

Film Noir

Literally meaning “black,” the concept of “noir” was first applied in France to describe the British Gothic novel. It was later used in “Serie Noire,” a collection of American fiction, translated into French, including the writings of “hard-boiled” novelists such as Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Cornell Woolrich, James M. Cain and Horace McCoy. French film critics coined the term “film noir” by analogy with those literary works (many of which had been made into film). Many noir films were crafted by German and central European émigrés, trained in the UFA studios in the 1920s and early 1930s and influenced by German Expressionism. The noir ambience is dominated by low-key lighting, chiaroscuro effects and deep shadows, creating feelings of disorientation, loneliness and entrapment. Along with other critics, Paul Schrader feels that the cycle of “noir” films starts with John Huston’s *THE MALTESE FALCON* (1941), and begins to decline after Orson Welles’ *TOUCH OF EVIL* (1958). Within these years, noir directors included Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Robert Siodmak, Michael Curtiz, William Dieterle, and Otto Preminger. Titles such as *THE BIG SLEEP* (1946),



Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray in Billy Wilder’s classic *noir*, *Double Indemnity* (1944).

MURDER, MY SWEET (1944), and *KISS ME DEADLY* (1955) are examples of noir style and storyline. The classic *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* (1944) has been preserved by the UCLA Film and Television Archive.

The “noir” style periodically resurfaces as an

homage to these Hollywood classics. Though shot in color, American films like *BULLITT* (1968), *KLUTE* (1971), *CHINATOWN* (1974), *BODY HEAT* (1981) and the contemporary remakes of *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE* and *D.O.A.* are a tribute to the “noir” sensibility.

Film Noir

Films

(this is only a partial list – consult the Archive Research and Study Center for further listings)

Maltese Falcon (1941). Warner Bros. Director, Writer, John Huston. Based on the novel by Dashiell Hammett. Study Copy: VD610 M

Double Indemnity (1944). Paramount. Director, Billy Wilder. Writers, Billy Wilder and Raymond Chandler. Based on the novel by James M. Cain. Study Copy: VD67 M

Murder, My Sweet (1944). RKO. Director, Edward Dmytryk. Writer, John Paxton. Based on the novel *Farewell, My Lovely* by Raymond Chandler. Study Copy: VA3350 M

The Big Sleep (1946). Warner Bros. Director, Howard Hawks. Writers, William Faulkner, Leigh Brackett and Jules Furthman. Based on the novel by Raymond Chandler. Study Copy: DVD116 M

Gilda (1946). Columbia. Director, Charles Vidor. Writer, Marion Parsonnet. Study Copy: VA1399 M

The Killers (1946). Universal. Director, Robert Siodmak. Writers, Anthony Veiller and John Huston. Study Copy: VA10739 M

Postman Always Rings Twice (1946). Loew's Inc. Director, Tay Garnett. Writers, Harry Ruskin and Niven Busch. Study Copy: VA19052 M

Gun Crazy (1949). United Artists. Director, Joseph H. Lewis. Writers, MacKinlay Kantor and Millard Kaufman. Study Copy: VA20193 M

Night and the City (1950). 20th-Century Fox. Director, Jules Dassin. Writer, Joe Eisinger. Study Copy: VA2995 M

Sunset Boulevard (1950). Paramount. Director, Billy Wilder. Writers, Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder and D.M. Marshman, Jr. Study Copy: VD570 M

Kiss Me Deadly (1955). Parklane Pictures, Inc. Director, Robert Aldrich. Writer, A.I. Bezzerides. Study Copy: VD727 M

Touch of Evil (1958). Universal. Director, Writer, Orson Welles. Study Copy: VD611 M

Chinatown (1974). Long Road Productions. Director, Roman Polanski. Writer, Robert Towne. Study Copy: VD597 M

Postman Always Rings Twice (1981). MGM. Director, Bob Rafelson. Writer, David Mamet. Study Copy: VD553 M

Print Resources

(for more information consult the UCLA Arts Library)

Hirsch, Foster. *Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2001.

Keaney, Michael F. *Film Noir Guide: Films of the Classic Era, 1940-1959*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2003.

Silver, Alain and James Ursini, eds. *Film Noir Reader*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1996.