ENG 381-Film Noirs: Visual Style and Fortune
William Thomas McBride
Wednesday 5:30-8:20p
Spring 2016
STV 101

Warning: The content of the books and films in this class are designed for mature audiences only. If issues of race, sex, violence, class, drugs, profanity or politics cause you discomfort or upset, please consider enrolling in a different class.

From ’40s Hollywood, film noir is disillusionment, alienation, and nihilism painted with German expressionism’s shadows and canted frames richly juxtaposed by European Neo-Realism. In this film and literature seminar we will immerse ourselves in this rich field of cultural inquiry (note the over 50 selected readings below). We’ll read as a class the “big three” noir novelists of the hard boiled tradition, Hammett, Chandler, and Cain, and two writers who pick up that noir thread 50 years later, Ellroy and Miller. We will study and discuss dedicated theoretical texts. And of course each week we will chronologically big screen the films listed below, asking, “Is film noir a genre?” Back in 1970 Raymond Durgnat in “Paint It Black: The Family Tree of the Film Noir (1970) [in Resources] argued "no," unlike the Western or gangster film, “film noir is not a genre,” rather it “takes us into the realm of classification by motif and tone.” We’ll see if these films evince a particular political ideology. What was the impact of the Hayes Office and McCarthy hearings on noir? In what ways can we theorize noir’s gender and racial codes? We will consider such Durgnat’s schemas as Crime as Social Criticism, Hostages of Fortune. Middle Class Murder, Pathologies and Psychopaths, as we develop eyes and ears attuned to noir style, learn the language with which to describe it, and apply that knowledge. A Harold K. Sage Foundation grant will bring the former international private detective and bestselling crime mystery author of the Harlan Donnally and Graham Gage series, Steven Gore (http://stevengore.com/books.php), to campus for a public lecture and participation in the seminar for a discussion of Chinatown, which will be screened at the Normal Theatre and open to the public. Given the enormity of Stevenson 101, I encourage you to invite interested friends and family to each Wednesday evening seminar. Look for noncompulsory continuations of weekly seminar discussions at one of the local hotel watering holes. Weekly 500 word posts; critical essay.
Films Noir

Pre-Noir

1 Slightly Honorable (Garnett 1939) F. G. Presnell 1/13

2 Stranger on the Third Floor (Ingster 1940) Frank Partos 1/20
Classic Noir

3 The Maltese Falcon (Huston 1941) Dashiell Hammett 1/27

4 Shadow of a Doubt (Hitchcock 1943) Gordon McDonnell (Story) Thornton Wilder (Screenplay) 2/3
5 *Double Indemnity* (Wilder 1944) James M. Cain 2/10

6 *Murder, My Sweet* (Dmytryk 44) Raymond Chandler *Farewell My Lovely* [complete novel in RESOURCES] 2/17
7 The Postman Always Rings Twice (Garnett 1946) James M. Cain
[complete novel in RESOURCES] 2/24

8 The Big Sleep (Hawks 1946) Raymond Chandler (novel) Wm Faulkner
(Screenplay) 3/2
9 Spring Break 3/9

10 Notorious (Hitchcock 1946) Ben Hecht (Screenplay) Clifford Odets (uncredited love scenes) 3/16
11 Out of the Past (Tourneur 1947) Daniel Mainwaring screenplay with Frank Fenton and an uncredited James M. Cain from Mainwaring’s novel Build My Gallows High published under pseudonym Geoffrey Homes 3/23
Post-Noir


14 *Chinatown* (Polanski 1974) Robert Towne 4/13

15 *Blue Velvet* (Lynch 1986) Lynch 4/20
16 L.A. Confidential (Hanson 1997) James Ellroy 4/27

Novels

Dashiell Hammett The Maltese Falcon (1929)
James M. Cain  *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934)
Raymond Chandler  *The Big Sleep* (1939)

Philip K. Dick  *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)
James Ellroy  
*L.A. Confidential* (1990)

Frank Miller  
*Sin City* (1991)
Documentaries

Film Noir: Bringing Darkness to Light (Leva 2006)

You Kill Me-Hollywood & Film Noir (Morris 1989) [in RESOURCES]
Secondary Readings


Broe, Dennis. *Film noir, American workers, and postwar Hollywood.* FL, 2009


Crowther, Bruce. *Film Noir: Reflections in a Dark Mirror.* Continuum, 1989.


Durgnat, Raymond. “Paint It Black: The Family Tree of the *Film Noir*” (1970)


Lummins, Suzanne. “(Never) Out of the Past: Film Noir and the Poetry of Lynda Hull” LARB November 17th, 2015 [in Resources & Materials]


---. *Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir*. St. Martin’s, 1998.


Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, eds. *Film Noir Reader*. Limelight. 1996.


