the scene where Marlowe and Moose Malloy first meet involves two noir tropes: an intermittent 'neon sign' motif, and a reflection – or 'double' – of Malloy which appears momentarily in the frame as the sign flashes on and off, and which therefore causes Marlowe to doubt what he is seeing (*plate* 24). This sets the tone for the visual style of the film, which involves the use of cinematic devices to represent Marlowe's subjective, and distorted, point of view.



Turning now to the visual style of *Phantom Lady*, in which 'glistening night-time streets' are endowed with 'a claustrophobic intensity through the use of heavy chiaroscuro lighting', Spicer cites the view of Porfirio that the visual appearance '"as much as any other film, defines the studio noir"'.[540] In the scene where Carol flees the apartment of drummer Cliff Milburn (Elisha Cook, Jr.), Elsaesser notes resonances with the visual style of 'the German street film', for instance *Asphalt*, the 1929 UFA production directed by Joe May, such as 'an atmosphere of oppression and metropolitan chaos', and 'the image of a city where everyone is alone'. Siodmak informed Bredell that his former colleague, Eugen Schüfftan, with whom he worked on the 1930 Filmstudio Berlin production *Menschen am Sontag*

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[540] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.113, citing Robert Porfirio in *Film Noir: An Encyclopaedic Reference to the American Style*, ed. by A. Silver and E. Ward (New York: Overlook Press, 1980; 1993), p.226.

('People on Sunday'), was a 'great admirer of Rembrandt'.[541] Bredell is said to have been impressed with the theory that 'the eye instinctively moves away from the brightest point and seeks out the darkest',[542] prompting him to study Rembrandt's work.



The film's visual appearance, characterised by the use of chiaroscuro lighting, which, it transpires, may well have owed something to the paintings of Rembrandt, is seen to be influential upon noir's emergent signifying practice. The scene where Carol pursues the Anselmo club bartender (Andrew Toombes) in search of evidence to exonerate Scott Henderson is a case in point. It provides an example of 'the dark street in the early morning hours, splashed with a sudden downpour'[543] referenced by Higham and Greenberg, in addition to other noir tropes, such as the subway train, 'clanking and swaying through storm-swept darkness, their arrival at remote stations signalled by the presence of mysterious raincoated figures'.[544] It concludes with a long shot of Carol silhouetted against streetlamps at the bottom left of shot, while the barman is lit by a spotlight in the entrance to the subway station (*plate* 25). It should also be noted that the subway bridge which dominates the frame appears to be an example of the Schüfftan process, named after its inventor, the aforementioned Eugen Schüfftan, an 'in camera' effect whereby live action is incorporated with a model or transparency.

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[541] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.433, citing Hans C. Blumenberg (ed.) *Robert Siodmak: Zwischen Berlin und Hollywood* (Munich: Hanser, 1980).

[542] Ibid, p.433.

[543] Higham and Greenberg, '*Noir* Cinema', from *Film Noir Reader*, p.27.

[544] Ibid., p.27.

The following scene, where the Anselmo barman is killed in a car accident, features a point-of-view shot where Carol gazes down at the dead man's hat (*plate* 26). In terms of the generic practice of noir, this image is an effective means of representing the recent, violent departure of its owner, as well as accommodating PCA guidelines by representing a fatality without depicting either the accident or the corpse. In terms of the influence of the visual style of *Phantom Lady*, both upon development of the genre and beyond, this motif is referenced by the Coen Brothers in *Miller's Crossing* (1990), their *hommage* to Gangster movies, film noir, and hard-boiled fiction, particularly Dashiell Hammett's *The Glass Key*.

Cornell Woolrich's novel, which involves the same plot and characters as the film, is seen to be representative of the hard-boiled mode. For example, *The Glass Key* involves the efforts of Ned Beaumont to prove that his friend, the politician Paul Madvig, is innocent of the murder of Taylor Henry, the wayward son of Madvig's political ally, Ralph Henry, and the brother of Janet Henry, with whom he has fallen in love. The novel was adapted by Stuart Heisler as *The Glass Key* in 1942, a film which prefigures film noir, both in terms of character types and visual style. The 'male victim' of the 'femme fatale', as we have seen, is a defining element of the mode. The trope features in many of Hammett's *Black Mask* short stories of the early-1920s, Cain's 1930s Depression-era tales, in the novels of Chandler from *The Big Sleep* (1939) to *The Long Goodbye* (1953), and also in the Cold War-era hard-boiled fiction of Ross MacDonald, for instance, his 1949 debut The *Moving Target*.

As mentioned previously, *Phantom Lady* is notable for the way in which it appears to make reference to the generic conventions of the 'femme fatale' or 'vamp'. The representation of the 'secretary-turned-*femme fatale*' involves a degree of self-reflexivity and 'knowingness' bordering on parody. It is one thing to reference a trope but to do so ironically gives a clear indication that such devices, credited with defining noir's generic practice, were well-established prior to the start of the genre cycle.

Inspector Burgess (Thomas Gomez) devises a plan to lure Cliff Milburn, who is thought to have information about the woman Henderson claimed he was with on the night of his wife's murder. The plan requires Carol to attend a concert where Millburn is playing drums, and to dress and behave in a sexually provocative manner. The cinematography and mise-en-scene are very much in keeping with the representational conventions pertaining to the

female sexual predator. Bredell's camera focuses firstly upon Ella Raines's legs and feet in black high heels and stockings (*plate* 27), before panning up to reveal that, much like Alice in *The Woman in the Window*, she is wearing a black satin 'sheath-like dress'.

This is followed by perhaps the film's best known sequence. Carol follows Cliff to a basement where he has an impromptu 'jam session' with some jazz musicians. McCann notes of films such as *The Blue Dahlia* (Marshall, 1946) and *Phantom Lady* how jazz is seen to be 'the sonic analog of the metropolitan labyrinth'.[545] He argues that the use of jazz signifies 'the potent combination of eros and mortality' and 'the perils of urban freedom'[546] within a contemporary urban milieu, or rather, the imaginary universe of noir, where 'urban freedom' is seen to be perilous and where sex inevitably equates with anxiety and death.



This provides a useful critical framework within which to view the scene. A continuous shot, moving fluidly between close-ups of trombone (Dole Nicolls), piano, and trumpet (Roger Hanson), provides a visual match for the thrilling spontaneity of the 'jam'. The expressions on the faces of the musicians, contorted in esctasy, herald Carol's entry into a world of excitement, uncertainty, sex, and danger. In her 'vamp' disguise, the secretary is surrounded by an array of distinctly phallic trombones, trumpets and clarinets, as it were, engulfed by male sexuality. Appearing to disapprove of a clarinet being waved in her face, Carol then gazes into a mirror, seemingly unable to recognise her own reflection as the glass vibrates to the sound of the music. After being jarred momentarily by the uncanniness of her reflection, she soon assumes the role given her by the Inspector, appearing to revel in the experience

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[545] S. McCann, 'Dark Passages: Jazz and Civil Liberty in the Postwar Crime Film', in *'Un-American' Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, ed. by F. Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve and Peter Stanfield (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007), p.118.

[546] Ibid., p.118.

of the 'jam' along with the musicians. The sequence contains a further shot in which her individual body parts are fetishised and eroticised, an essay in Rembrandt-inspired chiaroscuro lighting, with Carol's calves and high-heeled shoes in the foreground, silhouetted against the bass drum of Cliff's kit (*plate* 28). However, the eroticism is offset by the self-reflexive nature of the scene, and the audience's knowledge that Carol is playing a 'role'; indeed, that Ella Raines is playing a secretary playing a 'vamp', with Inspector Burgess standing in for the film director.

The connection between jazz and the 'metropolitan labyrinth' of noir is enduring. The influence of hard-boiled fiction and film noir upon late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first century culture falls largely without the scope of this study. Touching briefly upon this rich topic, however, the novels of James Ellroy can be seen as a veritable repository of such influence. For instance, in *Perfidia* (2014), set in Los Angeles in 1941, the 'gifted arriviste'[547] Kay Lake flees the family home in Sioux Falls for Los Angeles, where she leads a life of 'aimless bohemianism'.[548] After being fired from her waitressing job for alleged prostitution, she has 'a series of affairs with dubious jazz musicians'.[549] Kay's character can be interpreted as a hybrid of several hard-boiled and noir references, with Ellroy drawing upon both modes in his representation of the 'femme fatale'. The insinuation that the former 'waitress' may have been a prostitute suggests links with Cora Smith in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, while her liaisons with jazz musicians of dubious moral character imply *Phantom Lady* and *The Blue Dahlia* (Marshall, 1946). Kay first appears in Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia*, adapted by Brian De Palma as a 2006 neo-noir. Her name can thus be interpreted as a reference to the actress Veronica Lake, who starred with Alan Ladd in *The Blue Dahlia*. Indeed, the novel's title derives from the nickname given to Elizabeth Short, the victim of a 'real life' murder which took place in Los Angeles in 1947. Thus, 'real life' and fiction, as well as intertextual referencing and the reapplication of generic tropes merge in Ellroy's work, much as these elements did in earlier examples of hard-boiled fiction and, of course, film noir.

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[547] J. Ellroy, *Perfidia*, Windmill Books (Penguin: London, 2014), p.30.

[548] Ibid., p.31.

[549] Ibid., p.31.

Further to the point regarding Siodmak's ironic representation of the 'femme fatale' and how this indicates that the trope was a familiar one prior to 1944, as noted above, Elsaesser observes that the characters and plot of *Phantom Lady* reference Siodmak's 1938 film, *Pièges*, which he directed for the French company Spéva films, and where the heroine also 'slips effortlessly into the role that is most seductive to the man she is trying to expose'.[550] Like Lang and Hawks, then, Siodmak is also seen to reference his own work. As discussed further below in relation to Hawks and *The Big Sleep*, the 'authorship' of the film is seen to involve the inter-relationship of a variety of influences. Besides the direct links between the film and Woolrich's novel, these include the contributions of other members of the production team, and the convergence of the generic practice of film noir and Siodmak's body of work, including *Pièges*, as well as his Weimar films.

In terms of the latter, as previously noted, Siodmak had worked as a screenwriter on the 1931 Universum Films AG production *Der Mann der seinen Mörder sucht* where Hans Herfort (Heinz Rühmann) tries to avoid being murdered by the contract killer he himself hired after an abortive suicide attempt. As Elsaesser observes, there is an apparent connection with *Phantom Lady*, which concerns Carol's quest to find the woman with whom Henderson claims he spent the evening on the night his wife was murdered, but who cannot be found, and which therefore 'suggests the title'[551] of *Der Mann der seinen Mörder sucht* ('The man in search of his murderer'). However, while *Der Mann* and *Pièges* are seen to anticipate *Phantom Lady*, and therefore film noir, his 'Studio Expressionist' noir might also imply former projects. As Elsaesser argues, '*Pièges* looked at in its own film-historical context, does not anticipate *Phantom Lady* half as much as *Phantom Lady* implies *Pièges*'.[552]

Regarding the collaborative effort involved in making *Phantom Lady*, Spicer notes that, following her move to Universal studios as an independent producer, Joan Harrison found that Siodmak 'shared her interest in psychological disturbance and sexual pathology'.[553] This

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[550] Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After*, p.434.

[551] Ibid., p.433.

[552] Ibid., p.434.

[553] Spicer, *Film noir*, p.113, citing D. Alpi, *Robert Siodmak* (North Carolina and London: McFarland, 1998), pp.118-119.

preoccupation was one she also shared with former colleague Alfred Hitchcock, with whom Harrison worked as a screenwriter on *Rebecca* and *Suspicion* before her move to Universal to become an executive producer. The 'innovative characterisation' of *Phantom Lady*, which Spicer views as being 'influential in the early development of film noir',[554] can thus be seen as partly attributable to Harrison, and perhaps to Hitchcock, too.

There are, indeed, further connections between Hitchcock, Woolrich, *Phantom Lady* and film noir. As noted in the Introduction, these can be attributed to the cultural exchange between film and literature referred to by Stam as the 'infinitely permutating intertext'.[555] Both Siodmak's 1944 noir and the 1942 Woolrich hard-boiled novel upon which it is based are seen to have cultural antecedents in Hitchcock films where the reliability of the main character is called into question by the police, largely because other witnesses refuse to corroborate his or her 'evidence', despite the audience having 'seen' the same events. Examples include Richard Hannay (Robert Donat) in *The 39 Steps* and Iris Henderson (Margaret Lockwood) in *The Lady Vanishes*, films released in 1935 and 1938 respectively. This in turn is seen to involve the 'vexed relations' between sense impressions and knowledge and the 'perceptual doubling' comprising a central part of Hitchcock's work.

However, such 'vexed relations' are also characteristic of Woolrich's work, and thus hard-boiled fiction, a point endorsed by the fact that Hitchcock adapted *Rear Window*, released in 1954, from Woolrich's 1942 short story 'It had to be Murder', two further texts where the protagonist has to prove the reliability of their account. The trope also recurs in Hitchcock's 1959 feature *North by Northwest*, where Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant), finding himself accused of murder in the midst of an international espionage plot, strives to prove his innocence despite being conspired against by foreign agents. There are thus several antecedents and 'descendants' which situate the 'innovative characterisation' of Siodmak's noir within the contexts of commercial film and literature. It is argued that this is attributable to the dialogic exchange between these two forms of popular culture.

In addition, the production and distribution company Universal-International has strong connections with the Horror genre. In reference to *Stranger in the Third Floor*, the 1940 RKO

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[554] Ibid., p.113.

[555] Stam, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Film*; see Introduction, p.26.

feature often viewed as the first film noir, Krutnik argues that the 'dislocated perspective, where the "reality principle" is swamped by a twisted logic of desire' is reminiscent of 'the Universal horror films of the 1930s'.[556] In addition to its links with Horror, and by association the 'dislocated perspective' of early noir, as also noted, Universal produced Hitchcock's psychological thriller, *Shadow of a Doubt*, released in 1943. The studio's reputation for films involving paranoia and suspicion therefore allies it with film noir.

As acknowledged throughout this study, *Double Indemnity* is widely viewed as having played a major role in defining the generic practice of film noir, for instance, with regard to the representation of the 'femme fatale'. However, these are the very conventions upon which Siodmak, Bredell, and the Universal team are seen to provide a self-reflexive commentary in *Phantom Lady*, released seven months before Paramount's quintessential noir. While this may seem paradoxical, then as noted above, it only appears so when the generic practice of film noir is viewed in isolation, both from the work of the directors concerned, and the modalities of the Hollywood genre system.[557]

When viewed within these contexts, Lang's *The Woman in the Window* can be seen to 'imply' his Weimar film, *M*, as much as it anticipates noir. Similarly, the tropes of *Phantom Lady* imply former projects with which Joan Harrison and Robert Siodmak were involved, for example, *Suspicion* and *Pièges*. In that they situate the genre within a film-historical context, as noted above, it is argued that these precedents provide an argument for the existence of film noir as an event in the history of cinema.

The following examples taken from the work of Hitchcock are discussed within the aforementioned contexts, that is, the intermingling of the signifying practices of European cinema of the interwar years with the Hollywood genre system. The first example, concerning the representation of female identity in *Suspicion*, released in 1941, involves the use of conventions similar to those relating to the noir 'femme fatale', particularly the fetishisation of individual body parts. However, it is also noteworthy that these conventions are referenced ironically, suggesting that Hitchcock is also engaging in a witty, self-reflexive commentary upon the representation of gender identity.

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[556] Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street*, p.49.

[557] Previously stated on p.169.

In *Suspicion*, Johnnie Aysgarth first encounters Lina McLaidlaw on board a train. Lina is reading a book, affording Johnnie the opportunity to gaze at her without her knowledge. A point-of-view shot focuses firstly upon Lina's brogues (*plate* 29), before panning up to reveal that the 'sensible' shoes belong to a bespectacled woman reading a book on child psychology. Lina is, thus, represented as studious, reserved, and 'plain'. Her brogues are seen to be antithetical to the fashionable footwear of the 'vamp'. Her choice of reading matter identifies her as 'serious-minded' and therefore an unlikely 'mate' for Johnnie, who is represented as fun-loving, feckless, and opportunistic. It is also seen to be an ironic reference to Freudianism, which, as noted, was 'in vogue' at the time, and in which the director (but also his co-writer Joan Harrison) had taken an interest. In the next scene, involving a fox hunt, Johnnie's interest is piqued by a female hunter, whom, it transpires, is the 'dowdy' and 'bookish' Lina. In this instance, Lina is shown as dynamic, physically attractive, and thus highly desirable, especially where the opportunistic Johnnie is concerned, given that she is also wealthy.

Thus, Hitchcock is seen to deploy cinematic conventions relating to the representation of gender identity in a wittily ironic manner. It would appear that the selfsame conventions referenced ironically by Siodmak in *Phantom Lady* were sufficiently mature to warrant a similar commentary from Hitchcock in *Suspicion*, released three years earlier. If this privileges the directors over other members of the production team, as noted, the producer of *Phantom Lady*, Joan Harrison, was a screenwriter on *Suspicion*, suggesting the influence of two British émigrés, that is, Harrison and Hitchcock, upon noir.

The second example from *Suspicion* involves the representation of male identity through the use of 'Portraits and Doubles'. After Johnnie and Lina decide to get married, the two examine a portrait of Lina's father, and Johnnie's future father-in-law, General McLaidlaw (Cecil Hardwicke) (*plate* 30). The General represents the hegemonic values and traditional masculine virtues which the charming but feckless Johnnie lacks. As with Max de Winter in *Rebecca*, when Johnnie Aysgarth gazes upon the General's portrait with his wife-to-be, he is, in effect, confronting his 'other', in this case, the 'very picture' of traditional masculinity. There are also parallels with *Scarlet Street* when Chris Cross regards the portrait of Homer Higgins, suggesting further connections with Weimar cinema and film noir.

The foregoing can also be viewed in terms of the Freudian subtext of the two directors' work. In Lang's noirs this concerns the exploration of 'individual desire' leading to awful consequences for the middle-aged bourgeois protagonists of *The Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street*. In *Suspicion*, the use of 'perceptual doubling' enables the spectator to participate in 'vexed relations' between sense impressions and knowledge, and to speculate upon Johnnie's moral character, thus adding a psychological element to the romance melodrama, which, as previously noted, is also characteristic of Lang's work.



Returning to the comparison between *Suspicion* and *Phantom Lady*, the similarity between the respective shots of Lina's brogues and Carol's high heels (*plates* 27 and 29) enables a further reading in which *Phantom Lady* is seen to reference the already self-referential commentary upon the representation of gender in *Suspicion*. It is not inconceivable that the pre-existing signifying practice, which, it is argued, was assimilated by film noir, was sufficiently mature by 1944 to involve such a complex and multilayered instance of self-reflexivity. In support of this argument, it should be noted that Hawks and Lang were given to reference, shot-for-shot, their own work, that Lang is seen to draw comparisons between the respective conventions of film and painting, including the representation of gender identity, and that both directors, along with Hitchcock, had played a significant role in defining the crime film in its various incarnations. Additionally, the work of Siodmak is also seen to be self-reflexive and complex. This is due to: the referencing of silent films and the associated commentary upon the representation of violence in *The Spiral Staircase*; the 'condensing' of various literary tropes in the character of 'Swede' in *The Killers*; and the commentary upon the representation of female identity in *The Killers* and *Phantom Lady*.

### *The Big Sleep* (Hawks, 1946)

The Chapter concludes with a discussion of the Howard Hawks's 1946 adaptation of Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. As already noted, Hawks's *modus operandi* provides a prime example of the way in which cinema responds to its own traditions and conforms to its own conventions, and how certain directors and the production teams within which they worked can be seen to 'adapt', that is, to reference former collaborations. Commenting on *Land of the Pharaohs* (Hawks, 1955) and the working methods of director, Hawks, screenwriter William Faulkner said '[i]t's *Red River* all over again … but the thing about Howard is, he knows it's the same movie, and he knows how to make it'.[558] In an interview with Peter Bogdanovich, Hawks himself appears to endorse Faulkner's viewpoint regarding his methods, commenting that *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep* 'are rather like the same picture'.[559] Thus, when adapting Chandler's debut novel, Hawks can also be seen to 'adapt', that is, to reshape and modify his own work. Indeed, thanks to the prodigious abilities of screenwriter Jules Furthman, who was known to have had 'a fantastic memory for scenes from other pictures',[560] the pair would 'reference', as it were, any film that might provide a likely source from which to derive their own 'customised' scenes.

The process of 'recycling' elements of other films, including visual motifs, character tropes, specific shots, and even entire scenes, supports the view that 'a filmic adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium'.[561] Much like the Paramount and MGM teams responsible for the adaptation of *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Hawks and his colleagues necessarily responded to cinematic precedents. This argument, which contextualises the relationship between hard-boiled fiction and film noir within the various aspects of the adaptation process, is developed below by means of a comparison between *The Big Sleep* and Hawks's 1944 adaptation of

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[558] P. Wollen, 'Introduction', in *Howard Hawks*: *American Artist*, ed. by Jim Hillier and Peter Wollen (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p.2.

[559] Peter Bogdanovich, 'Interview with Howard Hawks', in P. Bogdanovich, *The Cinema of Howard Hawks* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962); also published in *Movie*, no.5, December 1962, p.59.

[560] Stam, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Film*, p.2.

[561] Ibid., p.17.

Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*,[562] prior to a close reading of the intertextual relationship between Chandler's novel and Hawks's adaptation.

Hawks was no great respecter of literary reputation, even if this involved such luminaries as Ernest Hemingway. One might say he had no reason to be, given his screenwriting team at Warner Brothers during the 1940s included William Faulkner, a fellow winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, although there was said to be more rivalry than 'fellowship' between these two pre-eminent American Modernists. Hawks did not hold the novel of *To Have and Have Not* in high regard. He told Hemingway himself as much during a fishing trip, when he informed his friend, the author, that he could make a film out of his worst book, calling it a 'goddamned piece of junk'.[563] When Hemingway declined to participate in the rewrite for the planned screenplay, Hawks invoked the ultimate deterrent, replying 'Okay, I'll get Faulkner to do it. He can write better than you anyway',[564] a remark designed to exploit the rivalry between the two writers, both close friends of Hawks. Hemingway capitulated and spent the remainder of the trip helping Hawks with the rewrite.

This involved some fundamental changes. As Bruce Kawin argues, Hawks disliked the novel because it was 'about "losers" – and Hawks hated "losers"'.[565] The director was unabashed of his intention to completely overhaul the source text in order to turn 'losers' into 'winners', as Kawin says, 'turning Morgan into Hawks's idea of a "winner"'.[566] Morgan's wife Marie, on the other hand, is transformed into Marie 'Slim' Browning, nicknamed 'Slim' after Hawks's wife, Slim Keith. With further regard to 'winners' and 'losers', during the transformation she also becomes a version of the 'Hawksian woman', described by Naomi

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[562] *To Have and Have Not* is also analysed in my undergraduate dissertation 'To Have or Have Not: The Hemingway-Hollywood Intertext', pp.4-19. The notion that Hawks is seen to reference his own work is also explored, but is expanded upon significantly here. This also applies to the discussion of the 'Hawksian Woman' and the ideology involving 'winners and losers'. However, this has been subject to significant development and expansion; moreover, these ideas have been incorporated within the theoretical arguments of this thesis.

[563] B. Kawin, 'Hawks and Faulkner', in *Faulkner and Film*, ed. by Peter Lurie and Anna J. Abadie (New York: Ungar, 1977), p.144.

[564] Ibid., p.144.

[565] Ibid., p.144.

[566] Ibid., p.144.

Wise as 'independent, self-supporting, and competent', a self-determining individual who makes her choices through 'personal will rather than by social or economic pressures'.[567]

Paid only scant attention by Hemingway, the romance – rather than the inequality within American society – provides the main focus of the film, which Bogdanovich describes as 'basically a love story'.[568] Regarding the commercial context, it had been two years since the release of *Casablanca* in 1942, and Warner Brothers were keen to replicate the success of one of cinema's most celebrated romances. Furthermore, an off-screen romance flourished between the two leads during the making of *To Have and Have Not*, with the studio eager to exploit the commercial potential of that, too. The same would apply to *The Big Sleep*, which also stars Bogart and Bacall, and which also transforms the source novel into a love story.



During the first encounter in *The Big Sleep* between Philip Marlowe and Vivian Rutledge[569] (and Bogart and Bacall) the shot of the interior of Vivian's room (*plate* 31) bears a marked resemblance to a corresponding shot from *To Have and Have Not* (*plate* 32). The shot from Hawks's earlier film also involves the initial encounter between the two leads, playing Harry Morgan and Marie 'Slim' Browning, when 'Slim' first enters Morgan's hotel room. In both shots, the actors are arranged in a diagonal configuration, with Bogart to the right foreground and Bacall to the left background. Also worthy of note is the 'venetian blind' motif, slanting diagonally from left to right. In keeping with cinematic convention dating at least as far back as 1920 and Wiene's *Caligari*, the motif can be interpreted as a 'danger sign', denoting 'entrapment' and/or impending doom. In compositional terms, the motif counterbalances the right-to-left diagonal of the figure arrangement.

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[567] Naomi Wise, 'The Hawksian Woman', in *Take One*, vol. 3, no. 3, January-February 1971, p.114.

[568] Peter Bogdanovich, 'Interview with Howard Hawks', pp.59-60.

[569] The character in the novel is called Vivian Sternwood.

The trope has cinematic precedents; besides Weimar cinema, it also appears in Hawks's 1932 gangster film *Scarface*, where Tony Camonte (Paul Muni) is being interrogated by Inspector Guarino (C. Henry Gordon) (*plate* 33). The rhombus-shaped motif slants steeply from left-to-right, following the direction of, and accentuating, the Inspector's stare. As with *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, it is seen to represent the latent power dynamic, as well as to connote entrapment and danger. It was also observed how the 'cross' motif in *Double Indemnity*, signifying violent death, was traceable to the same sources, that is, Weimar cinema, the Gangster cycle, and the work of Hawks. Given that these visual devices occur across various forms of cinema, irrespective of the intertextual relationship between the adaptation and the source text, they are seen to demonstrate the way in which film responds to, and indeed 'adapts', itself.

If, as Faulkner observed, the similarity between *The Land of the Pharaohs* and *Red River* is due to the fact that Hawks was, effectively, remaking 'the same movie', then this is also seen to apply to *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep*. The referencing by Hawks and his team of other films, including previous collaborations, it is argued, has a direct bearing upon the adaptation of Chandler's novel. This involves the 'shot for shot' replication of the initial encounter between Bogart and Bacall in *To Have and Have Not*, the use of the 'venetian blind' motif from *Scarface*, and the transformation of the novel into a love story.

The following concerns the 'knight' motif which recurs throughout *The Big Sleep*.[570] The function of the motif within the film can be shown to reflect, and articulate, a central theme of the novel, namely, 'the chivalric code', that is, the sense of honour which governs Marlowe's motives and actions, but one which is at odds with the themes of film noir. The theme of 'chivalry' is, however, seen to be characteristic of the work of Hawks, whom Leigh Brackett considered to valorise traditional 'masculine virtues',[571] and which, it is therefore argued, conflicts to a degree with the ethos of the unconventional new genre. There is no evidence that Hawks used the 'knight' motif intentionally; its significance is an inference.

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[570] A reference to the chess piece.

[571] Leigh Brackett, 'A Comment on 'The Hawksian Woman'', from *Howard Hawks*: *American Artist*, p.121.

However, the presence of such a device reflects Hawks's working method, given the use of a recurring 'cross' motif in *Scarface*.[572]

Chandler's first novel, published by Knopf in 1939, opens with the private eye, Philip Marlowe, paying a visit to the home of his client, General Sternwood. Upon entering the lavish, two-storey hallway of the Sternwood residence, Marlowe encounters 'a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree'.[573] Seeing that the knight is struggling to free the lady, Marlowe states that, 'if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him'.[574] This comment can be interpreted in a number of ways. It is seen to be a meditation upon the role of law enforcement in the latter-day struggle between good and evil. It may thus be a reference to the qualities of the ideal private detective, described by Chandler in the Preface to *The Simple Art of Murder* as 'a man of honor', with his 'disgust for sham' and his 'contempt for pettiness'.[575] MacShane notes Chandler's observation regarding his detective novels that '"There must be idealism … but there must also be contempt"', adding that, in *The Big Sleep*, Chandler 'points his finger at those who are responsible for the corruption of society'.[576] Indeed, regarding the 'chivalric code' and the upholding of moral values, Marlowe is described as a 'shop-soiled Sir Galahad' in Chandler's third novel, *The High Window* (1942). This description also foregrounds the wittily ironic nature of Chandler's work, prompting MacShane to observe that *The Big Sleep* is 'a comedy of human futility'.[577]

As a representation of class, the latter-day 'knight in dark armour' is a professional detective, not an amateur sleuth such as his English predecessors, Sherlock Holmes and Lord Peter Whimsey. As Chandler observes, the private eye is 'a relatively poor man, or he would

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[572] Chapter Two, p.113.

[573] R. Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (London: Penguin, 2011), p.1.

[574] Ibid., p.1.

[575] R. Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder' in *The Simple Art of Murder* (New York: Vintage, 1988), p.18.

[576] F. MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1986), p.71.

[577] Ibid., p.72.

not be a detective at all'.[578] General Sternwood, however, is a millionaire, the family having made a fortune from oil valued at four million dollars, although their luck and moral standards are in decline. His relatively lowly social status also means that Marlowe 'talks as a man of his age talks – that is, with a rude wit',[579] a reference to the use of the contemporary vernacular in his first person narration, replete with witty 'one-liners' and an abundance of elaborately crafted simile. There are six of these in the first five pages of Chandler's second novel, *Farewell, My Lovely*, including the celebrated description of ex-convict Moose Malloy who is described as being 'as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food'.[580] It should also be noted that Malloy is the 'dupe' of the 'femme fatale' Velma Valento, indicating the way in which Chandler is seen to rework the tropes of the hard-boiled mode, particularly those of Hammett, whom he held in high regard.

The 'knight' metaphor can also be interpreted in relation to the representation of gender. The phrase 'if I lived in this house, I would … climb up there and help him' can be taken to imply that Marlowe's services are required due to a certain 'dereliction of duty' on the part of the General, and thus a diminishing of male authority. The same would seem to apply to Vivian's husband, Rusty Regan, a former member of the Irish Republican Army, who has abandoned his wife and in-laws – or so it would appear. The sense of corruption, neglect, and decay is reinforced by Marlowe's initial interview with his client in a greenhouse, amidst stifling heat and the heady perfume of tropical plants. The General, paralysed and confined to a wheelchair, informs the detective that neither he nor either of his daughters, Carmen and Vivian, 'has any more moral sense than a cat'.[581] The scene, retained in the adaptation, is effective in representing the decline of the Sternwood household, the steady advance of decay symbolised by the ailing General and the 'rotten sweetness'[582] of the orchids, and the loss of masculine potency, especially since the unexplained departure of Rusty Regan.

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[578] Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', p.18.

[579] Ibid., p.18.

[580] Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely*, p.2.

[581] Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p.8.

[582] Ibid., p.8.

Marlowe is hired to investigate the blackmail of the youngest daughter, Carmen, who has become involved with members of the Los Angeles criminal underworld, including pornographer A.G. Geiger, gambler Joe Brody, and casino owner Eddie Mars. MacShane notes that 'Chandler thought of Marlowe as a catalyst, a means of bringing to the foreground the other characters who are the real substance of the fiction'.[583] Thus, while ostensibly working on a case, the 'man of honor' is, in effect, seen to be addressing the decline in moral standards, diminishing male authority, and erosion of the 'chivalric code' which has led to the corruption of the Sternwood household, and by association, modern American society. The full significance of the 'knight' metaphor becomes apparent when Carmen informs Marlowe that her father was paralysed in a riding accident, that is, when he was 'rolled on by a jumper'[584] during a steeplechase.

There are further associations between the 'chivalric code' and the private detective which, it is argued, are seen to support the view that the 'knight' is an important narrative theme which the Warner Brothers team seized upon and visualised in a subtle yet ingenious way. Marlowe is a keen chess player. When he returns home after an evening with Vivian at Eddie Mars' casino, Las Olindas, he finds Carmen in his bed, 'as naked and glistening as a pearl'.[585] Despite the distraction, he notices Carmen has been tampering with a chess game that the solitary detective, whom Thomson describes as enduring 'a kind of immaculate loneliness',[586] has been playing against himself. The piece she has moved, it transpires, is the knight. Marlowe observes of his evening with Mars and the Sternwood sisters that '[k]nights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights'.[587] He also informs Carmen that his rejection of her advances is 'a question of professional pride'.[588] The 'knight' can thus be seen to signify the triumph of Marlowe's rationality over Carmen's

[583] MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, p.71.

[584] Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p.63.

[585] Ibid., p.169.

[586] D. Thomson, *The Big Sleep* (London: BFI Publishing, 1997), p.17.

[587] Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p.170.

[588] Ibid., p.170.

sexual provocation, of the professional detective over the morally derelict nouveau riche, and the reassertion of male authority.

Regarding Marlowe's comment that his is no 'game [or profession] for knights', despite his idealism, he is sufficiently cynical and worldly-wise to be able to do his job effectively. This is seen to represent the view taken by the author in *The Simple Art of Murder* that, as 'a common man', the latter-day detective – or knight – is able to 'go among common people',[589] but also to protect his well-to-do clients from exploitation by professional, working-class criminals. The legacy of Hammett and *Black Mask* tales such as 'Dead Yellow Women' is apparent.[590] In addition, Marlowe apportions blame for the 'corruption of society' to the upper as well as the lower social echelons. This again is characteristic of Hammett, for example, *Red Harvest* and the corrupt 'Czar of Poisonville' Elihu Willsson.

Returning to the Hawks adaptation, the theme of 'chivalry' is incorporated into the film, both within the dialogue and by means of the recurring 'knight' motif. In terms of dialogue, this manifests in a typically 'Hawksian' form of verbal sparring between the male and female leads. When Marlowe and Vivian meet at a bar, Thomson notes of the flirtatious exchange between the two that 'By now the "case", or the "job", has become just a pretext for the swordplay of insolent wooing'.[591] The investigation of the blackmail of Carmen (Martha Vickers) by A.G. Geiger (Theodore von Eltz) has effectively concluded with the discovery of Geiger's body and the arrest of Carol Lundgren (Tommy Rafferty) for the murder of Joe Brody (Louis Jean Heydt), in retaliation over the murder of Geiger. Vivian pays Marlowe for his services. However, Marlowe registers disappointment, perhaps because his relationship, just like his investigation of the criminals involved with the Geiger case, appears to be prematurely at an end. Indeed, had the film ended here, his disappointment would have been shared by the movie-going public, not to mention production head Jack Warner, due to the romance between Marlowe and Vivian being in its infancy.

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[589] Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', p.18.

[590] Introduction, pp.36-37.

[591] Thomson, *The Big Sleep*, p.39.

The ensuing dialogue, and flirtatious innuendo, does not appear in the novel. It is, however, representative of the dialogue between Morgan and Marie in *To Have and Have Not*, also characterised by *double entendre* and risqué remarks. As with *Double Indemnity*, the innuendo is effective in conveying the erotically charged encounter while also plotting a safe course through PCA guidelines. When Vivian asks Marlowe what he does when he is not working, he replies 'Play the horses, fool around'. Recognising the innuendo, Vivian responds 'Speaking of horses, I like to play them myself, but I like to see them work out a little first, to see if they're front runners or come from behind'. The implication that she is attracted to Marlowe prompts him to reply 'You've got a touch of class but I don't know how far you can go', a horse-racing reference with obvious sexual undertones. Once again, Vivian responds in kind, saying 'Well that depends on who's in the saddle'.

There are several ways of interpreting the couple's 'banter', each providing an insight into the dialogic relationship between the hard-boiled mode and Hollywood. As noted, there are similarities with the dialogue of *To Have and Have Not*, attributable to the fact that Faulkner and Furthman were screenwriters on both films. For instance, during the first meeting in Morgan's hotel room, Marie, leaning seductively against the doorframe, asks 'Anybody got a match?' Besides the flirtatiousness of the remark, it is seen to issue a challenge to Captain Morgan's hitherto unassailable authority. The exchanges are, thus, seen to take the form of verbal 'sparring' between male and female characters competing for ascendancy. It is also noteworthy, however, that the dialogue resembles the exchanges between Walter and Phyllis in *Double Indemnity*, lines which are partly attributable to Chandler, who co-wrote the screenplay. The screenwriters may therefore have been approximating Chandler's writing style. Alternatively, they could have been supplying the kind of risqué dialogue that audiences had come to expect of film noir. It is argued that all of the above could be seen to apply, and that the close similarity between Hollywood screenwriting and hard-boiled fiction is attributable to the dialogic exchange between the two modes.

Leigh Brackett, who joined Faulkner and Furthman as a third screenwriter on *The Big Sleep*, observes of the 'Hawksian woman' and male-female relationships in Hawks's films that '[w]hen the hero can accept her as he would another man, with the masculine virtues he

values, then he can start thinking about her as a woman'.[592] There is a sense in the novel that Vivian is capable of assuming the male role in the Sternwood family following her father's accident and her husband's departure, and that she and Marlowe form an alliance of sorts in order to restore the moral character of the family. The General despairs of his daughters, observing that while 'Carmen is a child who likes to pull the wings off flies', Vivian is 'exacting, smart, and quite ruthless'.[593] Indeed, The General's description of both daughters, including the resourceful Vivian, is retained verbatim in the film. Although frowned upon by the General in Chandler's novel, Vivian's qualities would appear to have recommended her to Hawks, who loved 'winners' and abhorred 'losers'. These qualities seem to represent the 'masculine virtues' valued by Hawks's heroes which enable Vivian and Marie to enter into 'partnership' with the respective male leads. As Thomson notes of the adaptation, 'Marlowe and Vivian have sex, talk, and a task in common – helping to hold the family in place'.[594] In addition, Rivette observes that the characters in Hawks's films exhibit a 'pragmatic intelligence' often through their involvement with 'profession or some form of human activity at grips with the universe and anxious for conquest'.[595] While only Marlowe has any direct professional involvement with the case, as a 'crime-fighting duo', as it were, he and Vivian are seen to be 'at grips with the universe' as well as being 'anxious for conquest', not only of their criminal adversaries, but of each other, too.

The following involves a brief analysis of the occurrences of the 'knight' motif as they relate to narrative themes and the notoriously complicated plot, which broadly speaking is the same as the novel. The one notable exception – the film's ending – is discussed further below. The motif appears at key moments in the action, often in relation to the power dynamic, either between Marlowe and Vivian, or the villains he encounters, including his main rival, Eddie Mars (John Ridgely). As with the 'cross' motif in *Scarface*, the 'knight' motif is thus seen to comprise an integral part of the film, paralleling and reinforcing the events of the narrative.

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[592] Brackett, 'A Comment on 'The Hawksian Woman'', pp.120-121.

[593] Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p.12.

[594] Thomson, *The Big Sleep*, p.39.

[595] Jacques Rivette, 'The Genius of Howard Hawks', in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no.23, May 1953 in *Howard Hawks*: *American Artist*, p.29.

The plot involves Marlowe being hired by General Sternwood (Charles Waldron) to investigate the blackmail of Carmen by A.G. Geiger. Vivian suspects her father is also interested in the whereabouts of her husband, Rusty. It is rumoured that Rusty eloped with Mona Mars (Peggy Knudsen), the wife of casino boss, Mars. However, Rusty has been murdered. Vivian is being blackmailed by Mars, who told her that Carmen murdered her husband while drugged when he refused to sleep with her.[596] In addition, the film also focuses upon the romance between Marlowe and Vivian, which flourishes in the film, but not the novel. The dual narrative strands thus involve Vivian's attempts to prevent Marlowe from discovering the truth in order to protect her sister and the family name, and Marlowe's gradual realisation of Vivian's involvement in the 'cover-up'; and in addition, the two growing closer in the process, becoming 'teammates', as it were, as well as lovers.

The first equestrian statue appears in the scene where Marlowe pays a visit to the Geiger property to find Carmen, intoxicated, seated in a chair, and Geiger's corpse nearby. He also discovers a hidden camera, secreted in an oriental bust, one of many trinkets which feature amongst the elaborately-themed, 'bohemian' design scheme. It transpires that Geiger had been blackmailing the Sternwoods by taking pictures of Carmen in 'compromising' poses while drugged. After waking Carmen, Marlowe investigates the property, where he finds incriminating evidence pertaining to the Sternwood blackmail. The white ceramic statuette appears in the background on Geiger's desk (*plate* 34). The first occurrence of the motif thus coincides with Marlowe's initial discovery in the Geiger case, signalling that the 'game is afoot' as Marlowe's Victorian predecessor, Sherlock Holmes, may have put it. The ornament also forms part of the 'exotic' décor which implies that Geiger, who lived with Carol Lundgren, may have been a homosexual.

The second instance occurs in Marlowe's office during a visit from Vivian. While ostensibly Vivian visits Marlowe to discuss the case, the scene involves the burgeoning romance between the two. Vivian is smartly dressed in check jacket and skirt, that is, in a businesslike manner, identifying her as 'independent, self-supporting, and competent' in keeping with the conventions of the 'Hawksian woman' (*plate* 35). Regarding Hawks's referencing of his

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[596] Carmen murders Rusty Regan in the novel, but not the film, where the alleged murder is used by Eddie Mars as means of blackmailing Vivian, and representing both Carmen and Vivian as Mars's victim. The Carmen of the novel is thus seen to have more generic verisimilitude with the 'femme fatale' than the film character.

own work, this is a similar outfit to the one worn by Bacall during her first encounter with Bogart in *To Have and Have Not* (*plate* 32). When Vivian seats herself provocatively on the edge of Marlowe's desk, a silver statuette of a racehorse and jockey appears on the desk. Vivian repeatedly massages her left knee with 'masturbatory zeal',[597] an allusion to the mounting sexual tension, prompting Marlowe to tell her 'Go ahead and scratch' – another instance of innuendo which bypassed 'the Code'. For his part, Marlowe rubs his right ear lobe (a 'trademark' Bogart gesture) which is seen to represent his attraction to Vivian. The silver racehorse is seen to represent the fractious, competitive, and erotically charged Marlowe-Vivian relationship, with the one attempting to outmanoeuvre the other.



The third statue appears when Marlowe visits Joe Brody, the gambler involved with Geiger in the Sternwood blackmail, and his girlfriend, Agnes Lowzier (Sonia Darrin). It transpires that Brody has obtained Geiger's photographs of Carmen, suggesting he may be responsible for his murder. With Brody holding Marlowe at gunpoint, Carmen arrives at the apartment brandishing a handgun and demanding Brody return the photographs. Marlowe seizes the opportunity, and both firearms, leaving Brody no choice but to comply with Carmen's wishes. As he retrieves the photographs, a chrome equestrian statuette resembling the 'knight' chess piece appears on the desk in which they are concealed (*plate* 36). The motif is seen to represent the struggle for ascendancy between the detective and his adversaries, and the fact that Marlowe has 'outmanoeuvred' Brody, who is forced to concede to Marlowe's 'checkmate'. The blackmailer is murdered by Lundgren immediately afterwards.

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[597] Thomson, *The Big Sleep*, p.42.

The fourth and fifth statues appear in scenes in the private office of the Las Olindas casino, where the owner Mars and Marlowe meet; and subsequently, at a hideaway in Realito, when Marlowe, having been knocked unconscious by Mars's henchman, Lash Canino (Bob Steele), awakes to find himself being guarded by his wife, Mona.




In the former instance, a modish art deco-style statuette appears on a shelf behind Mars, forming part of the ostentatious trappings of the casino boss's headquarters. Marlowe has accompanied Vivian to the casino. During the meeting, which also involves a bout of verbal 'sparring', Mars tells Marlowe that Vivian has gambling debts. Marlowe rejoins Vivian, who has won at the roulette table. When they vacate the casino, and when Vivian is beset by one of Mars's thugs, apparently trying to steal to Vivian's winnings, Marlowe, the 'shop-soiled' knight, comes to the rescue. The couple kiss for the first time during the car journey home, thereby consummating their relationship. The scene is effective in advancing the dual threads of the plot, with Marlowe becoming suspicious that the robbery was a hoax, and that Vivian is being blackmailed by Mars. The 'equestrian' motif in this instance can be seen to represent the struggle between Marlowe and Mars, ending in a draw or 'photo finish', with the casino boss perhaps in the lead by a 'short head'.

Mars is definitely ahead at the start of the fifth and final scene involving an equestrian statue. Marlowe follows the trail of Rusty Regan to a garage in suburban Realito, where Agnes Lowzier has spotted Mona Mars. After being knocked out by Canino, Marlowe wakes up to find Mona watching over him. When Mona gives him a drink of water, an ornament featuring two racehorses appears on the desk behind her (*plate* 37). Vivian enters the room. Upon seeing Marlowe in his diminished state, she remarks sarcastically 'You don't seem to

be running in front today'. Thus, with the beleaguered Marlowe seemingly losing the battle against Mars and Canino, the dialogue and visual motif combine to reinforce the events of the narrative. The private eye's fortunes are soon restored, however, with Marlowe freeing himself then shooting dead Canino before putting pay to Mars, who dies in a hail of his own henchmen's bullets outside Geiger's house. The film ends with the Sternwood name intact, with Marlowe and Vivian considering a future together, and, in keeping with the conventions of Hawks's films, with the male hero winning 'by a distance'. As discussed below, however, this plot resolution could hardly be more at odds with Chandler's novel.

In summary, the statuettes appear at significant moments in the narrative. They may be inconspicuous, but, in the visual patterning which they establish, they can be seen as 'waypoints' charting the course of the convoluted plot. Given the relationship, both with the 'knight' motif in the Chandler text, and the valorisation of traditional masculinity in Hawks's films, the statuettes are seen to be an integral part of the signifying practice, as well as a 'running gag', performing a similar function to the 'cross' motif in *Scarface*. It was discussed in the chapter dealing with *Double Indemnity* how the character of Marlowe is seen to endow Chandler's work with 'a center of conventional morality in an otherwise frowsy universe'.[598] The 'knight' motif, given its association with the upholding of moral standards and traditional masculine values, is therefore seen to represent the 'conventional morality' of the novel, as embodied by the world-worn gallantry of the narrator. Indeed, as noted above, there appears to be an ideological similarity between the work of Chandler and that of Hawks, where male and female characters alike are required to demonstrate 'masculine virtues'. The horseracing analogy in *The Big Sleep* encapsulates these interrelated themes of 'winners and losers' and the omnipotence of the white, American male.

However, there is an essential difference between the two motifs, relating to the defining difference between the novel and adaptation. In the chapter on *Double Indemnity*, it was seen how Marlowe's moral rectitude was responsible for his 'poverty, loneliness, and a constant sense of his own otherness'.[599] As noted here, Thomson sees Marlowe as experiencing 'a kind of immaculate loneliness'. Through his asceticism and rectitude,

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[598] R. Schickel, *Double Indemnity* (London: BFI, 2000), p.34; see Introduction, p.43.

[599] Ibid., p.34; see Introduction, p.43.

Marlowe is able to expose 'those who are responsible for the corruption of society'. The 'knight' is thus seen to represent Marlowe's solitary struggle to uphold a moral code, which MacShane sees to involve a 'romantic, even sentimental view of the world'.[600]

It is characteristic of Chandler that while the private eye invariably meets, and is tempted by women, the dual narrative arc results in him exposing the 'corruption of society' and succeeding professionally, but never finding, or even seeking, romantic fulfilment. As noted above, however, the adaptation of *The Big Sleep* is, by contrast, a love story much in the vein of *To Have and Have Not*. The plot and characters undergo a similar transformation, involving Marlowe and Vivian forming a partnership founded upon 'masculine virtues'. While this may involve exposing corruption, as a love story in the tradition of Hawks, Warner Brothers, and Hollywood, it must, ultimately, entail the consummation of the main protagonists' affair. Thus, Hawks's film noir is seen to comply with Hollywood convention, rather to subvert it in the manner of other 'Studio Expressionist' noirs.

The discussion of *The Big Sleep* raises several points of interest, both in relation to film noir, and to adaptation in general. If the adaptation process is seen as 'an orchestration of discourses … a "hybrid" construction mingling different media and discourses and collaborations',[601] then film noir adaptations are no exception. In fact, they are seen to be exemplars of the 'orchestration of discourses', a nexus for a multitude of influences, including Murnau's fabulously constructed social environments, Hammett's tough-talking 'pulp' fiction, and the equally 'hard-bitten' industry figures, including Louis B. Mayer, Jack Warner, and Joseph Breen.

Viewed in this way, *The Big Sleep* can be interpreted as an 'orchestration' of the following media, discourses, and collaborations. Similarities with the themes and visual style of the previous Hawks/Warner Brothers collaboration *To Have and Have Not* suggest that *The Big Sleep* is representative of the work of the director. However, Hawks collaborated with a number of colleagues on both films. These include screenwriters Faulkner and Furthman (with Brackett joining the team for *The Big Sleep*), cinematographer Sid Hickox, film editor Christian Nyby, executive producer Warner, and the actors Bogart and Bacall. As discussed,

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[600] F. MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, p.101; see Introduction, p.43.

[601] Stam, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Film*, p.9; see Chapter Three, p.164.

similarities with the dialogue and mise-en-scene from the earlier film can be attributed to Hawks and the production team, whereas the decision to transform the Hemingway and Chandler novels into 'love stories' and the use of the Bogart-Bacall pairing is attributable both to Hawks himself, who 'discovered' Lauren Bacall, and to the studio.

In terms of mise-en-scene, the recurring 'equestrian' motif is seen to be part of Hawks's directorial style, given the use of the recurring 'cross' motif in *Scarface*. However, regarding the 'intermingling' of media, it is also attributable, in part, to the 'knight' motif in Chandler, and therefore to hard-boiled fiction. In the encounter between Chandler's protagonist and the adapted version of Marlowe, the latter reigns supreme, as the solitary and ascetic private eye is transformed into a 'winner' who walks away at the end of the film with Vivian, after vanquishing all before him. The adapted Marlowe is thus more representative of the 'Hawksian hero' than many of the male protagonists of noir, the 'vulnerable losers' for whom the director and screenwriters would have had little use. If one takes the 1941 Warner Brothers adaptation of Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* directed by John Huston as an example, one might surmise that had it been directed by Hawks, then Sam Spade, also played by Bogart, would have married Bridget O'Shaughnessy (Mary Astor), rather than condemning her to a lengthy jail sentence for her part in the Falcon conspiracy.

If Hawks's valorisation of traditional masculinity seems at odds with the ethos of film noir, it is argued that this is due to the fact that films such as *The Big Sleep* are representative of a 'watershed' moment in Hollywood during the mid- to late-1940s. Indeed, both writer and director alike are seen to espouse traditional values which, much like 'the Code', were fast becoming outmoded in modern American society. In addition, these various 'currents' are seen to be representative of the competing discourses, both within film noir, but also hard-boiled fiction, where Chandler's 'knight protector' contrasts starkly with the morally aberrant anti-heroes of Cain's version of the mode.

In addition to Hawks's body of work, it should also be noted that both *Scarface* and *The Big Sleep* are part of the Hollywood genre system. Thus, the 'construction' also involves the convergence of directorial style with generic practice. Regarding the latter, the term 'directorial style' seems to incline towards *auteur* theory, and Andrew Sarris's position that 'it is when the director dominates the film that the cinema comes closest to reflecting the

personality of a single artist'.[602] However, this position is at odds with two of the closely related working assumptions behind this thesis, that the analysis of a film should aim not to privilege one member of the production team over another, and that arguments relating to the director's work should be based on an examination of the tropes of the films concerned, and not seen as the 'reflection of personality'. The latter approach might also seem contrary to the workings of the Hollywood genre system. Despite the seeming conflict, however, there is a convergence between 'authorial presence'[603] and the generic practice of noir, with many of the films examined here and in other chapters being both films noirs and part of the directors' bodies of work. Spicer argues that directors such as Lang, Siodmak, and Wilder appear to be able to deploy 'generic elements' so that they 'yield their most profound meanings'.[604] While this does not necessarily apply to Hawks and *The Big Sleep*, where aspects of his directorial style are at odds with the genre, it appears to be true of Wilder and *Double Indemnity*, Lang and *Scarlet Street*, and Siodmak and *Phantom Lady*. Furthermore, the presence in Hollywood of so many prominent directors, several of whom were pioneers of the crime genre, at a time when the representation of sex, violence, and criminal psychology in the American crime film was undergoing radical change, is seen to be significant factor in the 'birth' of noir.

In terms of the tensions between the respective discourses involving the studio, Warner Brothers, and noir's emergent generic practice, it is the case that these compete and conflict – as well as coalesce – with one another. Krutnik notes that attempts to 'conceptualise film noir exclusively in terms of a "period style"' are inherently problematic, due to the fact that certain key films in the noir corpus, including *The Big Sleep*, are 'resolutely classical'.[605] Interestingly, however, despite Krutnik's valid point regarding the film's 'classical' style, budgetary restrictions resulting in the doubling-up of sets and dropping location scenes, in McCarthy's equally valid opinion, caused the film to appear 'perilously close to a B Movie',

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[602] A. Sarris, 'Toward a Theory of Film History', in *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), p.24.

[603] Spicer, *Film Noir*, p.105.

[604] Ibid, p.105.

[605] Ibid., p.23.

due to 'dark shadows hiding the lack of production values'.[606] Depending upon one's perspective, then, the film may appear either as an unconvincing 'classical' interpretation of film noir, or as a low-budget Warner Brothers film which jars with the production values of 'classical' Hollywood. Irrespective of these essentially qualitative evaluations, the thesis argues that the seeming tension in *The Big Sleep* between two differing sets of production and/or aesthetic values is due to the competing discourses of 'classical' Hollywood and noir's emergent generic practice.

In summary, the adaptation process involves the relationship between different media, including film, literature, and the visual arts, and the 'orchestration' of various discourses, including directorial style, generic practice, the studio and star systems, and censorship. With specific regard to 'Studio Expressionist' noir, this involves certain pre-existing tropes which can, in turn, be associated with the work of a number of influential directors. In addition, producers are also seen to play an important role in identifying key elements of the new 'series', and by reapplying these, to be instrumental in establishing the genre. As with Jerry Wald's intervention in the adaptation of *Mildred Pierce*, the reapplication of these elements was prioritised over the actual content of the hard-boiled source novel. Even so, while noir may involve the reapplication of familiar tropes, by common accord, audiences had never beheld a couple as villainous – and yet as sympathetically portrayed – as Walter and Phyllis before. That is to say, not in American cinema. American hard-boiled fiction was quite another matter. Despite the 'liberties' taken with novels such as *Mildred Pierce*, the relationship with the hard-boiled mode is seen to be a vital component of noir's success. Finally, it is not merely the innovative treatment of age-old themes that characterises noir, but the artful way in which they are visualised. For this the production teams – including the directors discussed here – must take the credit.

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[606] T. McCarthy, *Howard Hawks: The Grey Fox of Hollywood* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), p.386.

**Conclusion**

The following is intended as a summary of the findings of the thesis regarding the relationship between the hard-boiled mode and film noir, and the processes involved in hard-boiled fiction 'Becoming Film Noir'.

The Introduction begins, however, by acknowledging the difficulty of defining film noir, and that the very existence of the genre is disputed within some quarters. In order to establish a firm basis upon which to discuss the relationship between noir and the hard-boiled mode, the thesis also argues for the existence of the genre, both as an event in the history of cinema, as well as a critical construct. The so-called 'French invention' of film noir is discussed to this end. The term 'invention' is a reference to the fact that the genre was named retrospectively by French critic Nino Frank in 1946 as part of a critical response to a series of Hollywood films released mostly during the War, and which had been banned during the Nazi occupation of France.[607] The term need not be taken literally. Some critics, such as Naremore, see film noir both as an event in film history and the history of film criticism – a view which this thesis shares. Others, however, such as Marc Vernet, dispute noir's film-historical status, arguing that the French critical response in 1946, consolidated by Borde and Chaumeton by 1955, has no relevance outside of the immediate conditions of reception, and that it is seen to valorise elements of French culture without giving due attention to, or having adequate understanding of, the Hollywood production context.[608]

The thesis concurs with the revisionist view that the initial French response displayed a lack of familiarity, both with the Hollywood production context and the modalities and practices of the genre system, and furthermore, that the Anglo-American debate, commencing in earnest in the 1960s, was also deficient in this regard. It is also accepted, therefore, that early Anglo-American criticism was, to some extent, merely rehearsing a critical perspective which bore little relation to the facts of American production. However, this is seen to be addressed by critics such as Krutnik, who later succeeded in locating the noir debate within the production context, quite specifically, within that of the Hollywood genre system.

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[607]Ibid., p.3.

[608] Ibid., pp.4-6.

Film noir began as a 'reading position'[609] adopted firstly by Hollywood producers, then by audience members, including the Hollywood trade press and the general public, and subsequently by French critics several years later. The new trend in Hollywood film-making was first identified by the American media as early as October 1944 when it was referred to by Fred Stanley of the New York Times as the 'red meat cycle'.[610]

Altman's insightful commentary on the Hollywood genre system is discussed to this end. He argues that film production itself 'involves a process of criticism that actually precedes the act of production'.[611] The formation of a new genre is seen to be a speculative process involving trial and error, with the recombination of pre-existing generic components offering no guarantee of future success. As the difficulties encountered by generations of critics in defining film noir demonstrate, trying to ascertain how and why a genre works is inherently problematic. It is noted, in addition, how studio personnel first conceptualised film noir – or adopted their 'reading position' – almost a decade before the films were made, due to the 1935 PCA ban on adapting Cain's work.[612] As a way of highlighting the process of genre-formation, the thesis also discusses how other genres, including the Western, were named retrospectively.[613] Apart from the significant fact that film noir was named and fully conceptualised by overseas critics rather than by the American media, the circumstances surrounding the 'birth' of noir are seen to be fairly representative of the Hollywood genre system. The thesis therefore concludes that the French critics who named the series 'film noir' can be seen to have refined the concept rather than to have invented it.

The Introduction addresses the revisionist point that French critics were valorising aspects of their own culture in the series they named noir by arguing that elements such as Modernism, Surrealism, and Freudianism were international phenomena that influenced

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[609] R. Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 2000), p.44; see Introduction, p.13.

[610] Fred Stanley, 'Hollywood Crime and Romance', *NYT*, Nov., 19, 1944, in Chinen Biesen, *Blackout, World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p.96; see Introduction, p.7.

[611] Ibid., p.44; see Introduction, p.14.

[612] Introduction, p.14.

[613] Ibid., p.52; see Introduction, p.18.

the writers, directors and producers of Hollywood films as well as 'Left Bank' intellectuals.[614] Furthermore, it is also argued that the Popular Front had a firm foothold beyond the *rive gauche*, as demonstrated by the politically committed films noirs produced by RKO during the mid-1940s.[615] The thesis therefore concludes that these broad cultural trends were a significant factor, both in the production and reception of film noir.

**Chapter One, 'Weimar Cinema, German Expressionism, and film noir'**, examines the influence of 'German Expressionism' on film noir through the analysis of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Wiene, 1922), *The Last Laugh* (Murnau, 1924), and *Sunrise: a song of two humans* (Murnau, 1927). The thesis draws the following conclusions.

First, the generic tropes of film noir, such as the 'femme fatale', 'Portraits and Doubles', and the 'venetian blind' motif, can be seen to have intertextual connections with Weimar cinema. Second, the thesis accepts that there is seen to be a relationship between Weimar cinema and the fundamental principles of the artistic movement known as 'German Expressionism'. However, where the relationship with film noir is concerned, it is proposed that this should be understood as the influence of Weimar cinema (or 'Weimar influence') to avoid conflating the study of film with that of art history, and in acknowledgement of the uniqueness of the film medium.[616] Third, the work of certain Weimar film workers is seen to have a direct influence upon noir. The films noirs of directors Lang, Siodmak, and Wilder are seen to be 'palimpsests'[617] wherein the conventions of Weimar cinema are overwritten onto those of the Hollywood crime thriller. While this is not an original contribution to the debate *per se*, the preferred inferences of the various close readings are intended to provide fresh insight into the 'Weimar influence' upon film noir. Fourth, and finally, by focusing upon the films themselves, and upon the Weimar production context, in place of the 'imaginary' links with the rise of fascism, the thesis concludes that *Caligari* can be seen to challenge rather than acquiesce to authority. Furthermore, it is also concluded that, in terms of noir's

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[614] Ibid., p.5.

[615] Ibid., pp.9-10.

[616] Chapter One, 'Weimar Cinema, German Expressionism and film noir', p.47.

[617] M. Bould, *Film Noir: From Berlin to Sin City*, p.32; ibid., p.74.

Weimar legacy, Weimar film production provides a precedent for a commercially viable yet radical type of film-making.[618]

**Chapter Two, '"Dead Man Walking": adapting *Double Indemnity*'**, considers Paramount's adaptation of Cain's second novel from a variety of critical perspectives. *Double Indemnity* is seen to be a 'watershed' both in terms of its historical importance *per se*, and its role in establishing film noir, in particular the phase known as 'Studio Expressionism'. The groundbreaking representation of illicit sex, fraud, and ensuing crimes of passion, as well as the sympathetic portrayal of the villainous Walter and Phyllis, broke with Hollywood convention, and in so doing, defined key elements of noir's generic practice. The thesis argues that the relationship with hard-boiled fiction was of central significance in both respects. While there is seen to be a dialogic and mutually beneficial relationship between hard-boiled fiction and film noir, there was also a fundamental incompatibility between the two modes regarding the representation of sex and violence.[619] Thus, the conventions of Hollywood film-making regarding the foregoing had to change in order for the film to be made. Paramount's achievement in adapting Cain's novel is thus seen to be twofold: it was a landmark in Hollywood history, ushering in a new, more permissive era of film-making, and it helped to establish a new genre, later known as film noir.

The evidence set out in Chapter Two thus corroborates the orthodox view that hard-boiled fiction was a major cultural influence upon noir. In terms of its original contribution to the subject, however, the thesis concludes that there is a diversity of influence at work. This diversity is seen to arise from the variations within the mode itself, for example, Cain's fatalistically determinist version, where the doomed central characters, in the thrall of 'animal instincts' and at the mercy of the capitalist system, commit crime, as against screenwriter Chandler's romantically idealistic variant, where the main characters exercise individual agency, display moral rectitude, resist their 'primal urges', and solve crime. Regarding the latter, the adapted character of insurance investigator Barton Keyes is seen to be subject to Chandler's influence, to endow the film with a 'moral centre' lacking in the novel, and to ensure that hegemonic order prevails, thereby providing the 'compensating

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[618] Ibid., pp.51-52.

[619] Chapter Two, '"Dead man walking: adapting *Double Indemnity*', p.81.

moral values' which Cain's work lacked but which 'the Code' demanded. The thesis thus refutes revisionist theories which question the influence of hard-boiled fiction on film noir and argues instead for a diversity of influence.

The Chapter also examines various representational conventions, particularly in light of the Weimar influence upon *Double Indemnity*, and the ways in which these are seen to contribute to the generic practice of noir. These include tropes such as the 'femme fatale', 'Portraits and Doubles', and the 'venetian blind' motif, but also the way in which the corporeality of the actors is seen to merge with the mise-en-scene and how this is seen to connote a loss of individual agency.[620] The use of location shooting and the encounter between realism and Weimar-influenced 'expressionism' is also discussed.[621]

Chapter Two also considers the influence of the Hollywood Gangster cycle upon film noir by means of an analysis of *Scarface* (Hawks, 1932). It is discussed how the purported realism of the depiction of the urban environment in gangster films, and the notorious 'real life' criminals operating within it, merges with a stylised and stereotypical mode of representation.[622] In this way, audiences acquire a familiarity with the conventions of the genre, rather than the 'realities' of organised crime, thereby deriving vicarious pleasure from 'generic verisimilitude', that is, the similarities between *Scarface* and other gangster movies, rather than 'cultural verisimilitude', or, the likeness to 'real life' gangland activity. It is argued that the audience appeal of the 'Studio Expressionist' noir, as represented by films such as *Double Indemnity*, also derives partly from the vicarious pleasure of 'inhabiting' the world of villains one may imagine resemble 'the real thing', characters who are thoroughly bad and yet decidedly glamorous, amidst settings conjured largely on a studio lot but which include glimpses of the 'real' America. In addition, Walter's character in *Double Indemnity* is seen to have a precedent in the tragic anti-hero of the Gangster cycle, both in terms of his

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[620] Ibid., pp.98-102.

[621] Ibid., pp.102-104.

[622] Ibid., pp.113-115.

urban 'flanerie', affording panoramic views of part-real, part-imaginary American cities, and due to the fact that he must pay 'the ultimate price' for his transgressions and excesses.[623]

In terms of the inter-relationships between the Gangster cycle, film noir, and hard-boiled fiction, the thesis concludes that, in addition to the urban 'flaneur' in gangster movies, Walter Neff's character has several literary precedents, namely, Walter Huff in the source novel, Frank Chambers in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and Chandler's Philip Marlowe. The thesis also concludes that these cinematic and literary precedents are seen to provide a further instance of the dialogic exchange between the hard-boiled mode and Hollywood.[624]

The Chapter also discusses the use of a 'cross' motif in *Scarface* and the recurrence of a similar device in *Double Indemnity*, both of which are seen to represent a character's recent or impending demise. Besides its use in film noir, then, the motif is seen to have a number of precedents, including in the Gangster cycle, in Weimar cinema, given the prevalence of 'graphic marks' in Weimar films such as Lang's *M* (1931),[625] and also in the work of Hawks.

The thesis therefore concurs with the established viewpoint that both Weimar cinema and the Hollywood Gangster cycle are seen to be influential upon *Double Indemnity* and film noir, particularly the 'Studio Expressionist' phase. Further, the thesis concludes that Hawks's work is also seen to have an influence upon noir, both indirectly due to the connections with *Scarface* and the Gangster picture, and also directly, in that he directed the 1946 noir *The Big Sleep*. Following on from the discussion of the Weimar influence, this situates noir's generic practice within the context of the Hollywood genre system, in addition to its European 'roots'. The perceived influence of Hawks on film noir is discussed further in the summary of Chapter Four.

**Chapter Three, '"The price of fornication": adapting *The Postman Always Rings Twice*'**, examines the development of film noir through the analysis and discussion of MGM's 1946 adaptation of Cain's first novel. It is argued that the film is seen to apply and consolidate generic practice, as determined by earlier 'Studio Expressionist' noirs, particularly *Double*

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[623] Ibid., pp.122-123.

[624] Ibid., p.123.

[625] Ibid., p.116.

*Indemnity*. However, the Chapter also highlights certain conflicts with noir's emergent generic practice. These are seen to be due to a degree of incompatibility between the MGM ethos and 'house style' and noir, and to the studio's efforts to accommodate the PCA.

The Chapter begins with a close reading of the intertextual relationship between the novel and the film. This analysis is intended to highlight the modifications which took place during the adaptation process and to determine possible reasons why these changes were made. The analysis focuses upon the representation of the two main characters, Frank Chambers and Cora Smith. Following on from Chapter Two, which examines the variations within the hard-boiled mode, particularly the ideological differences between Cain and Chandler and how these are seen to affect Paramount's adaptation of *Double Indemnity*, the focus in this chapter is upon the variations within Cain's work *per se*, and the impact this is seen to have upon the MGM film. While Cain's representation of the 'male victim' and 'femme fatale' in *Double Indemnity* is much in keeping with the stylised representation of gender which characterises the hard-boiled mode in general, and which helped define the tropes of film noir, the characters of Frank and Cora in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* are seen to bear a much clearer imprint of the literary Naturalism seen to influence the author. Rather than representing Frank as Cora's victim, it is argued that both characters are shown as 'victims', both of their desire for each other, and the circumstances of the Great Depression.[626]

While Cain's approach proved attractive to European film-makers such as Pierre Chenal and Luchino Visconti, both of whom had adapted Cain's first novel in 1939 and 1943 respectively, the chapter argues that the lack of a justifying moral framework, and thus the unembellished portrayal of sex, violence, and criminal psychology, were in clear conflict with the Hollywood Production Code, even after Paramount's successful adaptation of *Double Indemnity*. It is concluded that the combination of the relatively conservative ethos of MGM on the one hand, and a source novel which was even more frank in its representation of illicit sex and murder than *Double Indemnity* on the other, accounts for significant variations between the source text and film.[627]

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[626] Chapter Three: '"The price of fornication": adapting *The Postman Always Rings Twice*', p.129.

[627] Ibid., p.128.

As a counterpoint to MGM's treatment of Cain's novel, the Chapter also includes a comparative analysis between *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and Visconti's *Ossessione*, a film seen to confront and develop the Naturalist-inspired themes of the Cain text. The chapter goes on to explore how the hard-boiled mode and film noir are seen to be products of the exchanges taking place internationally during the interwar years between Modernism and realist art practices, and how Cain's work attracted film-makers from Europe and America alike due to the unflinchingly realist approach to themes of global significance, that is, its depiction of the 'realities' of modern life, such as 'migration', 'displacement', and economic hardship.[628]

While this applies in theory to film noir adaptations, it is argued that such a radical approach to film-making was in conflict, not merely with 'the Code' but also with the conservative MGM ethos, which, in turn, is seen to be representative of the values – both in production terms, but also morally speaking – of 'classical' Hollywood. These conflicts, that is, between Hollywood tradition and the potentially subversive new genre, are seen to be exemplified by MGM's decision to represent Cora as 'virtuous' and 'virginal' on the one hand, and as a 'femme fatale' on the other. Rather than cast doubt upon the film's noir status, however, it is concluded that the perceived conflict regarding the representation of the 'femme fatale' is indicative of the competing discourses within the adaptation process, that is, between the conventions of film noir and 'classical' Hollywood, and as such can be seen to endorse arguments for the emergence of a new genre.

**Chapter Four, 'The advent of noir style: "Portraits and Doubles" and the "femme fatale"'**, examines the evolution of film noir's generic practice, and aims to situate it within the history of cinema, and in relation to the Hollywood genre system. To this purpose, it explores the work of several directors, including Fritz Lang, Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, and Robert Siodmak. Regarding the way in which 'the advent of noir style' relates to the relationship between film noir and hard-boiled fiction, the Chapter discusses the way in which the adaptation process is seen to involve a number of determinants, or 'discourses', including cinematic as well as literary influences. The thesis proposes that one must view the various 'discourses' in the adaptation process in relation to each other, and that this is in

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[628] Ibid., p.155.

order to determine the degree to which each 'discourse', including the relationship between noir and hard-boiled fiction, is seen to affect the adaptation.[629] In terms of the cinematic influences involved in this process, the Chapter explores the various ways in which cinema responds to its own traditions and conforms to its own conventions.

In this regard, it is argued that the use of 'Portraits and Doubles' in Lang's *The Woman in the Window* (1944) and *Scarlet Street* (1945) to connote conflict and 'division' in a character's identity can be seen to have precedents in Weimar cinema, for example, Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924).[630] Also, Lang is seen to reference his own work, as evidenced by the replication of a shot from *M* (1931) in *The Woman in the Window*.[631] Furthermore, it is argued that both *The Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street* subject the production and reception of the image to scrutiny by means of a self-reflexive commentary on the respective representational processes of film and painting. As discussed further below, a similar commentary is seen to occur in Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase* (1945).

The thesis therefore concludes that the 'Studio Expressionist' noirs concerned are given to a self-reflexive commentary upon the production of the cinematic image.[632] In addition, it is also concluded that Lang's work is seen to be influenced by Freudianism, and that this supports the argument that Freudianism, as well as Modernism in its various guises, including Surrealism, were international phenomena that influenced Hollywood film-makers and French critics alike.[633]

Regarding *Gilda*, the thesis argues that Columbia's 1946 film noir can be seen to exemplify 'Studio Expressionism' in its novel recombination of familiar elements, its frank, even daring, depiction of sexuality, and its stereotypical representation of gender, but also the self-reflexive manner in which the conventions of the 'femme fatale' and 'male victim' are seen

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[629] Chapter Four: 'The advent of noir style: "Portraits and Doubles" and the '"femme fatale"', p.167.

[630] Ibid., p.174.

[631] Ibid., pp.173-174.

[632] Ibid., p.172.

[633] Ibid., p.174.

to be treated.[634] The parodic song 'Put the Blame on Mame', where the eponymous heroine is held responsible for various disasters, and certain lines of dialogue given to Jonny Farrell (Glenn Ford), which are seen to provide a comprehensive précis of the 'male victim' character type, are cases in point.[635]

However, it is also argued that *Gilda* can be seen as a film in the traditions of Columbia studios and 'classical' Hollywood, for instance, in its 'glamorous' representation of the female lead, and that these conventions are seen to conflict to a degree with those of film noir.[636] Far from 'disallowing' its noir status, as with *The Postman Rings Twice* (1946) and *The Big Sleep* (1946), it is concluded that these conflicts can be seen to provide an indication of the competing discourses of film noir and 'classical' Hollywood.

The analysis of Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase* argues that Siodmak's period crime drama (or 'gothic noir') contains a self-reflexive representation of cinematic sex and violence, a characteristic which is seen to ally his work with that of fellow Weimar film worker Fritz Lang. The commentary is seen to be achieved via the juxtaposition of scenes from D.W. Griffith's *Sands of Dee* (1912), involving the death by drowning of a young woman, with a scene depicting the murder of a female character from the serial killer's point of view.[637] In a similar vein, *Phantom Lady* (1944), released in January 1944 – that is seven months before the genre-defining *Double Indemnity* – is seen to contain a self-reflexive commentary on the 'femme fatale'. However, Hitchcock's *Suspicion*, released in 1941, is also seen to involve a wittily ironic representation of gender identity, effectively 'mimicking' the conventions of the 'vamp' and anticipating those of noir's 'femme fatale'.

In view of the presence of such self-reflexive commentaries in the work of Lang, Siodmak, and Hitchcock, it is concluded that the two film noir tropes under discussion were well established prior to the 'birth' of the genre. Proceeding from this premise, the thesis also

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[634] Ibid., p.195.

[635] Ibid., pp.194-195.

[636] Ibid., pp.195-196.

[637] Ibid., p.198.

concludes that the generic practice of noir involves the use of pre-existing tropes, which are reconfigured in a novel way.[638]

This leads, in turn, to one of the main conclusions of the thesis. The analysis of the work of Lang, Siodmak, and Hitchcock provides a number of examples of the way in which the films concerned can be seen to respond to cinematic precedents. This is also seen to apply to the work of Howard Hawks, which, it is argued, exemplifies the 'self-referential' aspect of cinema. In addition to this, the Hollywood genre system itself stands as a monument to the novel recombination of pre-existing tropes. In that these precedents situate film noir within a film-historical context, the thesis concludes that they provide a compelling argument for the existence of noir as a Hollywood genre. Furthermore, it is concluded that the identification of the pre-existing elements of generic practice, allied with the analysis of the relationships between film and other forms of popular culture, such as those between noir and hard-boiled fiction, facilitates a better understanding of the way genres work.[639]

In relation to the above, the thesis also concludes that film noir can be seen to respond to cinematic tradition and convention in different ways. First, it can be seen to involve the direct referencing of former projects with which production staff had been involved, for example, Lang's referencing of *M* in *The Woman in the Window*, or Hawks and Furthman's referencing of *To Have and Have Not* in *The Big Sleep*. Second, it can take the form of a self-reflexive commentary upon the production and reception of the cinematic image, as is seen to occur in *The Woman in the Window*, *Scarlet Street*, and *The Spiral Staircase*, and upon cinematic tropes such as the 'femme fatale', as is seen to occur in *Phantom Lady* and *Gilda*. Third, and finally, the novel recombination of pre-existing cinematic sources is a main characteristic of the Hollywood genre system. In addition to this 'standard practice', however, there were a number of directors working in Hollywood at the time who were given to reference former projects in which they had participated, and to comment self-reflexively upon the art of film-making. Furthermore, where the 'novelty' of film noir is concerned, this is seen to be especially pronounced, given the studios' new-found freedoms in depicting 'adult' content.

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[638] Ibid., p.169.

[639] Ibid., p.169.

The Chapter also argues that the work of Alfred Hitchcock is seen to influence, and to run in parallel with, the generic practice of film noir. As with Lang, Hawks, and Siodmak, all of whom directed films noirs, his work is seen to share a number of characteristics with the genre. The thesis explores these common elements in relation to *Rebecca* (1940) and *Suspicion* (1941), including prominent aspects of the visual style, such as the use of 'Portraits and Doubles' and the representation of gender identity.[640]

The thesis concludes that Hitchcock's work, like that of Lang and Siodmak, is characteristically self-reflexive, as demonstrated by the use of 'Portraits and Doubles'. The scene involving Max de Winter (Laurence Olivier) in *Rebecca*, where a troubled and 'divided' Max is juxtaposed with a sequence from a home movie filmed while he and his new wife were on honeymoon, and where he appears to be the 'very image' of a happily married man, is a case in point.[641] Similarly, in *Suspicion*, the feckless and opportunistic Johnnie Aysgarth (Cary Grant) is shown looking at an oil portrait of his future father-in-law, General McLaidlaw (Cecil Hardwicke). In this instance, Johnnie is seen to be overshadowed, both literally and figuratively, by the 'very picture' of traditional masculinity.[642]

Proceeding from the analysis of *Rebecca* and *Suspicion*, the thesis concludes the following with regard to the use of 'Portraits and Doubles', both in relation to film noir, the work of Hitchcock, and the 'common ground' between the two. The use of the trope tends to involve a group of three in which one of the figures is 'doubled' with another. In summary, the third figure, represented by the portrait and/or double, is either: also physically present (*The Woman in the Window*, *Rebecca*); absent and alive (*Suspicion*); absent and dead (*Phantom Lady*, *Rebecca*); or absent, presumed dead, but actually alive (*Laura* and *Scarlet Street*).[643] In terms of how the 'doubling' relates to narrative themes, as in Max's case, it is seen to connote 'divisions', or conflicts, within the identity of one of the characters concerned. Furthermore, the self-reflexive use of 'images within images' is seen to be effective in subjecting the representational practices of cinema to scrutiny.

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[640] Ibid., pp.188-192; pp.211-213.

[641] Ibid., pp.188-189.

[642] Ibid., p.212.

[643] Ibid., pp.189-190.

The thesis also considers Orr's argument that the 'vexed relations'[644] between sense impressions and knowledge in which the spectator takes part via the process of 'perceptual doubling' are a central part of Hitchcock's work. The thesis concludes that the use of these techniques allies his work both with film noir and hard-boiled fiction, given the similarities between *Phantom Lady* and films such as *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), and moreover the congruence between this aspect of his work and that of the author of the hard-boiled source novel, Cornell Woolrich. This conclusion is endorsed by the fact that Hitchcock later adapted Woolrich's 1942 short story 'It had to be Murder' as *Rear Window* (1954).[645]

The various ways in which hard-boiled source material was interpreted in 'Studio Expressionist' noir, that is, the different types of intertextual relationship are also discussed. Returning to the work of Siodmak, the discussion of *The Killers* (1946) explores the way in which the adaptation takes the Hemingway short story from the *Men Without Women* collection merely as the starting point for the film's narrative, as opposed to *Phantom Lady*, which follows the text of Woolrich's hard-boiled novel closely, interpreting certain passages in a literal manner.[646] It is also argued that the RKO production team responsible for the seminal 'Studio Expressionist' noir *Murder My Sweet* (Dmytryk, 1944), adhered closely to the Chandler text, *Farewell, My Lovely*, in the representation of the trials of Philip Marlowe.[647] In the finest traditions of the hard-boiled detective, Chandler's Marlowe is drugged, pistol-whipped, and knocked unconscious, affording Dmytryk and his team ample opportunity to depict the Bay City environs from the bleary viewpoint of the beleaguered private eye, and to utilise a number of cinematic techniques and 'special effects' to visualise the dialogue and descriptive passages in the novel from the detective's point of view.

In addition, the thesis also argues that the character of Swede (Burt Lancaster) in *The Killers* is seen to be 'condensed' from a variety of literary and cinematic sources, including the 'hard-boiled heroes' Babe McCloor from Hammett's 1929 short 'Fly Paper' and Chandler's

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[644] J. Orr, *Hitchcock and Twentieth-Century Cinema* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), p.27; ibid., p.192.

[645] Ibid., pp.209-210.

[646] Ibid., p.202.

[647] Ibid., pp.202-203.

Moose Malloy from *Murder, My Sweet*, as well as the 'male victim', both of Siodmak's work *per se*, and of course noir's evolving practice.[648]

The analysis of the 1946 Warner Brothers adaptation of *The Big Sleep* is intended to provide an insight into the various 'discourses' involved in the adaptation process. Similarities between the themes and visual style of *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep* suggest that both films can be seen to be representative of the work of Hawks. The nature of the collaborative effort is also significant. Hawks worked with several personnel on both films, including screenwriters Faulkner and Furthman, cinematographer Sid Hickox, film editor Christian Nyby, executive producer Jack Warner, and the actors Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall.[649] It is argued that the 'intermingling' of these discourses accounts for the similarities between the dialogue and the referencing of scenes from the earlier film, and for the decision to transform the two novels into love stories.

Regarding visual style, the recurring 'equestrian' motif is seen to be part of Hawks's directorial style, which tends to involve the use of such 'visual gags'. However, it is also attributable to the 'knight' motif in the Chandler novel, and thus to the source text that is rooted in hard-boiled fiction. It is discussed how Krutnik views *The Big Sleep* to be 'resolutely classical'[650] while McCarthy comments that it is 'perilously close to a B Movie'.[651] It is also argued that Chandler's 'chivalry' and Hawks's valorisation of 'masculine virtues' are seen to be out-of-step with the times, and jar with the progressiveness of the new genre. It is concluded that this is due, one the one hand, to the competing discourses of the adaptation process, and on the other, to the 'watershed' moment in Hollywood film-making when traditional values, as formalised by 'the Code', were being made to look outmoded, for instance, by the innovative new crime series.[652]

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[648] Ibid., pp.199-201.

[649] Ibid., pp.227-228.

[650] Krutnik, In A Lonely Street, p.23; ibid., p.229.

[651] T. McCarthy, *Howard Hawks: The Grey Fox of Hollywood* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), p.386; ibid., pp.228.

[652] Ibid., pp.229-230.

*The Big Sleep*, like all films noirs, reflects the Hollywood genre system, and, at the same time, the convergence of generic practice and the director's body of work. The dominant factors in terms of the 'construction' are thus seen to be: directorial style, the partnership between Hawks and his screenwriters, the Hollywood studio, star, and genre systems and – last but not least – censorship. The prevalence of these discourses transforms Chandler's novel into a love story in the best traditions of Hawks, Warner Brothers, and Hollywood.

What else would one expect? In the final analysis, cinema responds to its own traditions, and conforms to its own conventions. However, while these conventions are unique to film, inhering in the medium, they are also closely related to those of other modes of popular culture, by which they are influenced, and which they, in turn, affect, as exemplified by the relationship between film noir and hard-boiled fiction. It is misleading, however, to refer to this relationship merely as 'dialogic' and 'mutually beneficial', as if the hard-boiled mode and Hollywood had always coalesced. If one's sole intention were to write a novel which, were it ever adapted in anything like its original state, would flout every one of Breen's guidelines, then one could not have done a better job than Cain (and if *The Postman Always Rings Twice* appears risqué, then it pales by comparison with *Serenade*, a novel so scandalous that it does actually seem as if it were written to defy film adaptation). The studios had never doubted the benefits to be gained from adapting the controversial novels of James M. Cain. The problem was: how to do it?

It may seem ironic that another hard-boiled author with a radically different outlook and writing style – a romantic idealist as opposed to a fatalist, with a flair for *double entendre* – helped Paramount to circumvent 'the Code', to adapt *Double Indemnity*, and to allow the relationship between the hard-boiled mode and Hollywood to be fully 'consummated'. However, if Joseph Breen found Cain's work to be in poor taste, then the same was true of Raymond Chandler, who once described its author as 'a Proust in greasy overalls' and 'the offal of literature', not because he wrote about 'dirty things', but because he did so 'in a dirty way'.[653] Who could have known that in Chandler's letter to Alfred Knopf lay concealed the solution to the studios' persistent and perplexing problem? It was not the 'adult' themes which constituted this problem, rather, the way in which Cain wrote about them. If one

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[653] MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, p.101; see Introduction, p.43.

were sufficiently skilled in the use of innuendo to bypass 'the Code', and furthermore, if one were able to imbue Cain's work with a degree of 'conventional morality', then the problem would be solved. This is precisely what Chandler and Wilder were able to achieve. In so doing, they helped to establish the foundations of film noir, and to alter the course of Hollywood history in the process.

The relationship between hard-boiled fiction and a new type of Hollywood crime thriller which evolved during the mid-1940s was a major factor in the industry's most allusive and elusive of genres 'becoming film noir'. In the wake of Paramount's success, the studios were able to realise more fully the dialogic relationship between one mode of popular culture, their own, which was subject to a stringent, constraining, and outmoded form of censorship, and another – 'pulp' fiction – which was not. Once the relationship flourished, film-makers were able to provide the visual means of articulating shared themes, such as the surrender of individual agency to obsessive desire, and the divisions within complex characters who were neither wholly good nor evil, but who hovered, humanly, between the two.

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