

INVESTIGATING FILM NOIR

BROADWAY

6th October – 8th December 2025



Tutor
Ian Brookes

Investigating Film Noir

This ten-week course is designed to investigate a series of questions about one of the most fascinating and complex categories of film. But why, you might ask, should it be necessary to 'investigate' film noir? After all, isn't it one of the most obviously recognizable categories of film? This may be true to some extent but there remain several questions about noir which invite further examination. 'It has always been easier to recognize a film noir than to define the term,' says film noir scholar James Naremore, and he has a point. Why, then, should it be so difficult to pin down a category which seems so obvious and familiar to us?

During this course we will be addressing such questions. Does 'film noir' refer to a specific period of film production? Is its use restricted to films from, say, the 1940s and 1950s, or can it be used to categorize films made today? Does it apply only to American films? What type of films does it designate? Is it a genre? Why is it known by a French term rather than an English one (why not simply 'black film')?

With an emphasis on the historical contexts of 'classic' film noir, we will be examining visual style and narrative themes; issues of gender, including such archetypal characterisations as the private eye and the femme fatale; influences and antecedents such as 'hard-boiled' fiction and German Expressionism; wartime and 'low-budget' noir; noir stars as Humphrey Bogart; and 'international noir'.

We will also probe the widely held view that film noir reflects something of a 'postwar malaise' in American society. Here, we will examine the place of film noir in wider cultural context and look at how it relates to other cultural forms. Finally, we will be considering what happened to noir after the 'classic' period through such generic concepts as 'neo-noir' and its emergence through other media such as television.

In our class sessions each week we will consider these questions through a range of film clips, related materials and class discussions. Like those private eyes from the classic film noirs of the 1940s, we will investigate the shadowy world of film noir itself.

Dr Ian Brookes has taught for many years in the Department of Cultural, Media and Visual Studies and, previously, in the School of American and Canadian Studies at the University of Nottingham. He is currently Visiting Assistant Professor in the University's School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies.

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Course Programme

- Week 1 (6th October) Defining Film Noir
- Week 2 (13th October) Noir Visual Style
- Week 3 (20th October) Noir Narrative Themes
- Week 4 (27th October) Gender in Noir
- Week 5 (3rd November) Wartime Noir
- Week 6 (10th November) Veteran Noir
- Week 7 (17th November) Cold War Noir
- Week 8 (24th November) Late Noir
- Week 9 (1st December) Neo-Noir
- Week 10 (8th December) International Noir

Course Reading

There is no required reading for the course but for anyone who would like to read up on the subject, see Ian Brookes, *Film Noir: A Critical Introduction* (Bloomsbury, 2017).

Further Reading

- Auerbach, Jonathan, *Dark Borders: Film Noir and American Citizenship* (Duke University Press, 2011).
- Biesen, Sheri Chinen, *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).
- Borde, Raymond, and Étienne Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir, 1941-1953* (1955; City Lights, 2002) trans. Paul Hammond.
- Bould, Mark, *Film Noir: From Berlin to Sin City* (Wallflower, 2005).
- Broe, Dennis, *Class, Crime and International Film Noir: Globalizing America's Dark Art* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- Brookes, Ian, *Film Noir: A Critical Introduction* (Bloomsbury, 2017).
- Buss, Robin, *French Film Noir* (Marion Boyars, 1994).
- Cameron, Ian, ed., *The Movie Book of Film Noir* (Studio Vista, 1992).

- Christopher, Nicholas, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City* (Owl, 1997).
- Conard, Mark T., ed., *The Philosophy of Film Noir* (University Press of Kentucky, 2005).
- Conard, Mark T., ed., *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir* (University Press of Kentucky, 2007).
- Copjec, Joan, ed., *Shades of Noir: A Reader* (Verso, 1993).
- Crowther, Bruce, *Film Noir: Reflections in a Dark Mirror* (Columbus, 1988).
- Deyo, Nathaniel, *Film Noir and the Possibilities of Hollywood* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
- Faison, Stephen, *Existentialism, Film Noir, and Hard-Boiled Fiction* (Cambria Press, 2008).
- Grant, John, *A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Film Noir: The Essential Reference Guide* (Limelight, 2013).
- Grant, Kevin, *Roots of Film Noir: Precursors from the Silent Era to the 1940s* (McFarland, 2022).
- Hare, William, *Pulp Fiction to Film Noir: The Great Depression and the Development of a Genre* (McFarland, 2012).
- Hirsch, Foster, *Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir* (Limelight, 1999).
- Hirsch, Foster, *Film Noir: The Dark Side of the Screen* (Da Capo, 1981).
- Horsley, Lee, *The Noir Thriller* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- James, Nick, 'Twenty-First Century Noir', *Sight & Sound*, 27th November, 2020.
<https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/deep-focus/twenty-first-century-noir>
- Kaplan, E. Ann, ed., *Women in Film Noir* (BFI, 1978).
- Krutnik, Frank, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (Routledge, 1991).
- Lyons, Arthur, *Death on the Cheap: The Lost B Movies of Film Noir!* (Da Capo, 2000).
- Marling, William, *The American Roman Noir: Hammett, Cain, and Chandler* (University of Georgia Press, 1995).
- Mayer, Geoff, and Brian McDonnell, *Encyclopedia of Film Noir* (Greenwood Press, 2000).
- Mitchell, Lee Clark, *Noir Fiction and Film: Diversions and Misdirections* (OUP, 2021).
- Muller, Eddie, *Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir* (Titan, 1998).
- Naremore, James, *Film Noir: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2019).
- Naremore, James, *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (University of California Press, 1998).
- Nicol, Bran, *The Private Eye: Detectives in the Movies* (Reaktion, 2013).
- O'Brien, Geoffrey, *Hardboiled America: Lurid Paperbacks and the Masters of Noir* (1981; Da Capo, 1997).
- Ottoson, Robert A *Reference Guide to the American Film Noir, 1940-1958* (Scarecrow Press, 1981).
- Palmer, R. Barton, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema: The American Film Noir* (Twayne,

- 1994).
- Petty, Homer B., and R. Barton Palmer, eds., *Film Noir* (EUP, 2016).
- Petty, Homer B., and R. Barton Palmer, eds., *International Film Noir* (EUP, 2016).
- Renzi, Thomas C., *Cornell Woolrich: From Pulp Noir to Film Noir* (McFarland, 2006).
- Robertson, Robin, *The Long Take* (Picador, 2018).
- Rolls, Alistair, and Deborah Walker, *French and American Noir: Dark Crossings* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- Schatz, Thomas, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (University of California Press, 1999).
- Santos, Marlisa, *The Dark Mirror: Psychiatry and Film Noir* (Lexington, 2011).
- Selby, Spencer, *Dark City: The Film Noir* (McFarland, 1884).
- Server, Lee, Ed Gorman, and Martin H. Greenberg, *The Big Book of Noir* (Carroll & Graff, 1998).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, *American Neo-Noir: The Movie Never Ends* (Applause, 2015).
- Silver, Alain, Elizabeth Ward, James Ursini and Robert Porfirio, eds., *Film Noir: The Encyclopedia* (Overlook Duckworth, 2010).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir* (Taschen, 2004).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Compendium: Key Selections from the Film Noir Reader Series* (Limelight, 2017).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, *Film Noir: Fatal Women* (Silman-James, 2022).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, *Film Noir Graphics: Where Danger Lives* (CreateSpace, 2012).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader* (Limelight, 1996).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader 2* (Limelight, 1999).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader 3: Interviews with Filmmakers of the Classic Noir Period* (Limelight, 2002).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader 4: The Crucial Films and Themes* (Limelight, 2004).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader 4: The Crucial Films and Themes* (Limelight, 2004).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, *From the Moment They Met It Was Murder: Double Indemnity and the Rise of Film Noir* (Running Press Adult, 2024).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, *L.A. Noir: The City as Character* (Santa Monica Press, 2005).
- Silver, Alain, and James Ursini, *The Noir Style* (Aurum Press, 1999).
- Spicer, Andrew, ed., *European Film Noir* (Manchester University Press, 2007).
- Spicer, Andrew, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir* (Scarecrow Press, 2010).
- Spicer, Andrew, and Helen Hanson, eds., *A Companion to Film Noir* (Wiley Blackwell, 2013).
- Stephens, Michael L., *Film Noir: A Comprehensive, Illustrated Reference to Movies, Terms and Persons* (McFarland, 2006).
- Telotte, J.P., *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (University of

Illinois Press, 1989).
Tuska, Jon, *Dark Cinema: American Film Noir in Cultural Perspective* (Westport
Greenwood Press, 1984).

Some Key Films Noir

Asphalt Jungle, The. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Huston, John, dir. 1950.
Big Sleep, The. USA: Warner Bros. Hawks, Howard, dir. 1946.
Blue Dahlia, The. USA: Paramount Pictures. Marshall, George, dir. 1946.
Crossfire. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Dmytryk, Edward, dir. 1947.
Detour. USA: PRC Pictures. Ulmer, Edgar G., dir. 1945.
D.O.A. USA: Cardinal Pictures. Maté, Rudoph, dir. 1950.
Double Indemnity. USA: Paramount Pictures. Wilder, Billy, dir. 1944.
Force of Evil. USA: Enterprise Studios/Roberts Productions. Polonsky, Abraham, dir.
1949.
Gilda. USA: Columbia Pictures. Vidor, Charles, dir. 1946.
In a Lonely Place. USA: Santana Pictures. Ray, Nicholas, dir. 1950.
The Killers. USA: Mark Hellinger Productions/Universal Pictures. Siodmak, Robert,
dir. 1946.
Maltese Falcon, The. USA: Warner Bros. Huston, John, dir. 1941.
Mildred Pierce. USA: Warner Bros. Curtiz, Michael, dir. 1945.
Murder, My Sweet. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Dmytryk, Edward, dir. 1944.
Out of the Past. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Tourneur, Jacques, dir. 1947.
Postman Always Rings Twice, The. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Garnett, Tay, dir.
1946.
Scarlet Street. USA: Universal Pictures. Lang, Fritz, dir. 1945.
Sorry, Wrong Number. USA: Hal Wallis Productions. Litvak, Anatole, dir. 1948.
Strangers on a Train. USA: Warner Bros. Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. 1951.
This Gun for Hire. USA: Paramount Pictures. Tuttle, Frank, dir. 1942.
Touch of Evil. USA: Universal-International Pictures. Welles, Orson, dir. 1958.
Wrong Man, The. USA: Warner Bros. Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. 1956.

Select Noir Filmography

Act of Violence. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Zinnemann, Fred, dir. 1949.
Asphalt Jungle, The. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Huston, John, dir. 1950.
Beware, My Lovely. USA: The Filmakers/RKO Radio Pictures. Horner, Harry, dir.
1952.
Big Clock, The. USA: Paramount Pictures. Farrow, John, dir. 1948.
Big Combo, The. USA: Theodora Productions/Security Pictures. Lewis, Joseph H.,
dir. 1955.

Big Heat, The. USA: Columbia Pictures. Lang, Fritz, dir. 1953.
Big Sleep, The. USA: Warner Bros. Hawks, Howard, dir. 1946.
Bigamist, The. USA: The Filmakers Productions. Lupino, Ida, dir. 1953.
Blue Dahlia, The. USA: Paramount Pictures. Marshall, George, dir. 1946.
Boomerang! USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Kazan, Elia, dir. 1947.
Border Incident. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Mann, Anthony, dir. 1949.
Call Northside 777. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Hathaway, Henry, dir. 1948.
Cape Fear. USA: Melville-Talbot Productions. Thompson, J. Lee, dir. 1962.
Caught. USA: Enterprise Productions. Ophuls, Max, dir. 1949.
Christmas Holiday. USA: Universal Pictures. Siodmak, Robert, dir. 1944.
Citizen Kane. USA: Mercury Productions/RKO Radio Pictures. Welles, Orson, dir. 1941.
Clash by Night. USA: Wald-Krasna Productions/RKO Radio Pictures. Lang, Fritz, dir. 1952,
Cornered. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Dmytryk, Edward, dir. 1945.
Criss Cross. USA: Universal-International Pictures. Siodmak, Robert, dir. 1949.
Crossfire. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Dmytryk, Edward, dir. 1947.
Cry of the City. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Siodmak, Robert, dir. 1948.
Dark City. USA: Paramount Pictures. Dieterle, William, dir. 1950.
Dark Corner, The. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Hathaway, Henry, dir. 1946.
Dark Mirror, The. USA: Inter-John. Siodmak, Robert, dir. 1946.
Dark Passage. USA: Warner Bros. Daves, Delmer, dir. 1947.
Dark Past. USA: Columbia Pictures. Maté, Rudolph, dir. 1948.
Dead Reckoning. USA: Columbia Pictures. Cromwell, John, dir. 1947.
Deadline at Dawn. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Clurman, Harold, dir. 1946.
Desperate. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Mann, Anthony, dir. 1947.
Desperate Hours, The. USA: Paramount Pictures. Wyler, William, dir. 1955.
Detour. USA: PRC Pictures. Ulmer, Edgar G., dir. 1945.
D.O.A. USA: Cardinal Pictures. Maté, Rudolph, dir. 1950.
Double Indemnity. USA: Paramount Pictures. Wilder, Billy, dir. 1944.
Experiment Perilous. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Tourneur, Jacques, dir. 1944.
Force of Evil. USA: Enterprise Studios/Roberts Productions. Polonsky, Abraham, dir. 1949.
Gaslight. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Cukor, George, dir. 1944.
Gilda. USA: Columbia Pictures. Vidor, Charles, dir. 1946.
Gun Crazy. USA: King Bros. Productions. Lewis, Joseph H., dir. 1950.
He Walked by Night. USA: Eagle-Lion Films. Werker, Alfred, dir. 1948.
High Wall, The. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Bernhardt, Curtis, dir. 1948.
Hitch-Hiker, The. USA: The Filmakers/RKO Radio Pictures. Lupino, Ida, dir. 1953.
House on 92nd Street, The. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Hathaway, Henry, dir. 1945.
I Walk Alone. USA: Hal Wallis Productions. Haskin, Byron, dir. 1948.
I Was a Communist for the FBI. USA: Warner Bros. Douglas, Gordon, dir. 1951.
In a Lonely Place. USA: Santana Pictures. Ray, Nicholas, dir. 1950.
Key Largo. USA: Warner Bros. Huston, John, dir. 1948.

The Killers. USA: Mark Hellinger Productions/Universal Pictures. Siodmak, Robert, dir. 1946.

Killer's Kiss. USA: Minotaur Productions. Kubrick, Stanley, dir. 1955.

Killing, The. USA: Harris-Kubrick Pictures. Kubrick, Stanley, dir. 1956.

Kiss Me Deadly. USA: Parklane Pictures. Aldrich, Robert, dir. 1955.

Kiss of Death. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Hathaway, Henry, dir. 1947.

Kiss the Blood Off My Hands. USA: Norma Productions. Foster, Norman, dir. 1948.

Lady from Shanghai, The. USA: Columbia Pictures. Welles, Orson, dir. 1948.

Lady in the Lake, The. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Montgomery, Robert, dir. 1947.

Laura. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Preminger, Otto, dir. 1944.

Leave Her to Heaven. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Stahl, John M., dir. 1946.

Locket, The. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Brahm, John, dir. 1947.

Lost Weekend, The. USA: Paramount Pictures. Wilder, Billy, dir. 1945.

Maltese Falcon, The. USA: Warner Bros. Huston, John, dir. 1941.

Mildred Pierce. USA: Warner Bros. Curtiz, Michael, dir. 1945.

Murder, My Sweet. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Dmytryk, Edward, dir. 1944.

My Name Is Julia Ross. USA: Columbia Pictures. Lewis, Joseph H., dir. 1945.

Mystery Street. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Sturges, John, dir. 1950.

Naked City, The. USA: Mark Hellinger Productions. Dassin, Jules, dir. 1948.

Night and the City. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Dassin, Jules, dir. 1948.

Night of the Hunter, The. USA: Paul Gregory Productions. Laughton, Charles, dir. 1955.

Nightmare Alley. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Goulding, Edmund, dir. 1947.

Notorious. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. 1946.

On Dangerous Ground. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Ray, Nicholas, dir. 1952.

Out of the Past. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Tourneur, Jacques, dir. 1947.

Outrage. USA: The Filmmakers. Lupino, Ida, dir. 1950.

Panic in the Streets. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Kazan, Elia, dir. 1950.

Pickup on South Street. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Fuller, Samuel, dir. 1953.

Pitfall. USA: Regal Films. De Toth, Andre, dir. 1948.

Point Blank. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Boorman, John, dir. 1967.

Postman Always Rings Twice, The. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Garnett, Tay, dir. 1946.

Quicksand. USA: Samuel H. Stiefel Productions. Pichel, Irving, dir. 1950.

Raw Deal. USA: Reliance Pictures. Mann, Anthony, dir. 1948.

Reckless Moment, The. USA: Columbia Pictures. Ophuls, Max, dir. 1949.

Ride the Pink Horse. USA: Universal-International Pictures. Montgomery, Robert, dir. 1947.

Scarlet Street. USA: Universal Pictures. Lang, Fritz, dir. 1945.

Set-Up, The. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Wise, Robert, dir. 1949.

Shadow of a Doubt. USA: Jack H. Skirball Productions/Universal Pictures. Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. 1943.

Somewhere in the Night. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Mankiewicz, Joseph L., dir. 1946.

Sorry, Wrong Number. USA: Hal Wallis Productions. Litvak, Anatole, dir. 1948.

Spellbound. USA: Selznick International Pictures/Vanguard Films. Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. 1945.

Spiral Staircase, The. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Siodmak, Robert, dir. 1945.

Strange Life of Martha Ivers, The. USA: Hal Wallis Productions. Milestone, Lewis, dir. 1946.

Stranger, The. USA: International Pictures. Welles, Orson, dir. 1946.

Stranger on the Third Floor. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Ingster, Boris, dir. 1940.

Strangers in the Night. USA: Republic Pictures. Mann, Anthony, dir. 1944.

Strangers on a Train. USA: Warner Bros. Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. 1951.

Street with No Name, The. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Keighley, William, dir. 1948.

Sunset Boulevard. USA: Paramount Pictures. Wilder, Billy, dir. 1950.

Suspicion. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. 1941.

T-Men. USA: Edward Small Productions. Mann, Anthony, dir. 1947.

They Drive By Night. USA: Warner Bros. Walsh, Raoul, dir. 1940.

They Live By Night. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Ray, Nicholas, dir. 1948.

Thieves' Highway. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Dassin, Jules, dir. 1949.

This Gun for Hire. USA: Paramount Pictures. Tuttle, Frank, dir. 1942.

Touch of Evil. USA: Universal-International Pictures. Welles, Orson, dir. 1958.

Where the Sidewalk Ends. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Preminger, Otto, dir. 1950.

While the City Sleeps. USA: Bert Friedlob Productions. Lang, Fritz, dir. 1956.

Whirlpool. USA: Twentieth Century-Fox. Preminger, Otto, dir. 1950.

White Heat. USA: Warner Bros. Walsh, Raoul, dir. 1949.

Woman in the Window, The. USA: International Pictures. Lang, Fritz, dir. 1945.

Woman on Pier 13, The. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. Stevenson, Robert, dir. 1950.

Wrong Man, The. USA: Warner Bros. Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. 1956.

Some Film Noir Websites

Filmsite: Film Noir

<https://www.filmsite.org/filmnoir.html>

BFI Infographic: What Makes a Film Noir?

<https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/infographic-what-makes-film-noir>

Film Noir Foundation

<http://www.filmnoirfoundation.org/home.html>

FilmsNoir.Net

<https://filmnoir.art.blog>

Classic Noir: The Hardboiled World of Film Noir Films.Noir.Net

<https://classicnoir.com>

Internet Archive: Film Noir

https://archive.org/details/Film_Noir

All Articles about Film Noir (BFI)

<https://www.bfi.org.uk/articles/subject/film-noir>