

= Film noir =

The film noir genre generally refers to mystery and crime dramas produced from the early 1940s to the late 1950s . Movies of this genre were characteristically shot in black and white , and featured stories involving femmes fatales , doomed heroes or anti @-@ heroes , and tough , cynical detectives .

The term film noir , French for " black film " ( literal ) or " dark film " ( closer meaning ) , first applied to Hollywood films by French critic Nino Frank in 1946 , was unrecognized by most American film industry professionals of that era . Cinema historians and critics defined the category retrospectively . Before the notion was widely adopted in the 1970s , many of the classic films noir were referred to as " melodramas " . Whether film noir qualifies as a distinct genre is a matter of ongoing debate among scholars .

Film noir encompasses a range of plots : the central figure may be a private eye ( *The Big Sleep* ) , a plainclothes policeman ( *The Big Heat* ) , an aging boxer ( *The Set @-@ Up* ) , a hapless grifter ( *Night and the City* ) , a law @-@ abiding citizen lured into a life of crime ( *Gun Crazy* ) , or simply a victim of circumstance ( *D.O.A.* ) . Although film noir was originally associated with American productions , films now so described have been made around the world . Many pictures released from the 1960s onward share attributes with film noir of the classical period , and often treat its conventions self @-@ referentially . Some refer to such latter @-@ day works as neo @-@ noir .

= = Problems of definition = =

The questions of what defines film noir , and what sort of category it is , provoke continuing debate . " We 'd be oversimplifying things in calling film noir oneiric , strange , erotic , ambivalent , and cruel [ ? ] " ? this set of attributes constitutes the first of many attempts to define film noir made by French critics Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton in their 1955 book *Panorama du film noir américain 1941 ? 1953* ( *A Panorama of American Film Noir* ) , the original and seminal extended treatment of the subject . They emphasize that not every film noir embodies all five attributes in equal measure ? one might be more dreamlike ; another , particularly brutal . The authors ' caveats and repeated efforts at alternative definition have been echoed in subsequent scholarship : in the more than five decades since , there have been innumerable further attempts at definition , yet in the words of cinema historian Mark Bould , film noir remains an " elusive phenomenon [ ? ] always just out of reach " .

Though film noir is often identified with a visual style , unconventional within a Hollywood context , that emphasizes low @-@ key lighting and unbalanced compositions , films commonly identified as noir evidence a variety of visual approaches , including ones that fit comfortably within the Hollywood mainstream . Film noir similarly embraces a variety of genres , from the gangster film to the police procedural to the gothic romance to the social problem picture ? any example of which from the 1940s and 1950s , now seen as noir 's classical era , was likely to be described as a " melodrama " at the time .

While many critics refer to film noir as a genre itself , others argue that it can be no such thing . While noir is often associated with an urban setting , many classic noirs take place in small towns , suburbia , rural areas , or on the open road ; so setting cannot be its genre determinant , as with the Western . Similarly , while the private eye and the femme fatale are character types conventionally identified with noir , the majority of film noirs feature neither ; so there is no character basis for genre designation as with the gangster film . Nor does film noir rely on anything as evident as the monstrous or supernatural elements of the horror film , the speculative leaps of the science fiction film , or the song @-@ and @-@ dance routines of the musical .

A more analogous case is that of the screwball comedy , widely accepted by film historians as constituting a " genre " : the screwball is defined not by a fundamental attribute , but by a general disposition and a group of elements , some ? but rarely and perhaps never all ? of which are found in each of the genre 's films . However , because of the diversity of noir ( much greater than that of the screwball comedy ) , certain scholars in the field , such as film historian Thomas Schatz , treat it

as not a genre but a " style " . Alain Silver , the most widely published American critic specializing in film noir studies , refers to film noir as a " cycle " and a " phenomenon " , even as he argues that it has ? like certain genres ? a consistent set of visual and thematic codes . Other critics treat film noir as a " mood " , characterize it as a " series " , or simply address a chosen set of films they regard as belonging to the noir " canon " . There is no consensus on the matter .

= = Background = =

= = = Cinematic sources = = =

Film noir 's aesthetics are deeply influenced by German Expressionism , an artistic movement of the 1910s and 1920s that involved theater , photography , painting , sculpture , and architecture , as well as cinema . The opportunities offered by the booming Hollywood film industry , and , later , the threat of growing Nazi power , led to the emigration of many important film artists working in Germany who had either been directly involved in the Expressionist movement or studied with its practitioners . Fritz Lang 's *M* ( 1931 ) , shot only a few years before his departure from Germany , is among the first major crime films of the sound era to join a characteristically noirish visual style with a noir @-@ type plot , one in which the protagonist is a criminal ( as are his most successful pursuers ) . Directors such as Lang , Robert Siodmak , and Michael Curtiz brought a dramatically shadowed lighting style and a psychologically expressive approach to visual composition , or mise @-@ en @-@ scène , with them to Hollywood , where they would make some of the most famous of classic noirs .

By 1931 , Curtiz had already been in Hollywood for half a decade , making as many as six films a year . Movies of his such as *20 @,@ 000 Years in Sing Sing* ( 1932 ) and *Private Detective 62* ( 1933 ) are among the early Hollywood sound films arguably classifiable as noir ? scholar Marc Vernet offers the latter as evidence that dating the initiation of film noir to 1940 or any other year is " arbitrary " . Giving Expressionist @-@ affiliated filmmakers particularly free stylistic rein were Universal horror pictures such as *Dracula* ( 1931 ) , *The Mummy* ( 1932 ) ? the former photographed and the latter directed by the Berlin @-@ trained Karl Freund ? and *The Black Cat* ( 1934 ) , directed by Austrian émigré Edgar G. Ulmer . The Universal horror that comes closest to noir , both in story and sensibility , however , is *The Invisible Man* ( 1933 ) , directed by Englishman James Whale and photographed by American Arthur Edeson . Edeson would subsequently photograph *The Maltese Falcon* ( 1941 ) , widely regarded as the first major film noir of the classic era .

The Vienna @-@ born but largely American @-@ raised Josef von Sternberg was directing in Hollywood at the same time . Films of his such as *Shanghai Express* ( 1932 ) and *The Devil Is a Woman* ( 1935 ) , with their hothouse eroticism and baroque visual style , specifically anticipate central elements of classic noir . The commercial and critical success of Sternberg 's silent *Underworld* ( 1927 ) was largely responsible for spurring a trend of Hollywood gangster films . Successful films in that genre such as *Little Caesar* ( 1931 ) , *The Public Enemy* ( 1931 ) , and *Scarface* ( 1932 ) demonstrated that there was an audience for crime dramas with morally reprehensible protagonists . An important , and possibly influential , cinematic antecedent to classic noir was 1930s French poetic realism , with its romantic , fatalistic attitude and celebration of doomed heroes . The movement 's sensibility is mirrored in the Warner Bros. drama *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* ( 1932 ) , a key forerunner of noir . Among those films not themselves considered films noir , perhaps none had a greater effect on the development of the genre than *Citizen Kane* ( 1941 ) , directed by Orson Welles . Its visual intricacy and complex , voiceover @-@ driven narrative structure are echoed in dozens of classic films noir .

Italian neorealism of the 1940s , with its emphasis on quasi @-@ documentary authenticity , was an acknowledged influence on trends that emerged in American noir . *The Lost Weekend* ( 1945 ) , directed by Billy Wilder , another Vienna @-@ born , Berlin @-@ trained American auteur , tells the story of an alcoholic in a manner evocative of neorealism . It also exemplifies the problem of classification : one of the first American films to be described as a film noir , it has largely

disappeared from considerations of the field . Director Jules Dassin of *The Naked City* ( 1948 ) pointed to the neorealists as inspiring his use of on @-@ location photography with nonprofessional extras . This semidocumentary approach characterized a substantial number of noirs in the late 1940s and early 1950s . Along with neorealism , the style had a homegrown precedent , specifically cited by Dassin , in director Henry Hathaway 's *The House on 92nd Street* ( 1945 ) , which demonstrated the parallel influence of the cinematic newsreel .

= = = Literary sources = = =

The primary literary influence on film noir was the hardboiled school of American detective and crime fiction , led in its early years by such writers as Dashiell Hammett ( whose first novel , *Red Harvest* , was published in 1929 ) and James M. Cain ( whose *The Postman Always Rings Twice* appeared five years later ) , and popularized in pulp magazines such as *Black Mask* . The classic film noirs *The Maltese Falcon* ( 1941 ) and *The Glass Key* ( 1942 ) were based on novels by Hammett ; Cain 's novels provided the basis for *Double Indemnity* ( 1944 ) , *Mildred Pierce* ( 1945 ) , *The Postman Always Rings Twice* ( 1946 ) , and *Slightly Scarlet* ( 1956 ; adapted from Love 's *Lovely Counterfeit* ) . A decade before the classic era , a story by Hammett was the source for the gangster melodrama *City Streets* ( 1931 ) , directed by Rouben Mamoulian and photographed by Lee Garmes , who worked regularly with Sternberg . Wedding a style and story both with many noir characteristics , released the month before Lang 's *M* , *City Streets* has a claim to being the first major film noir .

Raymond Chandler , who debuted as a novelist with *The Big Sleep* in 1939 , soon became the most famous author of the hardboiled school . Not only were Chandler 's novels turned into major noirs ? *Murder , My Sweet* ( 1944 ; adapted from *Farewell , My Lovely* ) , *The Big Sleep* ( 1946 ) , and *Lady in the Lake* ( 1947 ) ? he was an important screenwriter in the genre as well , producing the scripts for *Double Indemnity* , *The Blue Dahlia* ( 1946 ) , and *Strangers on a Train* ( 1951 ) . Where Chandler , like Hammett , centered most of his novels and stories on the character of the private eye , Cain featured less heroic protagonists and focused more on psychological exposition than on crime solving ; the Cain approach has come to be identified with a subset of the hardboiled genre dubbed " noir fiction " .

For much of the 1940s , one of the most prolific and successful authors of this often downbeat brand of suspense tale was Cornell Woolrich ( sometimes under the pseudonym George Hopley or William Irish ) . No writer 's published work provided the basis for more films noir of the classic period than Woolrich 's : thirteen in all , including *Black Angel* ( 1946 ) , *Deadline at Dawn* ( 1946 ) , and *Fear in the Night* ( 1947 ) .

Another crucial literary source for film noir was W. R. Burnett , whose first novel to be published was *Little Caesar* , in 1929 . It would be turned into a hit for Warner Bros. in 1931 ; the following year , Burnett was hired to write dialogue for *Scarface* , while *The Beast of the City* ( 1932 ) was adapted from one of his stories . At least one important reference work identifies the latter as a film noir despite its early date . Burnett 's characteristic narrative approach fell somewhere between that of the quintessential hardboiled writers and their noir fiction compatriots ? his protagonists were often heroic in their way , a way just happening to be that of the gangster . During the classic era , his work , either as author or screenwriter , was the basis for seven films now widely regarded as films noir , including three of the most famous : *High Sierra* ( 1941 ) , *This Gun for Hire* ( 1942 ) , and *The Asphalt Jungle* ( 1950 ) .

= = Classic period = =

= = = Overview = = =

The 1940s and 1950s are generally regarded as the " classic period " of American film noir . While *City Streets* and other pre @-@ WWII crime melodramas such as *Fury* ( 1936 ) and *You Only Live*

Once ( 1937 ) , both directed by Fritz Lang , are categorized as full @-@ fledged noir in Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward 's film noir encyclopedia , other critics tend to describe them as " proto @-@ noir " or in similar terms . The film now most commonly cited as the first " true " film noir is Stranger on the Third Floor ( 1940 ) , directed by Latvian @-@ born , Soviet @-@ trained Boris Ingster . Hungarian émigré Peter Lorre ? who had starred in Lang 's M ? was top @-@ billed , though he did not play the lead . He would play secondary roles in several other formative American noirs . Though modestly budgeted , at the high end of the B movie scale , Stranger on the Third Floor still lost its studio , RKO , \$ 56 @,@ 000 , almost a third of its total cost . Variety magazine found Ingster 's work " too studied and when original , lacks the flare to hold attention . It 's a film too arty for average audiences , and too humdrum for others . " Stranger on the Third Floor was not recognized as the beginning of a trend , let alone a new genre , for many decades .

Most of the films noir of the classic period were similarly low- and modestly budgeted features without major stars ? B movies either literally or in spirit . In this production context , writers , directors , cinematographers , and other craftsmen were relatively free from typical big @-@ picture constraints . There was more visual experimentation than in Hollywood filmmaking as a whole : the Expressionism now closely associated with noir and the semi @-@ documentary style that later emerged represent two very different tendencies . Narrative structures sometimes involved convoluted flashbacks uncommon in non @-@ noir commercial productions . In terms of content , enforcement of the Production Code ensured that no film character could literally get away with murder or be seen sharing a bed with anyone but a spouse ; within those bounds , however , many films now identified as noir feature plot elements and dialogue that were very risqué for the time .

Thematically , films noir were most exceptional for the relative frequency with which they centered on women of questionable virtue ? a focus that had become rare in Hollywood films after the mid @-@ 1930s and the end of the pre @-@ Code era . The signal film in this vein was Double Indemnity , directed by Billy Wilder ; setting the mold was Barbara Stanwyck 's unforgettable femme fatale , Phyllis Dietrichson ? an apparent nod to Marlene Dietrich , who had built her extraordinary career playing such characters for Sternberg . An A @-@ level feature all the way , the film 's commercial success and seven Oscar nominations made it probably the most influential of the early noirs . A slew of now @-@ renowned noir " bad girls " would follow , such as those played by Rita Hayworth in Gilda ( 1946 ) , Lana Turner in The Postman Always Rings Twice ( 1946 ) , Ava Gardner in The Killers ( 1946 ) , and Jane Greer in Out of the Past ( 1947 ) . The iconic noir counterpart to the femme fatale , the private eye , came to the fore in films such as The Maltese Falcon ( 1941 ) , with Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade , and Murder , My Sweet ( 1944 ) , with Dick Powell as Philip Marlowe . Other seminal noir sleuths served larger institutions , such as Dana Andrews ' police detective in Laura ( 1944 ) , Edmond O 'Brien 's insurance investigator in The Killers , and Edward G. Robinson 's government agent in The Stranger ( 1946 ) .

The prevalence of the private eye as a lead character declined in film noir of the 1950s , a period during which several critics describe the form as becoming more focused on extreme psychologies and more exaggerated in general . A prime example is Kiss Me Deadly ( 1955 ) ; based on a novel by Mickey Spillane , the best @-@ selling of all the hardboiled authors , here the protagonist is a private eye , Mike Hammer . As described by Paul Schrader , " Robert Aldrich 's teasing direction carries noir to its sleaziest and most perversely erotic . Hammer overturns the underworld in search of the ' great whatsit ' [ which ] turns out to be ? joke of jokes ? an exploding atomic bomb . " Orson Welles 's baroquely styled Touch of Evil ( 1958 ) is frequently cited as the last noir of the classic period . Some scholars believe film noir never really ended , but continued to transform even as the characteristic noir visual style began to seem dated and changing production conditions led Hollywood in different directions ? in this view , post @-@ 1950s films in the noir tradition are seen as part of a continuity with classic noir . A majority of critics , however , regard comparable films made outside the classic era to be something other than genuine film noirs . They regard true film noir as belonging to a temporally and geographically limited cycle or period , treating subsequent films that evoke the classics as fundamentally different due to general shifts in filmmaking style and latter @-@ day awareness of noir as a historical source for allusion .

While the inceptive noir, *Stranger on the Third Floor*, was a B picture directed by a virtual unknown, many of the films noir still remembered were A @-@ list productions by well @-@ known film makers. Debuting as a director with *The Maltese Falcon* ( 1941 ), John Huston followed with *Key Largo* ( 1948 ) and *The Asphalt Jungle* ( 1950 ). Opinion is divided on the noir status of several Alfred Hitchcock thrillers from the era ; at least four qualify by consensus : *Shadow of a Doubt* ( 1943 ), *Notorious* ( 1946 ), *Strangers on a Train* ( 1951 ) and *The Wrong Man* ( 1956 ). Otto Preminger 's success with *Laura* ( 1944 ) made his name and helped demonstrate noir 's adaptability to a high @-@ gloss 20th Century @-@ Fox presentation . Among Hollywood 's most celebrated directors of the era , arguably none worked more often in a noir mode than Preminger ; his other noirs include *Fallen Angel* ( 1945 ), *Whirlpool* ( 1949 ), *Where the Sidewalk Ends* ( 1950 ) ( all for Fox ) and *Angel Face* ( 1952 ). A half @-@ decade after *Double Indemnity* and *The Lost Weekend*, Billy Wilder made *Sunset Boulevard* ( 1950 ) and *Ace in the Hole* ( 1951 ), noirs that were not so much crime dramas as satires on Hollywood and the news media . In *A Lonely Place* ( 1950 ) was Nicholas Ray 's breakthrough ; his other noirs include his debut, *They Live by Night* ( 1948 ) and *On Dangerous Ground* ( 1952 ), noted for their unusually sympathetic treatment of characters alienated from the social mainstream .

Orson Welles had notorious problems with financing but his three film noirs were well budgeted : *The Lady from Shanghai* ( 1947 ) received top @-@ level , " prestige " backing , while *The Stranger*, his most conventional film and *Touch of Evil*, an unmistakably personal work , were funded at levels lower but still commensurate with headlining releases . Like *The Stranger*, Fritz Lang 's *The Woman in the Window* ( 1945 ) was a production of the independent International Pictures . Lang 's follow @-@ up, *Scarlet Street* ( 1945 ), was one of the few classic noirs to be officially censored : filled with erotic innuendo , it was temporarily banned in Milwaukee , Atlanta and New York State . *Scarlet Street* was a semi @-@ independent , cosponsored by Universal and Lang 's Diana Productions , of which the film 's co @-@ star , Joan Bennett , was the second biggest shareholder . Lang , Bennett and her husband , the Universal veteran and Diana production head Walter Wanger , made *Secret Beyond the Door* ( 1948 ) in similar fashion .

Before he was forced abroad by political persecution , Jules Dassin made two classic noirs that also straddled the major ? independent line : *Brute Force* ( 1947 ) and the influential documentary @-@ style *The Naked City* were developed by producer Mark Hellinger , who had an " inside / outside " contract with Universal similar to Wanger 's . Years earlier , working at Warner Bros. , Hellinger had produced three films for Raoul Walsh , the proto @-@ noirs *They Drive by Night* ( 1940 ), *Manpower* ( 1941 ) and *High Sierra* ( 1941 ), now regarded as a seminal work in noir 's development . Walsh had no great name during his half @-@ century as a director but his noirs *White Heat* ( 1949 ) and *The Enforcer* ( 1951 ) had A @-@ list stars and are seen as important examples of the cycle . Other directors associated with top @-@ of @-@ the @-@ bill Hollywood film noirs include Edward Dmytryk ( *Murder , My Sweet* [ 1944 ] , *Crossfire* [ 1947 ] ) ? the first important noir director to fall prey to the industry blacklist ? as well as Henry Hathaway ( *The Dark Corner* [ 1946 ] , *Kiss of Death* [ 1947 ] ) and John Farrow ( *The Big Clock* [ 1948 ] , *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* [ 1948 ] ) .

Most of the Hollywood films considered to be classic noirs , fall into the category of " B movie " . Some were Bs in the most precise sense , produced to run on the bottom of double bills by a low @-@ budget unit of one of the major studios or by one of the smaller Poverty Row outfits , from the relatively well @-@ off Monogram to shakier ventures such as Producers Releasing Corporation ( PRC ) . Jacques Tourneur had made over thirty Hollywood Bs ( a few now highly regarded , most forgotten ) before directing the A @-@ level *Out of the Past*, described by scholar Robert Ottoson as " the ne plus ultra of forties film noir " . Movies with budgets a step up the ladder , known as " intermediates " by the industry , might be treated as A or B pictures depending on the circumstances . Monogram created Allied Artists in the late 1940s to focus on this sort of production . Such films have long been colloquially known as B movies . Robert Wise ( *Born to Kill* [ 1947 ] , *The Set @-@ Up* [ 1949 ] ) and Anthony Mann ( *T @-@ Men* [ 1947 ] and *Raw Deal* [ 1948 ] ) each made a series

of impressive intermediates , many of them noirs , before graduating to steady work on big @-@ budget productions . Mann did some of his most celebrated work with cinematographer John Alton , a specialist in what James Naremore called " hypnotic moments of light @-@ in @-@ darkness " . He Walked by Night ( 1948 ) , shot by Alton and though credited solely to Alfred Werker , directed in large part by Mann , demonstrates their technical mastery and exemplifies the late 1940s trend of " police procedural " crime dramas . Put out , like other Mann @-@ Alton noirs , by the small Eagle @-@ Lion company , it was the inspiration for the Dragnet series , which debuted on radio in 1949 and television in 1951 .

Several directors associated with noir built well @-@ respected oeuvres largely at the B @-@ movie / intermediate level . Samuel Fuller 's brutal , visually energetic films such as Pickup on South Street ( 1953 ) and Underworld U.S.A. ( 1961 ) earned him a unique reputation ; his advocates praise him as " primitive " and " barbarous " . Joseph H. Lewis directed noirs as diverse as Gun Crazy ( 1950 ) and The Big Combo ( 1955 ) . The former ? whose screenplay was written by the blacklisted Dalton Trumbo , disguised by a front ? features a bank hold @-@ up sequence shown in an unbroken take of over three minutes that was influential . The Big Combo was shot by John Alton and took the shadowy noir style to its outer limits . The most distinctive films of Phil Karlson ( The Phenix City Story [ 1955 ] and The Brothers Rico [ 1957 ] ) tell stories of vice organized on a monstrous scale . The work of other directors in this tier of the industry , such as Felix E. Feist ( The Devil Thumbs a Ride [ 1947 ] , Tomorrow Is Another Day [ 1951 ] ) , has become obscure . Edgar G. Ulmer spent most of his Hollywood career working at B studios and once in a while on projects that achieved intermediate status ; for the most part , on unmistakable Bs . In 1945 , while at PRC , he directed a noir cult classic , Detour . Ulmer 's other noirs include Strange Illusion ( 1945 ) , also for PRC ; Ruthless ( 1948 ) , for Eagle @-@ Lion , which had acquired PRC the previous year and Murder Is My Beat ( 1955 ) , for Allied Artists .

A number of low- and modestly @-@ budgeted noirs were made by independent , often actor @-@ owned , companies contracting with larger studios for distribution . Serving as producer , writer , director and top @-@ billed performer , Hugo Haas made films like Pickup ( 1951 ) and The Other Woman ( 1954 ) . It was in this way that accomplished noir actress Ida Lupino established herself as the sole female director in Hollywood during the late 1940s and much of the 1950s . She does not appear in the best @-@ known film she directed , The Hitch @-@ Hiker ( 1953 ) , developed by her company , The Filmakers , with support and distribution by RKO . It is one of the seven classic film noirs produced largely outside of the major studios that have been chosen for the United States National Film Registry . Of the others , one was a small @-@ studio release : Detour . Four were independent productions distributed by United Artists , the " studio without a studio " : Gun Crazy ; Kiss Me Deadly ; D.O.A. ( 1950 ) , directed by Rudolph Maté and Sweet Smell of Success ( 1957 ) , directed by Alexander Mackendrick . One was an independent distributed by MGM , the industry leader : Force of Evil ( 1948 ) , directed by Abraham Polonsky and starring John Garfield , both of whom were blacklisted in the 1950s . Independent production usually meant restricted circumstances but Sweet Smell of Success , despite the plans of the production team , was clearly not made on the cheap , though like many other cherished A @-@ budget noirs , it might be said to have a B @-@ movie soul .

Perhaps no director better displayed that spirit than the German @-@ born Robert Siodmak , who had already made a score of films before his 1940 arrival in Hollywood . Working mostly on A features , he made eight films now regarded as classic @-@ era film noirs ( a figure matched only by Lang and Mann ) . In addition to The Killers , Burt Lancaster 's debut and a Hellinger / Universal co @-@ production , Siodmak 's other important contributions to the genre include 1944 's Phantom Lady ( a top @-@ of @-@ the @-@ line B and Woolrich adaptation ) , the ironically titled Christmas Holiday ( 1944 ) , and Cry of the City ( 1948 ) . Criss Cross ( 1949 ) , with Lancaster again the lead , exemplifies how Siodmak brought the virtues of the B @-@ movie to the A noir . In addition to the relatively looser constraints on character and message at lower budgets , the nature of B production lent itself to the noir style for economic reasons : dim lighting saved on electricity and helped cloak cheap sets ( mist and smoke also served the cause ) ; night shooting was often compelled by hurried production schedules ; plots with obscure motivations and intriguingly elliptical transitions

were sometimes the consequence of hastily written scripts , of which there was not always enough time or money to shoot every scene . In *Criss Cross* , Siodmak achieved these effects with purpose , wrapping them around Yvonne De Carlo , playing the most understandable of femme fatales , Dan Duryea , in one of his many charismatic villain roles and Lancaster as an ordinary laborer turned armed robber , doomed by a romantic obsession .

= = Outside the United States = =

Although the term " film noir " was originally coined to describe Hollywood movies , film noir was an international phenomenon . Even before the beginning of the generally accepted classic period , there were films made far from Hollywood that can be seen in retrospect as film noirs , for example , the French productions *Pépé le Moko* ( 1937 ) , directed by Julien Duvivier , and *Le Jour se lève* ( 1939 ) , directed by Marcel Carné . In addition , Mexico experienced a vibrant film noir period from roughly 1946 to 1952 , around the same time film noir was blossoming in the U.S.

During the classic period , there were are many films produced in Europe , particularly in France , that share elements of style , theme , and sensibility with American film noirs and may themselves be included in the genre 's canon . In certain cases , the interrelationship with Hollywood noir is obvious : American @-@ born director Jules Dassin moved to France in the early 1950s as a result of the Hollywood blacklist , and made one of the most famous French film noirs , *Rififi* ( 1955 ) . Other well @-@ known French films often classified as noir include *Quai des Orfèvres* ( 1947 ) and *Les Diaboliques* ( 1955 ) , both directed by Henri @-@ Georges Clouzot ; *Casque d 'Or* ( 1952 ) and *Touchez pas au grisbi* ( 1954 ) , both directed by Jacques Becker ; and *Ascenseur pour l 'échafaud* ( 1958 ) , directed by Louis Malle . French director Jean @-@ Pierre Melville is widely recognized for his tragic , minimalist film noirs ? *Bob le flambeur* ( 1955 ) , from the classic period , was followed by *Le Doulos* ( 1962 ) , *Le deuxième souffle* ( 1966 ) , *Le Samouraï* ( 1967 ) , and *Le Cercle rouge* ( 1970 ) .

Scholar Andrew Spicer argues that British film noir evidences a greater debt to French poetic realism than to the expressionistic American mode of noir . Examples of British noir from the classic period include *Brighton Rock* ( 1947 ) , directed by John Boulting ; *They Made Me a Fugitive* ( 1947 ) , directed by Alberto Cavalcanti ; *The Small Back Room* ( 1948 ) , directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger ; *The October Man* ( 1950 ) , directed by Roy Ward Baker ; and *Cast a Dark Shadow* ( 1955 ) , directed by Lewis Gilbert . Terence Fisher directed several low @-@ budget thrillers in a noir mode for Hammer Film Productions , including *The Last Page* ( a.k.a. *Man Bait* ; 1952 ) , *Stolen Face* ( 1952 ) , and *Murder by Proxy* ( a.k.a. *Blackout* ; 1954 ) . Before leaving for France , Jules Dassin had been obliged by political pressure to shoot his last English @-@ language film of the classic noir period in Great Britain : *Night and the City* ( 1950 ) . Though it was conceived in the United States and was not only directed by an American but also stars two American actors ? Richard Widmark and Gene Tierney ? it is technically a UK production , financed by 20th Century @-@ Fox 's British subsidiary . The most famous of classic British noirs is director Carol Reed 's *The Third Man* ( 1949 ) , from a screenplay by Graham Greene . Set in Vienna immediately after World War II , it also stars two American actors , Joseph Cotten and Orson Welles , who had appeared together in *Citizen Kane* .

Elsewhere , Italian director Luchino Visconti adapted Cain 's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as *Osessione* ( 1943 ) , regarded both as one of the great noirs and a seminal film in the development of neorealism . ( This was not even the first screen version of Cain 's novel , having been preceded by the French *Le Dernier tournant* in 1939 . ) In Japan , the celebrated Akira Kurosawa directed several films recognizable as film noirs , including *Drunken Angel* ( 1948 ) , *Stray Dog* ( 1949 ) , *The Bad Sleep Well* ( 1960 ) , and *High and Low* ( 1963 ) .

Among the first major neo @-@ noir films ? the term often applied to films that consciously refer back to the classic noir tradition ? was the French *Tirez sur le pianiste* ( 1960 ) , directed by François Truffaut from a novel by one of the gloomiest of American noir fiction writers , David Goodis . Noir crime films and melodramas have been produced in many countries in the post @-@ classic area . Some of these are quintessentially self @-@ aware neo @-@ noirs ? for example , *Il Conformista* (

1969 ; Italy ) , Der Amerikanische Freund ( 1977 ; Germany ) , The Element of Crime ( 1984 ; Denmark ) , As Tears Go By ( 1988 ; Hong Kong ) , and El Aura ( 2005 ; Argentina ) . Others simply share narrative elements and a version of the hardboiled sensibility associated with classic noir , such as The Castle of Sand ( 1974 ; Japan ) , Insomnia ( 1997 ; Norway ) , Croupier ( 1998 ; UK ) , Blind Shaft ( 2003 ; China ) , and The Square ( 2008 ; Australia ) .

= = Neo @-@ noir and echoes of the classic mode = =

The neo @-@ noir film genre developed mid @-@ way into the Cold War . This cinematological trend reflected much of the cynicism and the possibility of nuclear annihilation of the era . This new genre introduced innovations that were not available with the earlier noir films . The violence was also more potent than in earlier noir films .

= = = 1960s and 1970s = = =

While it is hard to draw a line between some of the noir films of the early 1960s such as Blast of Silence ( 1961 ) and Cape Fear ( 1962 ) and the noirs of the late 1950s , new trends emerged in the post @-@ classic era . The Manchurian Candidate ( 1962 ) , directed by John Frankenheimer , Shock Corridor ( 1962 ) , directed by Samuel Fuller , and Brainstorm ( 1965 ) , directed by experienced noir character actor William Conrad , all treat the theme of mental dispossession within stylistic and tonal frameworks derived from classic film noir . The Manchurian Candidate examined the situation of American prisoners of war ( POWs ) during the Korean War . These incidents that occurred during the war as well as post @-@ war incidents that ensued , functioned as an inspiration for a different " subgenre of Cold War Noir " . The television series The Fugitive ( 1963 ? 67 ) brought classic noir themes and mood to the small screen for an extended run .

In a different vein , films began to appear that self @-@ consciously acknowledged the conventions of classic film noir as historical archetypes to be revived , rejected , or reimagined . These efforts typify what came to be known as neo @-@ noir . Though several late classic noirs , Kiss Me Deadly in particular , were deeply self @-@ knowing and post @-@ traditional in conception , none tipped its hand so evidently as to be remarked on by American critics at the time . The first major film to overtly work this angle was French director Jean @-@ Luc Godard 's À bout de souffle ( Breathless ; 1960 ) , which pays its literal respects to Bogart and his crime films while brandishing a bold new style for a new day . In the United States , Arthur Penn ( Mickey One [ 1964 ] , drawing inspiration from Truffaut 's Tirez sur le pianiste and other French New Wave films ) , John Boorman ( Point Blank [ 1967 ] , similarly caught up , though in the Nouvelle vague 's deeper waters ) , and Alan J. Pakula ( Klute [ 1971 ] ) directed films that knowingly related themselves to the original film noirs , inviting audiences in on the game .

A manifest affiliation with noir traditions ? which , by its nature , allows different sorts of commentary on them to be inferred ? can also provide the basis for explicit critiques of those traditions . In 1973 , director Robert Altman flipped off noir piety with The Long Goodbye . Based on the novel by Raymond Chandler , it features one of Bogart 's most famous characters , but in iconoclastic fashion : Philip Marlowe , the prototypical hardboiled detective , is replayed as a hapless misfit , almost laughably out of touch with contemporary mores and morality . Where Altman 's subversion of the film noir mythos was so irreverent as to outrage some contemporary critics , around the same time Woody Allen was paying affectionate , at points idolatrous homage to the classic mode with Play It Again , Sam ( 1972 ) . The " blaxploitation " film Shaft ( 1971 ) , wherein Richard Roundtree plays the titular African @-@ American private eye , John Shaft , takes conventions from classic noir .

The most acclaimed of the neo @-@ noirs of the era was director Roman Polanski 's 1974 Chinatown . Written by Robert Towne , it is set in 1930s Los Angeles , an accustomed noir locale nudged back some few years in a way that makes the pivotal loss of innocence in the story even crueler . Where Polanski and Towne raised noir to a black apogee by turning rearward , director Martin Scorsese and screenwriter Paul Schrader brought the noir attitude crashing into the present day with Taxi Driver ( 1976 ) , a crackling , bloody @-@ minded gloss on bicentennial America . In



1978 , Walter Hill wrote and directed *The Driver* , a chase film as might have been imagined by Jean-Pierre Melville in an especially abstract mood .

Hill was already a central figure in 1970s noir of a more straightforward manner , having written the script for director Sam Peckinpah 's *The Getaway* ( 1972 ) , adapting a novel by pulp master Jim Thompson , as well as for two tough private eye films : an original screenplay for Hickey & Boggs ( 1972 ) and an adaptation of a novel by Ross Macdonald , the leading literary descendant of Hammett and Chandler , for *The Drowning Pool* ( 1975 ) . Some of the strongest 1970s noirs , in fact , were unwinking remakes of the classics , " neo " mostly by default : the heartbreaking *Thieves Like Us* ( 1973 ) , directed by Altman from the same source as Ray 's *They Live by Night* , and *Farewell , My Lovely* ( 1975 ) , the Chandler tale made classically as *Murder , My Sweet* , remade here with Robert Mitchum in his last notable noir role . Detective series , prevalent on American television during the period , updated the hardboiled tradition in different ways , but the show conjuring the most noir tone was a horror crossover touched with shaggy , Long Goodbye ? style humor : *Kolchak : The Night Stalker* ( 1974 ? 75 ) , featuring a Chicago newspaper reporter investigating strange , usually supernatural occurrences .

== 1980s and 1990s ==

The turn of the decade brought Scorsese 's black and white *Raging Bull* ( cowritten by Schrader ) ; an acknowledged masterpiece ? the American Film Institute ranks it as the greatest American film of the 1980s and the fourth greatest of all time ? it is also a retreat , telling a story of a boxer 's moral self destruction that recalls in both theme and visual ambience noir dramas such as *Body and Soul* ( 1947 ) and *Champion* ( 1949 ) . From 1981 , the popular *Body Heat* , written and directed by Lawrence Kasdan , invokes a different set of classic noir elements , this time in a humid , erotically charged Florida setting ; its success confirmed the commercial viability of neo noir , at a time when the major Hollywood studios were becoming increasingly risk averse . The mainstreaming of neo noir is evident in such films as *Black Widow* ( 1987 ) , *Shattered* ( 1991 ) , and *Final Analysis* ( 1992 ) . Few neo noirs have made more money or more wittily updated the tradition of the noir double entendre than *Basic Instinct* ( 1992 ) , directed by Paul Verhoeven and written by Joe Eszterhas . The film also demonstrates how neo noir 's polychrome palette can reproduce many of the expressionistic effects of classic black and white noir . *Poison Ivy* ( 1992 ) makes use of similar devices executed in *Basic Instinct* , including a shady , seductive femme fatale with ulterior motives .

Among big budget auteurs , Michael Mann has worked frequently in a neo noir mode , with such films as *Thief* ( 1981 ) and *Heat* ( 1995 ) and the TV series *Miami Vice* ( 1984 ? 89 ) and *Crime Story* ( 1986 ? 88 ) . Mann 's output exemplifies a primary strain of neo noir , in which classic themes and tropes are revisited in a contemporary setting with an up to date visual style and rock- or hip hop ? based musical soundtrack . Like *Chinatown* , its more complex predecessor , Curtis Hanson 's Oscar winning *L.A. Confidential* ( 1997 ) , based on the James Ellroy novel , demonstrates an opposite tendency ? the deliberately retro film noir ; its tale of corrupt cops and femmes fatales is seemingly lifted straight from a film of 1953 , the year in which it is set . Director David Fincher followed the immensely successful neo noir *Seven* ( 1995 ) with a film that developed into a cult favorite after its original , disappointing release : *Fight Club* ( 1999 ) is a sui generis mix of noir aesthetic , perverse comedy , speculative content , and satiric intent .

Working generally with much smaller budgets , brothers Joel and Ethan Coen have created one of the most extensive film oeuvres influenced by classic noir , with films such as *Blood Simple* ( 1984 ) and *Fargo* ( 1996 ) , considered by some a supreme work in the neo noir mode . The Coens cross noir with other generic lines in the gangster drama *Miller 's Crossing* ( 1990 ) ? loosely based on the Dashiell Hammett novels *Red Harvest* and *The Glass Key* ? and the comedy *The Big Lebowski* ( 1998 ) , a tribute to Chandler and an homage to Altman 's version of *The Long Goodbye* . The characteristic work of David Lynch combines film noir tropes with scenarios driven by disturbed characters such as the sociopathic criminal played by Dennis Hopper in *Blue Velvet* ( 1986 ) and the delusionary protagonist of *Lost Highway* ( 1997 ) . The *Twin Peaks* cycle , both TV

series ( 1990 ? 91 ) and film , *Fire Walk with Me* ( 1992 ) , puts a detective plot through a succession of bizarre spasms . David Cronenberg also mixes surrealism and noir in *Naked Lunch* ( 1991 ) , inspired by the William S. Burroughs novel .

Perhaps no American neo @-@ noirs better reflect the classic noir A @-@ movie @-@ with @-@ a @-@ B @-@ movie @-@ soul than those of director @-@ writer Quentin Tarantino ; neo @-@ noirs of his such as *Reservoir Dogs* ( 1992 ) and *Pulp Fiction* ( 1994 ) display a relentlessly self @-@ reflexive , sometimes tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek sensibility , similar to the work of the New Wave directors and the Coens . Other films from the era readily identifiable as neo @-@ noir ( some retro , some more au courant ) include director John Dahl 's *Kill Me Again* ( 1989 ) , *Red Rock West* ( 1992 ) , *The Last Seduction* ( 1993 ) , *To Die For* ( 1995 ) , and *A Perfect Murder* ( 1998 ) ; four adaptations of novels by Jim Thompson ? *The Kill @-@ Off* ( 1989 ) , *After Dark* , *My Sweet* ( 1990 ) , *The Grifters* ( 1990 ) , and the remake of *The Getaway* ( 1994 ) ; and many more , including adaptations of the work of other major noir fiction writers : *The Hot Spot* ( 1990 ) , from *Hell Hath No Fury* , by Charles Williams ; *Miami Blues* ( 1990 ) , from the novel by Charles Willeford ; and *Out of Sight* ( 1998 ) , from the novel by Elmore Leonard . Several films by director @-@ writer David Mamet involve noir elements : *House of Games* ( 1987 ) , *Homicide* ( 1991 ) , *The Spanish Prisoner* ( 1997 ) , and *Heist* ( 2001 ) . On television , *Remington Steele* ( 1982 ? 87 ) and *Moonlighting* ( 1985 ? 89 ) paid homage to classic noir while demonstrating an unusual appreciation of the sense of humor often found in the original cycle . Between 1983 and 1989 , Mickey Spillane 's hardboiled private eye Mike Hammer was played with wry gusto by Stacy Keach in a series and several stand @-@ alone television films ( an unsuccessful revival followed in 1997 ? 98 ) . The British miniseries *The Singing Detective* ( 1986 ) , written by Dennis Potter , tells the story of a mystery writer named Philip Marlow ; widely considered one of the finest neo @-@ noirs in any medium , some critics rank it among the greatest television productions of all time .

= = = 2000s and 2010s = = =

The Coens referenced the noir tradition again with *The Man Who Wasn 't There* ( 2001 ) ; a black @-@ and @-@ white crime melodrama set in 1949 , it features a scene apparently staged to mirror the one from *Out of the Past* pictured above . Lynch 's *Mulholland Drive* ( 2001 ) continued in his characteristic vein , making the classic noir setting of Los Angeles the venue for a noir @-@ inflected psychological jigsaw puzzle . British @-@ born director Christopher Nolan 's black @-@ and @-@ white debut , *Following* ( 1998 ) , was an overt homage to classic noir . During the new century 's first decade , he was one of the leading Hollywood directors of neo @-@ noir with the acclaimed *Memento* ( 2000 ) and the remake of *Insomnia* ( 2002 ) .

Director Sean Penn 's *The Pledge* ( 2001 ) , though adapted from a very self @-@ reflexive novel by Friedrich Dürrenmatt , plays noir comparatively straight , to devastating effect . Screenwriter David Ayer updated the classic noir bad @-@ cop tale , typified by *Shield for Murder* ( 1954 ) and *Rogue Cop* ( 1954 ) , with his scripts for *Training Day* ( 2001 ) and , adapting a story by James Ellroy , *Dark Blue* ( 2002 ) ; he later wrote and directed the even darker *Harsh Times* ( 2006 ) . Michael Mann 's *Collateral* ( 2004 ) features a performance by Tom Cruise as an assassin in the lineage of *Le Samouraï* . The torments of *The Machinist* ( 2004 ) , directed by Brad Anderson , evoke both *Fight Club* and *Memento* . In 2005 , Shane Black directed *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* , basing his screenplay in part on a crime novel by Brett Halliday , who published his first stories back in the 1920s . The film plays with an awareness not only of classic noir but also of neo @-@ noir reflexivity itself .

With ultra @-@ violent films such as *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* ( 2002 ) and *Thirst* ( 2009 ) , Park Chan @-@ wook of South Korea has been the most prominent director outside of the United States to work regularly in a noir mode in the new millennium . The most commercially successful neo @-@ noir of this period has been *Sin City* ( 2005 ) , directed by Robert Rodriguez in extravagantly stylized black and white with the odd bit of color . The film is based on a series of comic books created by Frank Miller ( credited as the film 's codirector ) , which are in turn openly indebted to the works of Spillane and other pulp mystery authors . Another comic book adaptation

with similar style and elements is *The Spirit* ( 2008 ) . This film is adapted from the comic book of the same name originally created by cartoonist Will Eisner . Similarly , graphic novels provide the basis for *Road to Perdition* ( 2002 ) , directed by Sam Mendes , and *A History of Violence* ( 2005 ) , directed by David Cronenberg ; the latter was voted best film of the year in the annual Village Voice poll . Writer @-@ director Rian Johnson 's *Brick* ( 2005 ) , featuring present @-@ day high schoolers speaking a version of 1930s hardboiled argot , won the Special Jury Prize for Originality of Vision at the Sundance Film Festival . The television series *Veronica Mars* ( 2004 ? 7 ) also brought a youth @-@ oriented twist to film noir . Examples of this sort of generic crossover have been dubbed teen noir .

Classical neo @-@ noir examples in the 2010s include Kim Jee @-@ woon ? s *I Saw the Devil* ( 2010 ) , Fred Cavaye ? s *Point Blank* ( 2010 ) , Na Hong @-@ jin ? s *The Yellow Sea* ( 2010 ) and Nicolas Winding Refn ? s *Drive* ( 2011 ) .

= = Science fiction noir = =

In the post @-@ classic era , a significant trend in noir crossovers has involved science fiction . In Jean @-@ Luc Godard 's *Alphaville* ( 1965 ) , Lemmy Caution is the name of the old @-@ school private eye in the city of tomorrow . The *Groundstar Conspiracy* ( 1972 ) centers on another implacable investigator and an amnesiac named Welles . *Soylent Green* ( 1973 ) , the first major American example , portrays a dystopian , near @-@ future world via a self @-@ evidently noir detection plot ; starring Charlton Heston ( the lead in *Touch of Evil* ) , it also features classic noir standbys Joseph Cotten , Edward G. Robinson , and Whit Bissell . The film was directed by Richard Fleischer , who two decades before had directed several strong B noirs , including *Armored Car Robbery* ( 1950 ) and *The Narrow Margin* ( 1952 ) .

The cynical and stylish perspective of classic film noir had a formative effect on the cyberpunk genre of science fiction that emerged in the early 1980s ; the film most directly influential on cyberpunk was *Blade Runner* ( 1982 ) , directed by Ridley Scott , which pays evocative homage to the classic noir mode ( Scott would subsequently direct the poignant noir crime melodrama *Someone to Watch Over Me* [ 1987 ] ) . Scholar Jamaluddin Bin Aziz has observed how " the shadow of Philip Marlowe lingers on " in such other " future noir " films as *12 Monkeys* ( 1995 ) , *Dark City* ( 1998 ) and *Minority Report* ( 2002 ) . Fincher 's feature debut was *Alien 3* ( 1992 ) , which evoked the classic noir jail film *Brute Force* .

David Cronenberg 's *Crash* ( 1996 ) , an adaptation of the speculative novel by J. G. Ballard , has been described as a " film noir in bruise tones " . The hero is the target of investigation in *Gattaca* ( 1997 ) , which fuses film noir motifs with a scenario indebted to *Brave New World* . *The Thirteenth Floor* ( 1999 ) , like *Blade Runner* , is an explicit homage to classic noir , in this case involving speculations about virtual reality . *The Animatrix* ( 2003 ) , based on the *The Matrix* trilogy , contains an anime short film in classic noir style titled " A Detective Story " which takes place within the story of the trilogy . Anime television series with science fiction noir themes include *Ghost in the Shell* , *Cowboy Bebop* ( 1998 ) , *The Big O* ( 1999 ) , and *Noir* ( 2001 ) .

The 2015 film *Ex Machina* puts a film noir spin on the Frankenstein mythos , with the femme fatale sentient android Ava manipulating outsider Caleb to perform a crime against her creator Nathan .

= = Parodies = =

Film noir has been parodied many times , in many manners . In 1945 , Danny Kaye starred in what appears to be the first intentional film noir parody , *Wonder Man* . That same year , Deanna Durbin was the singing lead in the comedic noir *Lady on a Train* , which makes fun of Woolrich @-@ brand wistful miserablism . Bob Hope inaugurated the private @-@ eye noir parody with *My Favorite Brunette* ( 1947 ) , playing a baby @-@ photographer who is mistaken for an ironfisted detective . In 1947 as well , *The Bowery Boys* appeared in *Hard Boiled Mahoney* , which had a similar mistaken @-@ identity plot ; they spoofed the genre once more in *Private Eyes* ( 1953 ) . Two RKO productions starring Robert Mitchum take film noir over the border into self @-@ parody : *The Big*

Steal ( 1949 ) , directed by Don Siegel , and His Kind of Woman ( 1951 ) . The " Girl Hunt " ballet in Vincente Minnelli 's The Band Wagon ( 1953 ) is a ten @-@ minute distillation of ? and play on ? noir in dance . The Cheap Detective ( 1978 ) , starring Peter Falk , is a broad spoof of several films , including the Bogart classics The Maltese Falcon and Casablanca . Carl Reiner 's black @-@ and @-@ white Dead Men Don 't Wear Plaid ( 1982 ) appropriates clips of classic noirs for a farcical pastiche , while his Fatal Instinct ( 1993 ) sends up noirs both classic ( Double Indemnity ) and neo ( Basic Instinct ) . Robert Zemeckis 's Who Framed Roger Rabbit ( 1988 ) develops a noir plot set in 1940s L.A. around a host of cartoon characters .

Noir parodies come in darker tones as well . Murder by Contract ( 1958 ) , directed by Irving Lerner , is a deadpan joke on noir , with a denouement as bleak as any of the films it kids . An ultra @-@ low @-@ budget Columbia Pictures production , it may qualify as the first intentional example of what is now called a neo @-@ noir film ; it was likely a source of inspiration for both Melville 's Le Samouraï and Scorsese 's Taxi Driver . Belying its parodic strain , The Long Goodbye 's final act is seriously grave . Taxi Driver caustically deconstructs the " dark " crime film , taking it to an absurd extreme and then offering a conclusion that manages to mock every possible anticipated ending ? triumphant , tragic , artfully ambivalent ? while being each , all at once . Flirting with splatter status even more brazenly , the Coens ' Blood Simple is both an exacting pastiche and a gross exaggeration of classic noir . Adapted by director Robinson Devor from a novel by Charles Willeford , The Woman Chaser ( 1999 ) sends up not just the noir mode but the entire Hollywood filmmaking process , with seemingly each shot staged as the visual equivalent of an acerbic Marlowe wisecrack .

In other media , the television series Sledge Hammer ! ( 1986 ? 88 ) lampoons noir , along with such topics as capital punishment , gun fetishism , and Dirty Harry . Sesame Street ( 1969 ? curr . ) occasionally casts Kermit the Frog as a private eye ; the sketches refer to some of the typical motifs of noir films , in particular the voiceover . Garrison Keillor 's radio program A Prairie Home Companion features the recurring character Guy Noir , a hardboiled detective whose adventures always wander into farce ( Guy also appears in the Altman @-@ directed film based on Keillor 's show ) . Firesign Theatre 's Nick Danger has trod the same not @-@ so @-@ mean streets , both on radio and in comedy albums . Cartoons such as Garfield 's Babes and Bullets ( 1989 ) and comic strip characters such as Tracer Bullet of Calvin and Hobbes have parodied both film noir and the kindred hardboiled tradition ? one of the sources from which film noir sprang and which it now overshadows .

= = Identifying characteristics = =

In their original 1955 canon of film noir , Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton identified twenty @-@ two Hollywood films released between 1941 and 1952 as core examples ; they listed another fifty @-@ nine American films from the period as significantly related to the field of noir . A half @-@ century later , film historians and critics had come to agree on a canon of approximately three hundred films from 1940 ? 58 . There remain , however , many differences of opinion over whether other films of the era , among them a number of well @-@ known ones , qualify as film noirs or not . For instance , The Night of the Hunter ( 1955 ) , starring Robert Mitchum in an acclaimed performance , is treated as a film noir by some critics , but not by others . Some critics include Suspicion ( 1941 ) , directed by Alfred Hitchcock , in their catalogues of noir ; others ignore it . Concerning films made either before or after the classic period , or outside of the United States at any time , consensus is even rarer .

To support their categorization of certain films as noirs and their rejection of others , many critics refer to a set of elements they see as marking examples of the mode . The question of what constitutes the set of noir 's identifying characteristics is a fundamental source of controversy . For instance , critics tend to define the model film noir as having a tragic or bleak conclusion , but many acknowledged classics of the genre have clearly happy endings ( e.g. , Stranger on the Third Floor , The Big Sleep , Dark Passage , and The Dark Corner ) , while the tone of many other noir denouements is ambivalent . Some critics perceive classic noir 's hallmark as a distinctive visual

style . Others , observing that there is actually considerable stylistic variety among noirs , instead emphasize plot and character type . Still others focus on mood and attitude . No survey of classic noir 's identifying characteristics can therefore be considered definitive . In the 1990s and 2000s , critics have increasingly turned their attention to that diverse field of films called neo @-@ noir ; once again , there is even less consensus about the defining attributes of such films made outside the classic period .

= = = Visual style = = =

The low @-@ key lighting schemes of many classic film noirs are associated with stark light / dark contrasts and dramatic shadow patterning ? a style known as chiaroscuro ( a term adopted from Renaissance painting ) . The shadows of Venetian blinds or banister rods , cast upon an actor , a wall , or an entire set , are an iconic visual in noir and had already become a cliché well before the neo @-@ noir era . Characters ' faces may be partially or wholly obscured by darkness ? a relative rarity in conventional Hollywood filmmaking . While black @-@ and @-@ white cinematography is considered by many to be one of the essential attributes of classic noir , the color films *Leave Her to Heaven* ( 1945 ) and *Niagara* ( 1953 ) are routinely included in noir filmographies , while *Slightly Scarlet* ( 1956 ) , *Party Girl* ( 1958 ) , and *Vertigo* ( 1958 ) are classified as noir by varying numbers of critics .

Film noir is also known for its use of low @-@ angle , wide @-@ angle , and skewed , or Dutch angle shots . Other devices of disorientation relatively common in film noir include shots of people reflected in one or more mirrors , shots through curved or frosted glass or other distorting objects ( such as during the strangulation scene in *Strangers on a Train* ) , and special effects sequences of a sometimes bizarre nature . Night @-@ for @-@ night shooting , as opposed to the Hollywood norm of day @-@ for @-@ night , was often employed . From the mid @-@ 1940s forward , location shooting became increasingly frequent in noir .

In an analysis of the visual approach of *Kiss Me Deadly* , a late and self @-@ consciously stylized example of classic noir , critic Alain Silver describes how cinematographic choices emphasize the story 's themes and mood . In one scene , the characters , seen through a " confusion of angular shapes " , thus appear " caught in a tangible vortex or enclosed in a trap . " Silver makes a case for how " side light is used ... to reflect character ambivalence " , while shots of characters in which they are lit from below " conform to a convention of visual expression which associates shadows cast upward of the face with the unnatural and ominous " .

= = = Structure and narrational devices = = =

Film noirs tend to have unusually convoluted story lines , frequently involving flashbacks and other editing techniques that disrupt and sometimes obscure the narrative sequence . Framing the entire primary narrative as a flashback is also a standard device . Voiceover narration , sometimes used as a structuring device , came to be seen as a noir hallmark ; while classic noir is generally associated with first @-@ person narration ( i.e. , by the protagonist ) , Stephen Neale notes that third @-@ person narration is common among noirs of the semidocumentary style . Neo @-@ noirs as varied as *The Element of Crime* ( surrealist ) , *After Dark* , *My Sweet* ( retro ) , and *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* ( meta ) have employed the flashback / voiceover combination .

Bold experiments in cinematic storytelling were sometimes attempted during the classic era : *Lady in the Lake* , for example , is shot entirely from the point of view of protagonist Philip Marlowe ; the face of star ( and director ) Robert Montgomery is seen only in mirrors . *The Chase* ( 1946 ) takes oneirism and fatalism as the basis for its fantastical narrative system , redolent of certain horror stories , but with little precedent in the context of a putatively realistic genre . In their different ways , both *Sunset Boulevard* and *D.O.A.* are tales told by dead men . Latter @-@ day noir has been in the forefront of structural experimentation in popular cinema , as exemplified by such films as *Pulp Fiction* , *Fight Club* , and *Memento* .

== Plots , characters , and settings ==

Crime , usually murder , is an element of almost all films noir ; in addition to standard @-@ issue greed , jealousy is frequently the criminal motivation . A crime investigation ? by a private eye , a police detective ( sometimes acting alone ) , or a concerned amateur ? is the most prevalent , but far from dominant , basic plot . In other common plots the protagonists are implicated in heists or con games , or in murderous conspiracies often involving adulterous affairs . False suspicions and accusations of crime are frequent plot elements , as are betrayals and double @-@ crosses . According to J. David Slocum , " protagonists assume the literal identities of dead men in nearly fifteen percent of all noir . " Amnesia is fairly epidemic ? " noir 's version of the common cold " , in the words of film historian Lee Server .

Films noir tend to revolve around heroes who are more flawed and morally questionable than the norm , often fall guys of one sort or another . The characteristic protagonists of noir are described by many critics as " alienated " ; in the words of Silver and Ward , " filled with existential bitterness " . Certain archetypal characters appear in many films noir ? hardboiled detectives , femme fatales , corrupt policemen , jealous husbands , intrepid claims adjusters , and down @-@ and @-@ out writers . Among characters of every stripe , cigarette smoking is rampant . From historical commentators to neo @-@ noir pictures to pop culture ephemera , the private eye and the femme fatale have been adopted as the quintessential film noir figures , though they do not appear in most films now regarded as classic noir . Of the twenty @-@ six National Film Registry noirs , in only four does the star play a private eye : The Maltese Falcon , The Big Sleep , Out of the Past , and Kiss Me Deadly . Just four others readily qualify as detective stories : Laura , The Killers , The Naked City , and Touch of Evil .

Film noir is often associated with an urban setting , and a few cities ? Los Angeles , San Francisco , New York , and Chicago , in particular ? are the location of many of the classic films . In the eyes of many critics , the city is presented in noir as a " labyrinth " or " maze " . Bars , lounges , nightclubs , and gambling dens are frequently the scene of action . The climaxes of a substantial number of films noir take place in visually complex , often industrial settings , such as refineries , factories , trainyards , power plants ? most famously the explosive conclusion of White Heat , set at a chemical plant . In the popular ( and , frequently enough , critical ) imagination , in noir it is always night and it always rains .

A substantial trend within latter @-@ day noir ? dubbed " film soleil " by critic D. K. Holm ? heads in precisely the opposite direction , with tales of deception , seduction , and corruption exploiting bright , sun @-@ baked settings , stereotypically the desert or open water , to searing effect . Significant predecessors from the classic and early post @-@ classic eras include The Lady from Shanghai ; the Robert Ryan vehicle Inferno ( 1953 ) ; the French adaptation of Patricia Highsmith 's The Talented Mr. Ripley , Plein soleil ( Purple Noon in the U.S. , more accurately rendered elsewhere as Blazing Sun or Full Sun ; 1960 ) ; and director Don Siegel 's version of The Killers ( 1964 ) . The tendency was at its peak during the late 1980s and 1990s , with films such as Dead Calm ( 1989 ) , After Dark , My Sweet ( 1990 ) , The Hot Spot ( 1990 ) , Delusion ( 1991 ) , Red Rock West ( 1993 ) and the television series Miami Vice .

== Worldview , morality , and tone ==

Film noir is often described as essentially pessimistic . The noir stories that are regarded as most characteristic tell of people trapped in unwanted situations ( which , in general , they did not cause but are responsible for exacerbating ) , striving against random , uncaring fate , and frequently doomed . The films are seen as depicting a world that is inherently corrupt . Classic film noir has been associated by many critics with the American social landscape of the era ? in particular , with a sense of heightened anxiety and alienation that is said to have followed World War II . In author Nicholas Christopher 's opinion , " it is as if the war , and the social eruptions in its aftermath , unleashed demons that had been bottled up in the national psyche . " Film noirs , especially those of the 1950s and the height of the Red Scare , are often said to reflect cultural paranoia ; Kiss Me

Deadly is the noir most frequently marshaled as evidence for this claim .

Film noir is often said to be defined by " moral ambiguity " , yet the Production Code obliged almost all classic noirs to see that steadfast virtue was ultimately rewarded and vice , in the absence of shame and redemption , severely punished ( however dramatically incredible the final rendering of mandatory justice might be ) . A substantial number of latter @-@ day noirs flout such conventions : vice emerges triumphant in films as varied as the grim Chinatown and the ribald Hot Spot .

The tone of film noir is generally regarded as downbeat ; some critics experience it as darker still ? " overwhelmingly black " , according to Robert Ottoson . Influential critic ( and filmmaker ) Paul Schrader wrote in a seminal 1972 essay that " film noir is defined by tone " , a tone he seems to perceive as " hopeless " . In describing the adaptation of Double Indemnity , noir analyst Foster Hirsch describes the " requisite hopeless tone " achieved by the filmmakers , which appears to characterize his view of noir as a whole . On the other hand , definitive film noirs such as The Big Sleep , The Lady from Shanghai , Scarlet Street and Double Indemnity itself are famed for their hardboiled repartee , often imbued with sexual innuendo and self @-@ reflexive humor .