

Cannibalizing The System: The Film Noir Backlash in Hollywood

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

The central goal of this thesis is to resituate the development of film noir within the context of the Hollywood studio system that created it. I argue that under the 'factory' conditions of the studio's working environment, a distaste fermented from the screenwriter class that burrowed in the pulp fiction, particularly hard-boiled mystery fiction, of the era. This strain of literature was eventually coupled with the panache of Hollywood style to form a filmic style which was noteworthy for its ability to use Hollywood stylistics to screen a vision of life that was antithetical to that which the studio system wanted to offer to the mass public. I have also attempted to situate the original and most crystallized noir moment in the mid-1940s as part of the continuum of American cinema where the stylistic traces of noir were present prior to that period, and certainly after, but never more coherently than at that moment in the 1940s. I have assembled sources ranging from published interview collections, memoirs, biographies, film criticism and archival collections to develop my argument about the literary, filmic and cultural evolution of film noir in Hollywood.

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Introduction

A convention of the newspaper article, magazine spread, festival program or book review pertaining to *film noir* is an introduction about how *noir* was a cycle of films coming out of Hollywood in the 1940s that trended toward darkness and dealt with a myriad of social, psychological or political ills that were diagnosed in the temperament of the time. It is not uncommon to read a stylish definition such as this one from the July 1997 issue of *Vanity Fair* when the subject is introduced: "it had its roots in German Expressionism and the private-eye novel, film noir emerged like a walking hangover after World War II, a haunted shadow rising from Europe's bombed-out rubble and Japan's radioactive ash - a slice of death drawn from a larger annihilation."¹ This is quite vivid for a group of 1940s Hollywood studio films, but it has also come to weigh them down with a cultural baggage that was unintended by most of the filmmakers of the time. The claims made about the films' subtext are perhaps due to the uncertain nature of their place in the spectrum: critics still have not decided whether noir is a genre, a movement, a style, or just a cycle of films that were a by-product of a specific era. Noir has achieved the remarkable feat of being supposedly unnoticed in its time to becoming a real popular art movement with a critical mythology all of its own.

At the heart of this issue is the notion that noir was came from a neglected corner of Hollywood where its most perceptive films went unheralded in their own time and have need of being intellectualized and fawned over retroactively. In a review of a noir related book by fiction writer Nicholas Christopher, *Somewhere in the Night*, film critic David Thomson balked at the tendency of noir writing to invoke large themes without evidence that "any movie has ever grown out of these themes."² Thomson urged further examination of the films in the context of the place where it was invented: Hollywood. He noted that there was a time when noir hardly existed at all and the analysis needed to be

taken back to the source as "it has worthy ancestors and many children, and it may be as good and original as American film has ever been."³

J. Hoberman, in *The Village Voice* called noir "a full-blown instance of American avant-pop, somewhere between bebop and art deco, film noir was dedicated to aestheticizing the downside of American life."⁴ This was much closer to the understanding of the discernable value of the achievement of noir in American cinema, but also hints at how these films have escaped a cogent genre definition. The notion of noir even being a genre is a contentious "academic pillow fight" to this day.⁵ Another issue with the concept of *film noir* is the term itself. Instead of serving to clarify the matter it has only served as a moniker that has always been used without a basic meaning. In turn, this has led to a contentious effort to create a firm definition and time span for these 1940s products and to give parameters to the famous expression. As it was an adopted expression from the French, and was unused until much later in American critical discourse, there is a tendency to state that American critics had a comparably unsophisticated lens for film appreciation. This, supposedly, led them to miss the statements that films were, supposedly, making.⁶ This has led to several decades of re-appraisal and consequent mythologizing of the films where philosophical matters are read into the stylistics of the films. The legacy of noir is by now an entity of its own apart from the films themselves.

This may be why there is a difficulty of defining the starting point of the first film noirs. Many try, as *Los Angeles Magazine* did when it stated that "the original noir landscape between 1944 and 1954 [was], a decade of sensuous menace."⁷ The need for definition and reckoning with the films continues today. A definition that could enclose the movement with a beginning and end and to codify exactly what the films espoused thematically, sociologically, and philosophically. Yet, the films were made initially in counterbalance to the Hollywood that created a clearly drawn moral prism with mass-culture belief systems based on wish fulfillment. They offered an often skillful brand of spectacle but

were also guilty of creating stilted and unoriginal reproductions of successful films. What made the early, one might say pure, noir films endure was that they used the same mechanism to turnover those precepts, almost invert them, and gradually cannibalize an aging studio system from within as it was headed towards its "crackup."⁸ The canonical history of noir also underplays how much this shift in tone was registered in the film discourse of the time.

Many of the more serious critics of the time dealt with trends in the movies as they saw them and attempted to attribute sociological layers to the films. However, the continued "Hollywood" stylization was a frustration to thoughtful critics who campaigned for greater realism in moviemaking in contrast to what had been produced under the thumb of Hollywood's Production Code. To critics such as James Agee and Manny Farber, the early noirs were unremarkable because they were just Hollywood concoctions of another sort. To them, inundated by the slew of Hollywood programmers from the studio era, the first noirs made no penetrating cinematic innovation toward improving the mediums move toward real life. The films were not unheralded or underrated in their time, but it is perhaps true that their enduring legacy would have been impossible to view through the contemporaneous lens. Later generations, less entranced by the novelty of cinematic realism, could more fully appreciate the inversed style that was synthesized in Hollywood to be in opposition to the notion of Hollywood.

The term film noir, ambiguous in its wide usage, was obviously a French invention, but it was not then intended to describe only the originality of the American films. It was a recognition of shared tendencies within the French films of the 1930s. William Safire found that the first usage was attributable to Nino Frank in *L'écran Français* on August 28 1946, followed shortly by Jean Pierre Chartier in *le Révue du Cinema* in an article famously titled "Americans Also Make Noir Films."⁹ These two pieces were written in response to the first batch of American films that arrived after the embargo against film importation was lifted in France after the Second World War, a group of films that included

The Maltese Falcon (1941) and *The Woman in the Window* (1943).¹⁰ The impression the films made when viewed in succession contributed to a notion of a unified conception of their aesthetic and themes. This began a period in which one noir historian believed the French ""taught" the Americans how to read aspects of their own popular culture." This required a latency period for the novel ideas of avant garde French film theory to sink-in in the United States of course, but, at least in this instance, that notion is overrated.¹¹

The American film critics knew that their country "also made noir films" and were pretty savvy about detecting their influences and what they espoused. The critics of the time merely did not use the invented label of film noir which was appropriated later. The reality is that in 1945 *New York Times Magazine* profiled the first slate of new crime films such as *The Big Sleep* (1945/6) and *Double Indemnity* (1944) in "Crime Certainly Pays on Screen" and featured a photo of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall in silhouette that typified the noir's image.¹² Both Bosley Crowther in the *New York Times* and W. Ward Marsh in the *Cleveland Plains Dealer* likened the slate of mid-forties crime films to the interwar German films, clearly making an allusion to the aesthetic dimension of the films.¹³ Indeed, critics such as James Agee and Manny Farber perceptively grasped the allure of the films and discarded them as calculated and cynical. Nostalgically, both seemed to pine for the pre-code crime films of which they were reminiscent. These two will be used further in body of the thesis, as they are both interesting contemporary sources for situating film noir more accurately. Ultimately, even the Freudian and psychoanalytical films which were trendy in the 1940s were deemed superfluous in their number by, of all people, widely syndicated gossip columnist Louella Parsons. The awareness of the trend in America was substantial.¹⁴

The noir "label" as such gained traction in France with Raymonde Borde and Etienne Chaumain's *Panamorique du Film Noir Americaine* in 1952. The legacy of these works is not so much the actual

reading of the films, but the perceptivity of the films that they did choose as being worthy of re-evaluation. They gave credit to directors who had worked in the studio system and the French notion of the *politique d'auteur* evolved to argue in favour of the fact that a director was the artist figure and thus had authorial mandate on the contents of his films. This made directors such as Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock artistic figures. A work such as *Panamorique*, and the larger influence of film theorist André Bazin and the later cinematic *enfants terrible* crew at the *Cahiers du Cinema*, rescued a film such as *Kiss Me Deadly* from obscurity and gave some celebrity to its director Robert Aldrich. Aldrich appreciated the redemption of his film, but completely rejected their pop-philosophic interpretations of it.¹⁵ This can be said similarly of Orson Welles who owed the maintenance of his reputation to international cinema journals but outright refuted their claims that he had been influenced by German film.¹⁶ Famously Howard Hawks even rejected the notion that filmmakers were making "art" and it is easy to see to whom this was aimed.¹⁷

Nonetheless, as will be discussed in the body of this analysis, the French theorists inspired the mid-century critical language in America and auteur theory took hold with influential critics like Andrew Sarris. The term "black cinema" first made its way into the American lexicon in Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg's survey history *Hollywood in the Forties* in 1968. It was shortly after that critics such as Raymond Durgnat and Paul Schrader, who had been influenced by the *Cahiers* that Sarris had had translated into English, wrote seminal essays that sought to contain the impact of film noir and provided the context and quest for parameters that have pervaded the scholarship ever since. Schrader earmarked Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* and Orson Welles' *The Touch of Evil* (1958) as the opening and closing entries in the "cycle" of film noir.¹⁸ Again the limits of this became a launching pad for debate, but the value of the essay was that it rediscovered and brought interest to an old B picture such as the magnificent Jacques Tourneur film *Out of the Past* (1947).¹⁹

The first attempts at definition led to a cavalcade of subsequent attempts to pluck out the few most repeated genre tropes and figures and as well to mark the point where it began and ended. Raymond Durgnat's essay "Paint it Black: The Family Tree of Film Noir" found that there were four, self-admittedly imperfect, steps in the evolution of noir.²⁰ This made a formal and ultimately important delineation between the "romantic" stylized noirs of the 1940s and the late 1940s and 1950s gritty street dramas which were an evolution in the cycle. This thesis will endeavor to explore the difficulty in enacting borders for fluid and incomplete transitional phases of film noir. They are obvious over the scope of a broad survey of the American film landscape, but lose footing as rigid film to film borders. There are obvious trends in film noir's development, but there is usually an antecedent or precedent buried somewhere that defies the notion of single landmark film. It is more manageable to view the film landscape as a continuum where changes evolve rather than occur singularly.

Regardless, the gamesmanship of noir definition continued into the 1980s. Foster Hirsch in *The Dark Side of the Street* in 1981 made an attempt to draw the first era of noir from Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944) to a close in his *Sunset Blvd.* (1950).²¹ In the context that noir was most impactful as an antithetical stylization of Hollywood this is an instructive observation that will be explored, but ultimately the door cannot be closed on any single film as the elements of film noir continued to filter through the stream of American cinema all the way to present. Indeed, this occurred with increasing self-consciousness as filmmakers who were schooled in the tradition of Hollywood cinema began to deliberately pluck the style elements of noir as shorthand to suggest certain themes which were believed to be, for the filmmakers of the Old Hollywood, just part of the accumulated bag of tricks.

As noir scholarship continued, rediscovering films became about rounding out the cannon and perceptions about noir did change. Foster Hirsch initially held that the *film gris* street films of the fifties lost some of the magic of the early studio concoctions. Yet, as he searched the vaults for long forgotten

B films he found, aided by the invention of The Film Noir Foundation chaired by author Eddie Muller, a number of films that renewed his affection for the lost treasures of the genre. The *complete* effort inspired an entire encyclopedia, *Film Noir*, by Alain Silver and Anne Ward. It is an invaluable resource, however, in some respects, this quest for stray elements of noir and uncovering lost classics has become a project of diminishing returns. The deeper the investigation into the Hollywood programmer slate from “poverty row” studios, this observer found an almost invariably diminishing product. The tendency amongst aficionados of delineating between the B picture noirs and the more famous major studio products is worthwhile, but does inevitably fall prey to a fan's tendency to lose perspective on the merits of the subject as a whole.²² The vault pruning of noir purists can lead to the repudiation of the known classics as mainstream in favour of celebrating the underseen.

In more recent years books have delved into specific aspects of film noir. These include, the urban setting in Andrew Dickos' *Street With No Name* (2002), to the perspective of its European Jewish émigré directors in Vincent Brook's *Driven to Darkness* (2009), or the product of the prototype noir films in Sherri Chinen Biesen's *Blackout World War II and The Origins of Film Noir* (2005). While these can be rewarding and insightful in their depth of review for a specific element, it is always worth noting that such works tend to emphasize one colour of the spectrum that share equal importance with the other elements that infused film noir. Theoretical essay collections on film noir, for example the Anne E. Kaplan edited *Women in Film Noir* (1980) or *The Philosophy of Film Noir* (2005) edited by Mark T. Conrad have been published and provide intriguing moral, gender, class, and sexuality readings of the films but tend to pluck film noir from the wider product of Hollywood at the time, where film noir never consciously existed as a distinct effort. I encourage interested readers to review those works for specific readings of the films. This study seeks to examine their production and filmic impact and not the implications of their portrayals of class, gender, sexuality or other sociocultural variables.

In this thesis I will use the terms *film noir*, *neo noir*, *hard-boiled* and to a lesser extent *film gris*, because they are so evocative and fundamental in the scholarship of this body of films and literature that to disregard them would be pointless. The reality is that these monikers have always been incomplete, but to attempt to bring a more succinct and applicable use is an effort of this study and perhaps to, again, give them a meaning other than the oft repeated "you know [noir] when you see it" mantra.²³ In a sense film noir is nothing more than a moniker and could be interchangeable with the "movietone realism" coined by James T. Farrell or the "crime film" preferred by the *New York Times*.²⁴ That all of these terms intersect liberally with terms such as "hard-boiled" or "tough-guy realism" is perhaps the fault of sloppily applied standards of definition. This study hopes to give some weight to the observable separation between those terms and has endeavored to apply them appropriately and not interchangeably.

The first chapter of this thesis is intended to situate the production of the early film noirs into the reality of Hollywood at that moment. It is an effort to survey the brewing frustrations within the studio system that led to the development of a style built on resentment for the frustration of working at the dream factory. This was the place where the dream being produced typified the most glaring gap between the American success story myth, in an era where the culture was preoccupied with the notion, and the reality of the country at the time. The second chapter looks at the development of a steeped antipathy for Hollywood in a developing strand of American literature and the movement toward the mission of writing the great literary condemnation of Hollywood. While this was happening, it was the screenwriters in Hollywood who vented their frustration in pulp fiction and gradually over the 1930s created a method of storytelling that fit a countervailing notion of Hollywood. The third chapter examines the fullest expression of this style in the collaboration of Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder on *Double Indemnity*. It also incorporates the filmic precedents and experiential overlaps between the filmmakers who created the noir offshoots that followed *Double Indemnity*. In formally skewing

Hollywood convention and its moralizing simplification of American life, Wilder went on to culminate the anti-Hollywood frustration explicitly in *Sunset Blvd.*

The fourth chapter discusses the dissemination of noir style into American society at large and the "exposé" *film gris* which followed and pushed gradually toward a realism in American cinema but away from the most novel and intriguing elements of the earlier film noirs. The bi-products of this were numerous as noir eventually petered out. It continued to have its style dragged into a split between television-style potboilers based upon clichéd reproductions of the earlier more tempestuous source material and tough cynical police films that aligned themselves with institutional authority. The final aspect will be an examination of how New Hollywood crafted a point of finality with its realism and the film school trained directors of the period looked nostalgically toward the style of the noirs of the past, before Martin Scorsese reenergized them with nightmarish new stylistics into what has been described of, broadly as usual, as *neo noir*, in *Taxi Driver* (1976).

The intention of this examination of film noir is to situate film noir firmly in the context of Hollywood and film production in the studio system. The social and political context of the era such as the blacklisting and anti-communistic government investigations into the studios is pertinent to the climate of the era; however, I have decided to focus my study on the filmic and literary creation aspects. I refer in my endnotes to recommended readings for further details on, for example, the blacklist or Second World War propaganda issues. It is hopeful that this evaluation of the origins of noir in the film and literary elements of the time, the most illustrative films of the "cycle," the eventual dispersal of the films into American film language, and the eventual reinvention in *neo noir* will be useful in pruning away some of the mystic fanfare and skewed theoretic that has come to cloud the original films popular culture legacy. It is also hopeful that the argument of this thesis, that the mindset of the studio

workplace fermented the frustrations that begat the noir temperament, will serve as a more practicable originating force to explain the films themselves.

¹ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, James Wolcott, "New York Noir," *Vanity Fair*, July 1997: 36.

² Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, David Thomson, "Noirly," review of *Somewhere In The Night*, by Nicholas Christopher, *L.A. Weekly* April 4 1997: 23.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 2 of 5*, J. Hoberman, "Noir Town," *The Village Voice* February 2 1998:

⁵ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, Edward Sorel illustrations, *GQ Magazine*, December 1997: 251.

⁶ Alain Silver, "Introduction" in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 1996): 3.

⁷ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 2 of 5*, "Queens of M," *Los Angeles Magazine* March 1999: 99.

⁸ Thomson, "Noirly," 23.

⁹ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, William Safire, "Film Noir Is My Bête Noire," *New York Times* October 5 1997; Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 4 of 5*, William Safire "On Language," *New York Times* April 28 2002: 1

¹⁰ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 3 of 5*, Stanley Kauffmann, "on Film's Underworlds," *The New Republic* August 2000: 30.

¹¹ Foster Hirsch, *Film Noir The Dark Side of the Screen* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1981), 9.

¹² University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *The Big Sleep Publicity File*, Lloyd Shearer, "Crime Certainly Pays On Screen," *New York Times Magazine* August 5 1945.

¹³ University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *The Big Sleep Publicity File*, Bosley Crowther, "Violence Erupts Again," *The New York Times* September 1 1946; University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *Possessed Publicity File*, W. Ward Marsh, "Joan Crawford at Her Pest in 'Possessed,' a Powerful Psychological Drama at Hipp" *Cleveland Plains Dealer* July 23 1947.

¹⁴ University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *Possessed Publicity File* Louella O. Parsons, " " *Los Angeles Examiner* July 18 1947.

¹⁵ Alain Silver, "Interview with Robert Aldrich," *Film Comment* November 1970 in Eugene L. Miller Jr. and Edwin t. Arnold ed., *Robert Aldrich Interviews* (Jackson University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 58.

¹⁶ André Bazin, Charles Bitsch, and Jean Domarchi, "Interview with Orson Welles (II)," *Cahiers du Cinéma* September 1958, Translated by Peter Wollen in Mark W. Estrin, *Orson Welles Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 75.

¹⁷ "Howard Hawks" in Peter Bogdanovich, *Who The Devil Made It* (New York: Ballantine, 1997), 375.

¹⁸ Paul Schrader, "notes on film noir," *Film Comment* 8 (1972). Reprinted in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 1996): 53-64.

¹⁹ Paul Schrader, *Schrader on Schrader & Other Writings*, ed. Kevin Jackson (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990), 126.

²⁰ Raymond Durnat, "Paint It Black: The Family Tree of Film Noir," *Cinema* (1970) Reprinted in *Film Noir Reader*. ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 1996) : 37-52

²¹ Hirsch, 10.

²² Hirsch, 214-226.

²³ Foster Hirsch, *Film Noir The Dark Side of the Screen* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1981), 211.

²⁴ James T. Farrell, *Literature and Morality* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1947), 86; Lloyd Shearer, "Crime Certainly Pays On Screen," *New York Times Magazine* (1945) Reprinted in *Film Noir Reader 2*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 1996),

Chapter 1 Undercover of Night: Hollywood's Constructed Reality

It is difficult to imagine a moment more illustrative of the brand of grandeur produced by 'Old Hollywood' than the premiere of *Gone with the Wind* on 14 December 1939. At least three hundred thousand people, half the city's population, flocked to the streets of Atlanta to see a parade featuring the stars. It was a rare opportunity to see Hollywood's "King" Clark Gable in the flesh, and to brush up against the actual real versions of the fantastic heroes of the screen.²⁵ The 14 December edition of the *Atlanta Constitution* was filled with articles about the movements of the Hollywood cavalcade and treated it like the arrival of foreign dignitaries while the subsequent parade was the cover story the next day.²⁶

Gone with the Wind (1939) was a fascinating moment for Old Hollywood as it not only became the center of attention for Atlanta's media outlets, but would go on to be one of the all-time most successful pictures. It epitomized the powerful lure that Hollywood's marketing and hype-machine had on the wider public. Yet, by the end of the succeeding decade, this model would lose its undisputed pre-eminence in mass entertainment. The studio process was no longer able to function in isolation. In a sense what was lost was the abstract sense of self-sufficiency that came with being a "movie colony" hidden away on one coast.²⁷ The old institution of the studio strove toward a sheltered conception of reality where the industry could continue to produce the sanitized glamor and showmanship that made Hollywood a great spectacle based on wholesome "Americana".²⁸ The processing of film content toward this ideal was ultimately a lengthy evolution. It required a tightly wound control mechanism that functioned on the maintenance of a consolidated industry, content regulation from the Hays Office, and an image manufacturing army that blanketed the media with a re-enforcement campaign around the

desired conception of the industry. An individual's career prospects in Hollywood centered on the question of whether or not they could live and work within this illusion.

For a time, the studio framework did succeed in controlling the notion of popular filmmaking. The studios left, what one historian called, a remarkable if “eccentric beauty” in their product.²⁹ However, over the course of the 1940s the industry was set to change irrevocably and the reverberation would be felt for decades.³⁰ It is still fascinating to look in at the apogee of the old model in form of that day in Atlanta, where perhaps the biggest star of the era stood, the people’s choice for the most coveted male lead in quite some time.³¹ It is no coincidence though that, in the words of critic Barbara Deming, the Gable protagonist looked much different only six years later in the actor’s first post-war picture *Adventure*. “Rhett Butler” was no longer dashing and confident as the star’s character was now weary, wary and “wounded”.³² In many ways this transition is reminiscent of the tonal shift of the entire industry.

By 1939 Hollywood was in a very conservative state having founded an economical production model that obviated some of the risk taking of the pioneering days of the film business in America.³³ The classic studio model was still the norm and the upstart independent producers were an exception.³⁴ The reality was still that an overwhelming number of pictures were churned out in the trusted and true method that the movie moguls had reinforced through the previous decade. *Film Daily's* Ten Best Pictures of 1939 featured an impressive list of classics such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Dark Victory*, *The Women* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.³⁵ Still, while many of these pictures were also commercially successful, a glance at the annual box office champions over the 1930s reveals that audiences flocked to the most saccharine of studio pabulum featuring Will Rogers, Shirley Temple and musicals with Eddie Cantor. It is clear that in the 1930s the gloss of safe studio diversions had not yet worn off at all.³⁶

An examination of the legality of film censorship done by the *Yale Law Review* in 1939 noted that not only were the previous decisions that upheld state-level government censorship of the movies extremely suspect in their legality, but also the surprisingly “restive” response to content control measures that existed in the movie industry.³⁷ This can be explained by what had come to be the major studio vision of what was good for business, which was a unifying force that kept the major producers within a moral framework.³⁸ Gone was the profiteering and talent swiping of the pioneering days of the business, because it had become time for the industry to think of its image. The studios still vied for supremacy, but within the confines of a unified front.

The arrival of several scandalous incidents in Hollywood’s formative years had put the film producers on watch for fear of special interest groups and media speculation about the morals of the movies.³⁹ They turned to the Republican Party to find an appropriate moralistic figurehead. William H. Hays was picked for the task and instituted a regime of self-maintenance standards.⁴⁰ It brought the main studios together and also eventually led to the infamous Hays Office.⁴¹ It was a gradual process toward that point, and it wasn’t until 1934 that the formal Production Code came to be the de facto authority on what was appropriate on the nation’s screens.⁴²

Hays fit perfectly with the idea that the industry figureheads had for the post and his kindly disposition and Washington contacts made him an ideal frontman. He commenced cleaning up the pictures by imposing his “Dos, Don’ts and Be Carefuls” on the industry in an effort to, in his own words, raise the “quality” of the films.⁴³ Subsequent to raising the “quality” of the movies, the audience would therefore come away with increased standards in their own morals and character.⁴⁴ Thus, Hays thought he was making the movies into an instrument of moral education for the American people.

While on the surface there is nothing ghastly about that position, the exploration of the content deemed worthy of the screen reveals a very particular agenda to the underpinnings of the code. The

actual enforcement of the Production Code fell to the Breen Office, which was named after its head Joseph L. Breen.⁴⁵ The process was as follows: the film studio would submit a screenplay draft to the office for review. Breen would then respond with a memorandum that listed the required changes, including specific page references, which would be required to obtain certification.⁴⁶ It should be noted that as the Code came to be standard practice, the legal, research, and story departments at each studio - which were already active in poring over films for potentially litigious issues in regards to name use and inadvertent advertisement for real world products and companies - would contact the producer or supervisor of the production to vet out obvious Code issues before the script was even sent to Breen.⁴⁷

The Production Code Administration had a standard form which streamlined the process of review, which included the portrayal of professions, races and nationalities, liquor, crime, and most lengthily, sociological factors (marriage, sex, and family).⁴⁸ Check boxes were used to rank the degree to which the portrayal of any of these was pertinent to the story.⁴⁹ Reading the "Adopted Code to Govern the Production of Motion Pictures" makes obvious the agenda of which the effort was in aid. Firstly, pictures should be "primarily regarded as entertainment" and thus had a "moral importance."⁵⁰ This meant that institutions, both civic and religious, should not be profaned. Breen once flagged "Jeez" as a required script deletion.⁵¹ The undercurrent of religious puritanism is evident with frequent allusions to "sin" and "moral good."⁵²

While morality meant several things - including the maxim that evil doers should be punished ("criminals should not be made heroes"), which probably helped produce a generation's worth of formulaic endings - the obvious underpinning of the effort was a sanitization of human behaviour.⁵³ This applied to bodily functions, ranging from defecation to pregnancy, but the most stressed notes from Breen were usually about sexuality.⁵⁴ Code era Hollywood life was of cleansed passion, which according to the code should be avoided unless "essential to the plot." Even dancing should be seen as "art only."⁵⁵

The Code went unmodified officially until 1956 when it became more permissive toward the portrayal of societal issues, sex and narcotics included.⁵⁶

Despite the portrait above, Hays' view in his *Memoirs* was that he was stridently opposed to censorship. His logical framework was that the Hays Office managed to align itself with the most conscientiously inoffensive version of supposedly typical American virtues. Concurrently, it finessed the perception of its, clearly restrictive, mandates into another version of American virtue. The slogan for the Production Code Administration was "self-regulation."⁵⁷ It was to be celebrated, in the eyes of Hays, that the producers had decided to keep their own house so that, unlike in many other countries, it did not have to become the duty of the state.⁵⁸ It should be said that this system did succeed in quelling cries from special interest groups for censorship for several decades and was thus a useful stabilizer for the Hollywood industry.

However, the implications of the Code ran deeper than the role as a stopgap for cries for national censorship legislation.⁵⁹ Hays believed he had invented a method to make the movies an educational force for good, but also in the process of doing so, an example of the typically American virtue of freedom of choice. The public front for the industry was adamant that it was working toward a distinctly American purpose, which was to screen for the public only wholesome conceptions of reality, but that was also exactly what was desired by the film producers. By insisting on the broadest appeal it continued to both attract, and control, the biggest audience possible. If there was only one audience, then there was only one expectation, and thus what functioned once could be repurposed. The modulation of good taste into one framework meant the process was replicable and made the studio conception viable, theoretically in perpetuity.⁶⁰

Historian John Baxter noted that all the major studios had their own style, what would now be referred to as a brand, stamped on their pictures. The studios came to define themselves by a certain

style of film. There was the tough-guy melodrama of Warner Brothers; there was the witty, romantic sophistication of Paramount lavished on by the likes of Ernst Lubitsch (a master of hinting at sexual undercurrents without airing them in a way that would force the PCA to flag them); and, of course, MGM's seductively wholesome version of comfort cinema.⁶¹ This is echoed in the full page advertisements each studio published in the industry's own annual *International Motion Picture Almanac*: "Warner Bros: The company that gives you Action! The company that's Fair and Square!" for example.⁶² The *Almanac* was the yellow pages for the studios and their employees, as well as a celebration of their accomplishments. It was a proud piece of propaganda for the industry's own proud image.⁶³ The *Almanac* was published by the Quigley Publishing Company, headed by Martin Quigley, author of the original Production Code and a book entitled *Decency in the Motion Pictures*, which was also advertised in the 1939-1940 edition of *the Almanac*.⁶⁴ The interconnectivity of the process of regulation to the advertising and branding wing of the industry cannot be overlooked or downplayed.

This proud and wholesome framework was what filmmakers had to function within in order to have successful careers in Hollywood. Their visions would have to be tailored to fit within it, or their deviances from it would have to be artfully subtle and creative. It was not a climate that functioned well on quick change.⁶⁵ It depended on old conceptions of appealing to a single mass audience. The sophisticated ratings and market research techniques that would be used in television took decades to permeate the old Hollywood mindset. There was hostility to outside techniques and intellectualized theories about moviemaking from the production moguls of the "Golden Age" studios.⁶⁶

As though it were a trade secret, there was still an in-shop mentality as to what the audience wanted and that notion was not to be traipsed upon. Hollywood was an insular place where the curtains were drawn and the tried and true genres and mores were trotted out again and again. As far back as 1923 Louis B. Mayer, eventually the studio chief of Metro Goldwyn Mayer, stated in a piece he wrote for

the *New York Times* that “while the high-brows may sniff at good old heart-touching hokum on the screen, the American public could not keep house without it.”⁶⁷ Hortense Powdermaker’s much discussed anthropological study of Hollywood published in 1949, *Hollywood The Dream Factory*, made the interesting observation that in Hollywood there are two types of people with two different notions about the place. There were those that had worked elsewhere and had a sceptical tolerance to the tropes of the place, and those who had only worked in Hollywood and seem to know nothing else: *Hollywood people*.⁶⁸ These were the individuals who talked in the slogans of the industry and had an effete sophistication or humble, adroit wholesomeness in the way they talked. They were playing characters they had, or had had, developed off-camera and on.

There was a startling dichotomy present between the courses taken by the ‘founding fathers’ of the motion picture industry in life and the public image their companies used as the brands for the industry. It was as though they clutched to the “American Dream” for everything they ever gained in life and tried to transmute it back to the public through the screens. The moguls did not have sophisticated backgrounds in marketing, but they had the showman's impulse and strove for as big an audience they could find. The theoretical methodology for success never got more complex than “the public is never wrong,” but it made them rich and the industry came to consolidate around that trope.⁶⁹

Many of the famed moguls were first-generation immigrants from Europe who took on new names as adults trying to crack into the New York business establishment – famously Fried Vilmos became William Fox, Sammy Goldfish became Samuel Goldwyn and Lazar Meir became Louis Mayer.⁷⁰ These men, who were some of the players that centralized the picture business, were born into working class families and usually worked in odds and ends trades or ran small town theatres.⁷¹ These humble roots led them to undergo an assimilation process in order to succeed as social climbers. That

assimilation came with a total self-mythologizing to fit exactly the narrative of the hard-working American success story. Life, of course, was more complicated.

Louis B. Mayer famously chose July 4th as his adopted birthday. There is also some mystery as to whether he was born in Minsk, Belarus as he claimed, or a less known town in the region. The Minsk birthplace claim sounded most exotic and had a mythic quality, theorized his biographer Scott Eyman.⁷² This was printed as far along as his obituary in *Variety* in 1957.⁷³ Louis B. Mayer had fashioned his own origin story and image as he would attempt to do for many of his later star players. As relayed in Charles Higham's biography *Merchant of Dreams*, Mayer famously told his children how he was sent on his way across Canada, going from school to school as a young man without any money and made himself a great success. This is patently untrue as he was sent to the eastern United States by his parents and spent his youth in St. John, New Brunswick in Canada.⁷⁴ He is also credited with creating the "star system" although Dorothy Kilgallen in her gossip column "Voice of Broadway" noted that it was probably a concept owed to Carl Laemmle, eventual head of Universal, with his effort to create an icon in Theda Bara.⁷⁵

The narrative never quite fits the complications of the tumultuous early days of the film business. Mayer did proceed with a conception of how to build a studio, which was centered around stars and "idols" and he ran his studio to become the biggest of the 1930s Golden Age.⁷⁶ He consistently wanted crowd pleasing entertainments and came to despise his boss in New York, Nicholas Schenk, as well as eventual his rival Irving Thalberg, a production chief at MGM, until Thalberg's health gave out in 1936.

The fact was that L.B. Mayer was famously the highest salaried man in America for most of the 1930s. Yet, it must be remembered that he was bitterly left as a shareholder in the prospective merger in 1929 between Nicolas Schenk, head of Loews Inc. which was MGM's parent company, and William

Fox. The merger would have made Fox the unrivalled kingpin of the industry. Thus Mayer was never a titan of industry during the Golden Age but a man tied to wealth based on a payroll salary. It has been stated that Mayer himself delayed the merger and reported it to authorities as being in violation of anti-trust law. The merger was held up and Fox, after an accident, fell into ill-health and decline⁷⁷

A biography written by Upton Sinclair, which is mostly a creed against the ills of unbridled capitalism, cast William Fox as the fallen man in the industry's cutthroat business dealings. Fox, by his death in 1952, had been marginalized and his *Variety* obituary is nowhere near the headline story of L.B. Mayer's. *Variety* considered him to be in "semi-retirement," as did his profile in the 1939-1940 *Motion Picture Almanac*, despite the fact that his empire was once gigantic and he worth in excess of \$ 100 million.⁷⁸ The wheeling and dealing, the ambition and the casualties of the trade, are more numerous than just Fox. For example, Louis Selznick and B.P. Schulberg also lost out as the industry withered itself down in a high stakes game of musical chairs with only so many power posts.⁷⁹

It is riveting to explore the apotheosis of the men left standing from eager opportunists to corporate figureheads. There seems to be a patented lack of self-awareness in the memoirs and recollections that exist of the studio chiefs. As a matter of fact they adhere remarkably to their success narrative. Louis B. Mayer grossly simplified it all in his address entitled "The Motion Picture and the World Today" given in 1947 stating: "Motion pictures attracted me first because it was something entirely new, and by hard work would afford a decent living; also, because I knew all the happiness and relaxation it would give to the people... Little did I dream as I opened the door of that small theater in Haverhill, Mass. that the motion picture industry would rise to such dominance in American life."⁸⁰ This self-portrait as a humble hardworking man is unrepresentative of the type of life Mayer led. His *Variety* obituary is lavish in praise for his "pioneering," however, he is also cited as having an "invariably

uncertain [temper]" that "he rarely bothered controlling " and that he "had trouble getting along with practically everyone who seemed to challenge his authority."⁸¹

Mayer's notion of a wholesome America on the screen was epitomized by his favouritism for the *Andy Hardy* films on which he involved himself much more directly than most productions.⁸² This flew in the face of the individual who in one account "liked to take beautiful actresses to luncheon in prominent restaurants. Beautiful actresses appreciated the possible advantages at Metro itself..." Mayer did not achieve an ideal in his personal life as he eventually divorced his first wife, and that alone contradicts the value structure he espoused on screen, where divorce was still a taboo.⁸³ This aversion to vice on-screen was offset by his adoration of the horse track, and while he may have wished to claim the source of his wealth was hard-work, he was "deep in oil and capital gains deals, little was published on these latter day activities" and made much of his eventual fortune there. Mayer could not reconcile himself or his lifestyle to the unrealistic idealist standard of his pictures.⁸⁴

Adolphe Zukor served as the longest standing figurehead in the industry and held out at Paramount until his nineties (he died in 1976). He was there in the early New York days when the company was still Lasky's Famous Players.⁸⁵ This was where mergers and takeovers eventually led to the fusion of distribution and exhibition firms into the large corporate entities that would monopolize the picture business after moving out west to Los Angeles. Zukor was as cunning a manipulator as any and had his "knife" ready to supplant Louis Selznick and was ready to watch for the decline of B.P. Schulberg.⁸⁶ Yet through the decades he became an institution at Paramount Pictures. His memoirs *The Public Is Never Wrong* are essentially an act of spinning a narrative. He casts himself as a man who went forth to bring entertainment and joy to the people with nothing but good hard work and a sound even-handed conception of good taste.

The autobiography of Warner Brothers mogul Jack Warner, titled *My First Hundred Years In Hollywood*, was very much written in the voice of the public face he concocted: the taskmaster, wisecracking boss who often sported a wry sneer. It is unlikely these books were written purely for money and thus they must be seen as vehicles of self-expression. Rather, such narratives more often amounted to set in stone the self-perception these studio bosses wanted to leave behind. It became a tool in the manufacturing of a personality and legacy for oneself. Warner stressed the friendships and great collaborative relationships he established, but this was the man who planned a takeover that supplanted his own brother Harry in the studio.⁸⁷

In a sense, there was a need to appear to be as morally upstanding and purely American as possible in order to stand beside their pictures, and yet there was the reality of unchecked ambition for power and superiority in the industry, which meant a necessitation of creating a larger than life, hard, tough and uncompromising facade through which to do business on the studio lot. These men never let themselves come through the facade they marketed whether they were with the press or their own employees. This dichotomy indicates a fascinating burial of self behind the Hollywood mantras and obviously created an irreconcilable set of principles in the minds of the men who ran the production and conception of the movies.

There were also the second generation movie producers such as the aforementioned Irving Thalberg, a prodigal son of motion picture production, lived through his pictures and was the epitome of the second generation of movie moguls who strove for prestige through their films. Ironically, in order to wrest control away from Thalberg, Mayer gave increased leeway to the likes of David O. Selznick, which precipitated the rise of the independent producer in the industry and sent the production process away from the studio model irrevocably.⁸⁸ It was still, even under the studio system of the movie moguls, a business with fluctuating loyalties and ascendancy strategies by very ambitious and fervently

stubborn men despite the public image of being in it to please the crowds first. The two are not mutually exclusive by any means, but the elevation of ego above serving an audience is fascinating in these men such as Darryl Zanuck, Thalberg and Selznick.

In his 1947 address to the Newspaper Advertising Executives Association, Louis B. Mayer made sure to stress to the assembled news publishers the symbiotic relationship between the two industries.⁸⁹ Mayer went as far as to note that Hollywood was a principle investor, in terms of advertising and content, for the nation's news media. The relationship that Mayer was reminding the assembled press about was one of the chief methods Hollywood used to disperse the Hollywood myth onto the public. The media was pivotal, but it also broke down into two separate streams: the trade press and the popular press. Ezra Goodman's *The Fifty Year Decline of Hollywood* is fascinating in the way it details the relationship between the studios and the trade papers.⁹⁰

Martin Quigley was a powerful early trade press publisher behind two important trade papers in *The Motion Picture Herald* and *Motion Picture Daily*.⁹¹ *Film Daily 1940 Yearbook's* statistics note that by 1939 there were 58 separate trade magazines.⁹² The two most known of these publications, which still exist today, were *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. The trades published updates on upcoming film productions, profile pieces on talent and the industry, and most crucially, reviews. These reviews were in no way what serious film criticism now aspires to be, but short snippets that assessed a film's likelihood of making an impact in the marketplace.

The mode of expression was concise, snappy, and efficient in relaying what was important: whether the film would sell. For example, here are quotes from three reviews of the same film: "Hard-hitting melodrama made to order" *Variety*; "spot on camera work is exciting" *The Hollywood Reporter*; and "Top notch melodrama" *Motion Picture Daily*. This was the shorthand of trade paper lingo, and it was what producers and those in the know wanted to find out.⁹³ The summative assessment of a

picture's merits often read in the vein of this one: "Aimed directly at the womenfolk in the plainer walks of life, of whom there are so many and who so largely determine attendance patterns, the picture has more than the standard equipment for commercial success."⁹⁴

These blurbs filtered through to the mainstream press when the studio put out pre-constructed press packets with contrived narratives. The trades also published personality pieces which adhered to the desired narrative. For example when light comedy star Fred MacMurray took on a darker role as Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* (1944), he was profiled in *Picture Goer* under the headline "MacMurray becomes an actor at last."⁹⁵ The studios assembled campaigns for each picture with ample ad-spaces and snappy tag lines which were concocted by the numerous press agents on studio payroll. A famous example was "Gable's Back and Garson's Got Him" for *Adventure*, which apparently made it into the lexicon.⁹⁶

Pre-packaged publicity pieces were assembled for local newspapers. They stressed resemblance to past successes, such as tying Humphrey Bogart's portrayal of a detective in *The Maltese Falcon* to that of his work in the *The Big Sleep* when it was due for release in 1946. The press kit features quotes from Bogart about his trust for the "Grey Fox," director Howard Hawks, and their previous success in *To Have and Have Not* as well as how "Bogey" spent his winter racing his sailboat.⁹⁷ Luxury and glamor in the lives of the stars was pushed to the public. Leo Rosten's sociological overview of the Hollywood press in 1939 revealed contrived star sightings where heartthrob stars were seen with various available starlets who were usually, and conveniently, all on the payroll to the same studio and had an upcoming picture due for release.⁹⁸

Stars did make it to the major papers for interviews, but were usually ready with perfunctory responses. An interview with William Holden in the *New York Times* in 1950 has him answering about what Hollywood was really like in cliché fashion. It was "just like any other place," he insisted.⁹⁹ In a

sense the industry had its cake and ate it too with the media as it simultaneously marketed luxury, while it staved off resentment and unusualness by claiming normalcy. Long-time Hollywood press agent Ezra Goodman in his *The Fifty Year Decline of Hollywood* details how the actual inquisitiveness of the 'showbiz' press was chastened in 1931 when the studios banded together to remind the publishers, in tough times due to the depression, how much advertising money came from the industry.¹⁰⁰ This sounds not unlike Mayer's aforementioned reminder of this in 1947 before the assembled Newspaper Advertising Executives Association.

The gossip columnists who prided themselves on their access to information, for example Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper, could be seen as holes in the Hollywood press blanket. However, Goodman details the cycle of trying to woo the attentions of the gossip specialists for press notices and then trying to hold them off if the same individual later found fame and success. Parsons for example made a big deal of newcomer Mark North landing a role in *The Unsuspected* after Dana Andrews passed on it and noted that Andrews would likely come to regret it.¹⁰¹ However, a star that had made it and was in demand faced some retribution if they had been difficult in the past. Sheila Graham, another of the same gossipy ilk, for example placed the following in her column on the eve of Joan Crawford's comeback film *Mildred Pierce*: "Funny to find Joan Crawford working as a waitress in "Mildred Pierce." that was how Joan started in Kansas City. At one time she would cry for hours if this appeared in print. Now she is the one who tells you."¹⁰²

While there were snarky comments, Goodman believed these columnists were really after the attention of the famous, and fawned upon stars and filmmakers in return for access.¹⁰³ They were dependent on contrived releases of information from their contacts and thus towed the line more often than not. Billy Wilder received a letter from Hedda Hopper which drips with overblown admiration when she addressed him as "My dear Billy."¹⁰⁴ Parsons had a fondness for using first names to demonstrate

familiarity such as "Speaking of Mike (Curtiz) reminds me of an amusing story..." These columnists had to keep the lines of communications open and had to balance being juicy with the prospect of losing their info.¹⁰⁵

Thus at the peak of their powers, the studios had a pretty formidable control mechanism on what information was shown to the public. This control mechanism kept the curtains closed on the inner workings of the factory, but it also typified how the factory was run. Indeed, it was a town that came to regulate and repress itself from the prying eyes of the rest of the world. It took effort and time to change the transplanted reality and quick money excess of the first generation of Hollywood superstars into the institutional authority and powerbase of the 1930s. The bohemianism of the silent stars such as Charlie Chaplin and the opulent mansions made to look like exotic foreign locals – or, in the case of cowboy star Tom Mix, his own name in big neon lights on the roof of his home – came to be part of the trade and part of the image.¹⁰⁶ This unruly behaviour was eventually packaged into a comfortable notion of wealth and sophistication that was made for public consumption.

The process of controlling the image of grandeur killed much of the genuine unbridled wildness and zeal for which the town gained its much needed allure. The systematizing of the star image into the production process helped the moguls, most acutely Mayer, create idols for the public, but also representations of the studio brand. If the stars could be made, they were easier to process and replace. This carried through to the style of movies they made and thus the type of filmmakers who were able to survive working under them. In a sense, the moguls' efforts to process talent created Powdermaker's "Hollywood people."¹⁰⁷

There was an old Hollywood maxim, probably attributable to Jack Warner, which stated "you take a man's money, you dance to his tune."¹⁰⁸ Thus was the artist's reality in Hollywood, that of a studio functionary. The studio was a place of business and those that worked there were expected to be there

and put in the hours of a bank manager as Jack Warner was fond of saying.¹⁰⁹ Harry Cohn at Columbia Pictures was said to have dictatorially insisted that his writers clock in and clock out at the beginning and end of every day.¹¹⁰ In addition to the work-a-day routine, it was also about likening oneself to the studio line of thought. Those that made pictures in Hollywood tended to be the sort of person whose personality came to be of the place, and typify the aspirations of the screen. The only alternative to being a functionary was to earn independence through making a reliably lucrative body of work and by negotiating contractual leeway.

John Baxter's *Hollywood In The Thirties* illustrates the work of the likes of directors Clarence Brown, W.S. Van Dyke and Sam Wood, who were able to quickly shoot tersely constructed films with airy pacing that kept the story moving the way MGM wanted.¹¹¹ The studios broke down the process and often had separate professionals for every step of the process with the overseeing mogul looming. Jack Warner claimed that he had a hand in cutting every single picture that bore the Warner's imprint during his tenure.¹¹² These were men who learned their trade in the Hollywood shop and expressed the same ethos as the men who built the plant. Even those that came from abroad were often reintegrated into a more conventionally American identity to fit the studio identity. According to studio records one Michael Kertesz signed a contract with the studio and was aided in obtaining his immigration papers. Kertesz then changed his name to Michael "Mike" Curtiz and went on to direct many of the best Warner's films including *Casablanca*.¹¹³

In his book *It Takes More Than Talent*, MGM contract director Mervyn LeRoy wrote about how to get into the picture business, with an introduction and praise from Louis B. Mayer. The book echoed everything Mayer would have wanted for a depiction of working in the business. LeRoy detailed his lack of formal education and how he made his own break by working hard and learning from life experience. He also defends the intentions of the Breen Office as being to "crack down on at every opportunity... the

picture that is made by conscienceless men who deliberately play on the lower emotions of man in order to sell tickets at the box office."¹¹⁴

There were directors with a particular vision in the old Hollywood, but they were those men who seemed to be able to excel at fashioning what Hollywood was pitching. Those that gained autonomy over projects were those who made pictures with a particular expertise in a desired genre. Ernst Lubitsch's "Lubitsch touch" fit the mode of production at Paramount better than any other working director and thus he gained a degree of power over his films, at one point even running the production schedule of the studio, because his artistry imbued films a little extra gloss.¹¹⁵ Occasionally a filmmaker would be rewarded for numerous successes with a pet project. King Vidor made *The Crowd*, much to the consternation of L.B. Mayer, but was only able to make it without stars and off the studio lot on location in New York City due to its themes and naturalistic look, which was a way for Mayer to unofficially disown the film.¹¹⁶

The American "auteurs" of the "Golden Age", the likes of John Ford and Howard Hawks, were still products of a huge reservoir of experience working for the studios. They made film after film in the silent era and in all the genres. Hawks, for example remembered toiling away at MGM before distinguishing himself under Irving Thalberg as a young producer and Ford made dozens of films at Fox Studios.¹¹⁷ They were especially skilled at their own craft, but they made pictures schooled in the Hollywood tradition. Indeed, they hardly considered themselves artists at all. For example, John Ford laughed off and ridiculed any question about the seriousness of the art form in interviews. There was, admittedly, some of the detectable affected showbiz gruffness to his persona, which was very common from Hollywood people of the era in interviews.¹¹⁸ Still, at least as far as they were willing to discuss it, they were just picture makers like any other. They were simply finely attuned to displaying the American virtues on the screen and had learned a trade through years of work within a framework of production.

Hawks finagled independence through a long association of success with Warner Brothers, MGM and Lasky's Famous Players in a position as a "story editor." In 1929 the studio records for Warner Brothers show that they contemplated enjoining Hawks from making a film with Howard Hughes.¹¹⁹ By 1935 Hawks, having established his own production company on the merits of his early sound films, was able to come to the negotiation table and demand a title card featuring a credit for "A Howard Hawks Production."¹²⁰ By his 1940s contract he was able to insist on the size of his own credit in relation to the main title in all advertising for the film. When Hawks noted an advertising fault that did not live up to the language of his contract, he decided to end his working relationship with Warner's.¹²¹ Hawks was able to facilitate and secure his own independence and prestige, although, years of toil had made him prioritize the preservation of that brand over the relationship to the studio.

Some, like Michael Curtiz, found that producing independently was a mistake. Curtiz left the confines of Warner's - where he was handed material that, he felt, he worked to make better - to pursue his own projects and material. Nine of his ten independent pictures produced by his company and distributed by Warner Brothers lost money for the studio.¹²² Curtiz wrote a pleading letter to Jack Warner to not let a twenty-five year relationship end acrimoniously using a 20th Century Fox letterhead, but Curtiz never worked for Warner's again.¹²³ Hawks did, but on his terms.¹²⁴ Independence meant making films of properties you sought out, but it was still necessary for those properties to perform commercially and that meant appealing to the audience that Hollywood had raised.

So, even a unique formulation of the Hollywood narrative, perhaps one as identifiable as Frank Capra's, only worked because it was exactly what Hollywood did best. Capra argued that with an adequate amount of pertinacity, the moguls were amenable to artistic ambitions, but Capra's successes were loud and proud portraits of Americana and achievement through individual resolve.¹²⁵ Capra was unusually suited to making a product tailored to the studio line. His autobiography, *Name Above The*

Title, is a curious exercise in self-mythologizing that echoes that of the studio moguls, but also his pictures themselves. Capra was born in Italy, immigrated to the United States, and managed to rise through the ranks of the picture industry with nothing but a little courage and a little backbone and he seems greatly indebted to the concept of living the American Dream.¹²⁶ This perspective is echoed in the sentimentality of his films, and while there is no specific reason to doubt the veracity of his facts, the linear success track he fashioned for his life story is fascinating when put in the Hollywood context. Capra was undoubtedly an example of a Hortense Powdermaker “*Hollywood person*.” He started writing gags for Max Sennett and through the years rose to direct and act as a president for both the Director’s Guild and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.¹²⁷

Capra’s films won him four Academy Awards for Best Director, but intriguingly he found it difficult to re-integrate into the same mode with his return to Hollywood after the Second World War. He notes that the entire roll call of names had changed upon his return and, revealingly, more punctilious critics such as Manny Farber in the *New Republic*, lambasted Capra for his simplistic narratives and racist denigration of minorities into amiable sidekicks.¹²⁸ By then the protection of the aura of the “Golden Age” had begun to wear off and, to an extent, the myth had been made transparent.

Capra’s tale is perhaps the archetypal account of the industry stalwart from the old days. He exemplified the business’s own self-laudatory tone, which was also present in the reflections of the industry’s spokesmen such as the moguls and Hays. Yet, the place was not as well remembered by those who came to the showbiz acropolis from other backgrounds or those who had ambitions to expand the potential of the burgeoning art form for the twentieth century. Aside from what had been engrained into Hollywood as the genres of practice, there was little interest in making pictures that

deviated from the norm. Any artistic leeway most certainly had to be earned through commercial success.

In the late 1940s screenwriter and novelist Irving Shaw actually wrote a piece for *Holiday* magazine called “Hollywood’s People” which told of the place that had emerged around the transplanted people who had come in search of fame and fortune in the movies. He likened Los Angeles to a ghetto of self-improvement stores, where desperate young people did absolutely anything to break into the movie business. It is perhaps the most insidious promotion that Hollywood ever got for itself when it became the dream site for fortune seekers and prospective stars.¹²⁹ After all, the broad appeal of the 1930s films was predicated on tales of individuals getting a chance to make themselves shine above the crop. They ranged from Capra’s odes to individual perseverance and achievement to the countless Busby Berkley musicals where the chorus girl is selected to the starring role.¹³⁰

Hollywood had a hand in the development of this figment of hope for stardom and had sold it for decades. Warner Brothers made a re-make of Cinderella in 1914 called *The Movie Queen* set in Hollywood with the prince being a motion picture producer.¹³¹ During the silent era MGM made *Show People*, a nostalgic portrayal of the driven artisans who had made the movies what they were and also a similar venture such as *Souls For Sale*.¹³² Hollywood’s commentary on itself by the 1930s had, unsurprisingly, not yet become self-aware as that would deride the long-standing vision as to how the town should be seen in public.

When the industry did allow a peak at itself it was the talent who was flawed, not the business.¹³³ David O. Selznick, only two years before *Gone with the Wind*, produced the first version of *A Star is Born* in 1937. It is the traditional narrative of a humble girl from rural America with big dreams getting her lucky break on a pure happenstance and becoming a star. The only villain in the movie is a press agent, and the only tragic figure is the alcoholic movie star Norman Maine (Frederic March) who

cannot cope with the waning of his success that leads to his downfall. The studio boss played by Adolphe Menjou is straight forward, kind, and ultimately compassionate toward his stars.

Author John Baxter argued that the studio controlled product gained a fully realized form in 1934.¹³⁴ American film had to re-invent itself due to the oncoming of sound technologies, which severely limited any technical verve in the years between 1929 and 1934. Gradually, the ability to hide microphones for sound was less constricting on the camera, and just as cinema had retooled, the industry around the technology had engrained the Production Code reality.¹³⁵ With sound, though, came a new set of eyes and a new class of minds to the Hollywood studios: the screenwriters. It threw a wrench in the production “hierarchy” and created a frustrated wing within the picture assembly line that eventually placed the entire process under the light of a much more articulate and incisive brand of criticism than ever raised before.¹³⁶

This unsuitability of the writer’s temperament took time to engender spite. There had long been scenario writers who essentially functioned to churn out copy. There were also continuity writers who fit scripts to camera setups. The more experienced ones could almost edit a film on the page in the early sound days due to the simple structure of those films.¹³⁷ With the demand for “talkies,” the studios needed writers to come up with more than just plot structure as they needed dialogue. Along with writers for original stories, they also needed properties that lent themselves more to the new verbal texture of cinema. Adapting novels and plays became a much more sophisticated process.¹³⁸ This led to ties with the literary world that heralded more hype on both ends when famed authors came to work for the studios. Playwrights, wits, and novelists such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Dorothy Parker, Aldous Huxley, P.G. Wodehouse, and William Faulkner, to name only a few, all ended up under contract to the studios naïve or curious about the nature of the new medium.¹³⁹

The truth is that the fusion of literary prestige and studio motion picture making never adhered. What resulted was a deeper tension between the East Coast literati and the West Coast showmen. Most of the famed novelists were not all that successful in Hollywood and returned to their roots. It was, in fact, an entirely different caste of writers who stayed and filled the studios' roster of screenwriters. Usually they were struggling writers and often, by trade, people who had worked well in the confines of deadline. The most highly paid screenwriter of them all was Ben Hecht who had a background in journalism as a reporter in Chicago.¹⁴⁰

These were the men and women who set out to fashion the new Hollywood "copy." Yet the price of concession to the studio process is palpable in many recollections. There is a rueful tone even from the great screenwriters, such as Donald Ogden Stewart, who wrote in his autobiography that he longed to get back the freedom he had "when [he] became a free-lance creative writer, and then lost... to Louis B. Mayer."¹⁴¹ Ben Hecht wrote in his memoir *Child of the Century* that his characters had been denied their immortality by his laboring mostly on what he thought was Hollywood ephemera: "I have written much fiction. The characters I made up are still alive, but they inhabit no world – only a closet... Like all writers who have tried hard, I dream sometimes that the closet door will open."¹⁴²

It was a troublesome reality for a writer, especially one with creative aspirations. For one, they were effectively denied authorship by the structure of the industry. The director was in charge of making the picture and had the reality of on the spot shooting schedules with which to contend. The script had to fit the kinetic reality of cinema and this meant that a script was, at best a guideline, as to what eventually ended up on camera. George Cukor related in an interview that he was often unaware how many writers had actually had a hand in crafting a screenplay and he normally only had contact with the author(s) of the last draft.¹⁴³

It is worth noting that those, like Hecht, who saw their works compromised were among the most successful screenwriters and that many toiled without any voice whatsoever due to a lack of writing jobs. Only those with what Koch referred to as “money” credits were given the time of day by the producers and movie bosses.¹⁴⁴ Competition for credits grew stiff for writers looking to build a resume, and on-screen title cards became a mouthful to get in all the deserving parties. Yet, it was a fight worth having because without those credits, there was almost no public record of efforts of the writer.¹⁴⁵ To just build a reputation in the industry, for example the roll call of *The International Motion Picture Almanac*, credits were what distinguished an individual’s listing from the huge scrolls of names. Also, studios paid for more space for those who could claim attachment to a list of successful pictures.¹⁴⁶ Being a screenwriter meant vying for opportunity on one hand, but even if you navigated the channels of influence, there was also the sacrifice of unique vision required to be successful. It was a life rife with frustration for many who had an artistic aim.

The preservation of credit mandated a strict trade protocol, which came with a thrust toward unionization. This put the screenwriters in a bullfight with the fervently anti-union studio chiefs, especially ardent opponent Louis B. Mayer who threatened to void the contract of any employee who saw fit to place himself among Screenwriter’s Guild ranks. Although screenwriters did apparently have divergent views on unionization, as there was a conservative reaction within the trade to the increasingly zealous members of the SWG in the form of the less radical Screen Playwrights Guild, this political gulf only further fuelled the animus between the writers and the executives.¹⁴⁷

The writers were the bullied sect of the film colony. They were “schmucks with Underwoods” as Jack Warner was fond of saying pejoratively as he and many of the moguls were prone to an anti-intellectual bent that led them to disdain literary culture.¹⁴⁸ Yet, a vocal literary backlash would serve as some comeuppance for Warner’s glib remarks, and his wit was not nearly as masterful as many of the

scribes who had toiled under him and his fellow moguls. In fact, it was the literary establishment who would sketch the enduring popular portrait of the movie moguls.

It was during the studio golden age that the literary establishment, which had been cooped up in Hollywood earlier in the 1930s, began to poke holes in the mantras of the movie colony and brought an outsider lens on the insular Hollywood subculture. It started out comically, as American cinema historian Robert Sklar noted the generally frivolous nature of literature on the movies prior to around 1941.¹⁴⁹ Most of the stories up until then were usually tales about dreams coming true in the land of bright lights. When the novelists who had been frustrated or wasted by the industry took swipes at Hollywood, as with P.G. Wodehouse in his *Mulliner* stories, studio life was generally given a treatment of a ship of fools with the poor incredulous writer being the only one with any sense:

‘Miss Stern’ he said, addressing his secretary, ‘what vacant offices have we on the lot?’

‘There is Room 40 in the Leper Colony’

‘I thought there was a song-writer there.’

‘He passed away Tuesday.’

‘Has the body been removed?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Then Mr. Mulliner will occupy the room, starting from to-day. He has just signed a contract to write dialogue for us.’¹⁵⁰

A popular stereotyping of the movie producer came to be the cocktail party favourite of the oft repeated *Goldwynisms* (“Include me out!”).¹⁵¹ It was not until pre-established novelists gave way to the toilers in and around Hollywood that the resentment and aversion to the climate of the town filtered through to the sphere of sophisticated literature.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's final literary effort, published in 1941, was the unfinished *The Last Tycoon*, one of numerous literary takes on Hollywood. The unfinished novel is about the daughter of a movie magnate who looks into the life of Monroe Stahr, a thinly concealed and widely recognized take on Irving Thalberg.¹⁵² Here the mogul, and Hollywood itself, is given an elegant treatise on the flaws of the singular ambition in the moviemaker's lifestyle. Fitzgerald paints it as a sad and wholly unbalanced workaholic life and an all-consuming obsession that stunted his character's development as a person. Stahr comes to view life through pictures, because seeing life through pictures helped the mind to understand how to make them, how to sell them, and then how to keep making them successfully.¹⁵³

However, *Tycoon* was still an otherwise established literary figure chronicling his retreat from the movie colony. It should probably be said that Fitzgerald's novel is an interesting and impactful work of romanticized literature that recast the conception of the movie tycoon, but was not a truly remarkable exposé. Still, it was at that same moment that those who were of Hollywood came out to write with frustration about living and toiling in the business. A much more penetrating literary critique of Hollywood came in Budd Schulberg's 1941 novel *What Makes Sammy Run?*. Schulberg was the son of fallen mogul B.P. Schulberg of Paramount and he wrote the most damning take on Hollywood's conniving young producers. This was a figure left unmarred previously except by Fitzgerald and then only to an extent. These young upstarts, for Schulberg, epitomized the cannibalistic nature of Hollywood power dynamics.

The novel is told through a narrator, Al Manheim, who is an unremarkable screenwriter, but with a background in reporting in New York City and a little worldliness. He watches Sammy Glick go from simpleton copyboy to a movie magnate over a long relationship.¹⁵⁴ The emphasis, again, is on the flaws of the picture producer: a man who set out to make it rich above all else in the most obvious place where quick fortune was to be had. Glick lacked a moral compass outside of that very particular drive to

succeed in movies. The character has been said to be a slice of Harry Cohn, and probably mostly Jerry Wald, but Schulberg also created the character Sidney Fineman, an old studio chief turned into an irrelevant dinosaur.¹⁵⁵

Fineman could well be a facsimile of Schulberg's own father and, as such, the dealings between Glick and Fineman are the most biting passages in the novel because it shows the old guard of movie producer teetering on irrelevancy. The Glicks of the industry were thus stalking underneath facades of respect in order to succeed them and take Hollywood into a new era with a new regime. In some ways Schulberg fell prey to a generational bias, of course, because the B.P. Schulbergs, the Louis Selznicks, the Zukors, and the Mayers were as a cavalier and flagrant in their schemes to get rich as anyone else.¹⁵⁶ Yet, there is a sense that they built the institution whereas the new crop was merely using the facilities that had been built to live in fame. The enduring strength of Schulberg's novel is its insight into the dual fallacies at work as the industry transitioned from the moguls to the producers at the crest of the "Golden Age".

The new breeds of independent producers were just as apt to run up against the screenwriter and cause friction. The David Selznicks, Daryl Zanucks, and Jerry Walds were often the ones sculpting the larger image of the picture, and as they watched dailies, they could demand re-writes on a whim. The writer retained the low position in the hierarchy of creative pursuits that under these types and continued to have little leverage.¹⁵⁷ The industry changed, but in effect the writers were still stuffed into a role as a supplicant functionary to the ambitions of megalomaniacal producers. Whether it was the mogul or the producer overlord, for the writers, the studios were still factories. *Casablanca* screenwriter Howard Koch wrote in his autobiography, after being overruled by Darryl F. Zanuck regarding his script for *The 13th Letter* (1951), and despite good notices, that he thought the film "a body without a heart."¹⁵⁸

Opportunity is what Hollywood sold, however, but the brewing sentiment for payback for unfulfilled promises was blisteringly articulated in 1939 by Nathaniel West's novel *The Day of the Locust*. West chose to focus on the employees on the lot who weren't chiefly artistic, but had delusions of importance, such as the main character, Ted Hackett, a background painter toiling on the lot. There are also supporting characters who are the sad sort who surrounded the industry but never really made it inside. Here for the first time, in a literary novel, is the other side of Los Angeles in contrast to the dream mystic of Hollywood. The desperate outsiders who fall prey to quick cash crimes and boozy con jobs are given a new sort of Los Angeles high literary fatalism by West. The land of opportunity and the land of opportunism end up in carnage as a riot breaks out at a movie premier, which sends the town into flames at the end of the novel.¹⁵⁹

Yet, on 14 December 1939 in Atlanta the industry had not yet had to come to terms with the turmoil that lurked within its gates and the frustration outside coming from pent up and unfulfilled dreams stemming from the disconnected representation of American life on-screen. The package of star power and spectacle was ringing with particular splendour on that day as *Gone with the Wind* promised a new level of grandeur at its premiere and the system seemed to be reaching a zenith. However, the old foundational conceits were about to send the old institution creaking towards its downfall. The movies changed drastically in the succeeding decade, and while wartime rationing made movies the only viable entertainment, and rallying around the flag continued the old model's prosperity a little further, the inevitable articulation of that simmering frustration was about to be vented.¹⁶⁰ The laboured, constructed, sanitized, and simplified package of Hollywood pleasantry no longer served to appeal to its aim at an antiquated conception of a single mass audience and value structure. It was the stymied groups who had circled the industry and had toiled within it who would complicate the picture by making the darker side of life as seductive as the studios had done for the wholesome. In the next decade, the old system would receive an anticipatory eulogy in its own product. The American film was

about to come out of a period of strict modulation and enter a complicated maturation process that would take decades to culminate.

²⁵ Meyer Berger, "Atlanta Retaken By Past Glory," *New York Times* December 15 1939, 19. *Proquest Historical Newspapers*, www.proquest.com.

²⁶ Lee Rogers, "CHEERS GREET FLASHING-EYED SCARLETT," *Atlanta Constitution* December 14 1939, 1; "'Melanie,' Laurence Olivier, David O. Selznick Arrive; Thousands To Line Famed Peachtree for Parade Today: Stars Parade Peachtree Today; Starting Time Dependent on Arrival of Gable at Airport," *Atlanta Constitution* December 14 1939, 1; Willard Cope, "CHEERING 300,000 HAIL CLARK GABLE IN WILD WELCOME," *Atlanta Constitution* December 15 1939, 1, *Proquest Historical Newspapers*, www.proquest.com.

²⁷ This is the title of Leo C. Rosten, *Hollywood The Movie Colony The Movie Makers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941) a survey conducted in 1939 on Hollywood as a self-contained social caste.

²⁸ Employee of the Breen Office, which reviewed scripts and recommended changes and deletions on films, Jack Vizzard considered this to be what the censorship body was all about. See: Jack Vizzard, *See No Evil The Life Inside A Hollywood Censor* (New York: Pocket Books, 1971), 15.

²⁹ John Baxter, *Hollywood in the Thirties* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1968), 209.

³⁰ The studios' power sources were reduced by a number of economic and fiscal realities. Their distribution monopoly on theatre ownership was ruled to be in violation of anti-trust law in 1948, they lost the foreign marketplace during the war, and, of course, television provided a more convenient form of immediate competition for the eyes of the viewing public. Add to this the strengthening of the talent guilds, which created a more even bargaining playing field for contracts, and the looming specter of House Un-American Activities Committee launched a probe into the industry's politics and Hollywood was a much different place by 1949. See Michael Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Ayer, 1978); Kerry Segrave, *American films Abroad Hollywood's Domination of the World's Movie Screens* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1997); Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the film community, 1930-1960* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980) for elaboration.

³¹ Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, *Hollywood In The Forties* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1968), 7.

³² Barbara Deming, *Running Away From Myself* (New York: Grossman, 1969), 42.

³³ Budd Schulberg, "Hollywood," *Holiday* 5 (1949): 41.

³⁴ The majors were still producing between 300 and 400 pictures a year with a high of 407 in 1937. This decreased to 289 in 1943 and fell to 234 in 1949. The studios also employed approximately a third fewer people in 1949 compared to 1939. The industry statistics are listed in Chester B. Bahn ed., *Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures 1940* (Los Angeles: Film Daily), 39; *The Film Daily Yearbook 1950*, 77.

³⁵ Let alone the "Honor Roll" which featured *Stagecoach*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, *Love Affair*, *Gunga Din*, *The Lady Vanishes*, *Only Angels Have Wings*, and *Angels with Dirty Faces* (*Gone with the Wind* premiered after publication). It was a high watermark for "quality" studio films. See Bahn ed., *Film Daily Yearbook 1940*.

³⁶ Titles such as *Kentucky* and *East Side of Heaven* are less remembered. See Bahn, ed. *Film Daily Yearbook 1940* "Box Office Champion."

³⁷ *Yale Law Review* "Censorship of Motion Pictures," 90.

³⁸ The majors were Metro Goldwyn Mayer (a subsidiary of Loew's Inc.), Paramount Pictures, United Artists, Warner Brothers, Universal Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Columbia Pictures and RKO. They all organized into the Motion Picture Association of America.

³⁹ It also led to a bevy of sociological studies and philosophical considerations of the movies role in society, including Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *The Morals of the Movie* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing, 1922) and Will Hays' favourite, Raymond Moley, *Are We Movie-Made?* (New York: Macy-Masius, 1938) as well as the much more comprehensive Payne Fund Study.

The history of the consolidation of the film producers into the studio corporations starting on the East Coast and the impact of the Fatty Arbuckle scandal on the industry banding together is best relayed concisely in Robert Sklar's seminal *Movie-Made America A Cultural History of American Movies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage

Books, 1994). Kevin Brownlow's classic *Parade's Gone By* (New York: Knopf, 1969) is a thorough history of the silent era.

⁴⁰ Sklar, 76-80.

⁴¹ It was officially known as the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association, which was based on the west coast and not to be confused with the Motion Pictures Producers Association based in New York with the studio corporate headquarters, as clarified by Hays in *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 452-453.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood the Dream Factory* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 57; Hays, 400.

⁴⁴ Hays, 394.

⁴⁵ Vizzard, 40.

⁴⁶ Archived material at Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) records, 1931-1990 is a voluminous trove of examples of the Breen communiqués. The "*Panic in the Streets* Folder" within those records is an intriguing example. See Memo "Breen to Jason S. Joy November 17 1949."

⁴⁷ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Paramount Production Records for *Double Indemnity*, Memo "Luigi Lurashi to Joseph Siström September 28 1945.";

University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *Mildred Pierce* Folder, Story File, "Censorship Memo Herman Lissauer Head of Research Department to Jerry Wald August 15 1944."

⁴⁸ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) records, 1931-1990, *Panic In The Streets* Folder, "Code Analysis of Film Content."

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Production Code Administration Folder, "Adopted Code to Govern the Production of Motion Pictures."

⁵¹ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) records, 1931-1990, *Panic In The Streets* Folder, Memo "Joseph L. Breen To Jason S. Joy November 17 1949."

⁵² Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Production Code Administration Folder, "Adopted Code to Govern the Production of Motion Pictures."

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Returning to Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) records, 1931-1990, *Panic In The Streets* Folder, "as an example, in memo "Joseph L. Breen to John S. Joy January 2 1950" Breen asks for wardrobe stills to be sent to the office to make sure a particular costume is not too revealing.

The code was less adept at enforcing the double entendre. For the famous exchange between Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall in *The Big Sleep* regarding the finer points of "horse racing" Breen could only stress that the audience not be able to infer sexual undertones. They exist implicitly and are obviously stressed in the finished film. University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *The Big Sleep* Folder, Story File, Memo "Joseph L. Breen to Jack Warner January 25 1946

Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, History of Cinema Series 1: Hollywood and the Production Code [Reel 27], *The Bad and the Beautiful*, Memo "Joseph L. Breen to Dore Schary November 27 1951."

The concerns about what we now refer to as "product placement" are interesting, given the profligacy of it today. While practical reasons for this existed, such as that it was then discouraged by the code, it is also indicative of the wish to make the movies exist outside of reality

⁵⁵ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Production Code Administration Folder, "Adopted Code to Govern the Production of Motion Pictures."

⁵⁶ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Production Code Administration Folder, "Adopted Code to Govern the Production of Motion Pictures, "Code Revision in 1956."

⁵⁷ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Production Code Administration Folder, "Adopted Code to Govern the Production of Motion Pictures, "Declaration of Principles of The Code of Self- Regulation."

⁵⁸ Hays, 461.

⁵⁹ I recommend Robert Sklar's concise treatment of the reality of the censorship cries from parental, and particularly Catholic, special interest groups during this era. *Movie Mad America*, 76- 80.

⁶⁰ Many scholars choose to treat the Code and Breen Office as more of a partnership where the Office would work with the filmmakers to get their vision across but in an acceptable form. This made the films of the era more creative in how they subtly grappled with vice. See Maltby, Richard "Baby Face; or, How Joe Breen Made Barbara Stanwyck Atone For Causing The Wall Street Crash," *Screen* 27 (1986): 27- 45, *JSTOR*. I see that dynamic as being more in place during the transitional phase from the pre-code status to the more institutional era of the Code on which I am focusing this chapter.

⁶¹ Baxter, 19 & 41.

⁶² Terry Ramsaye, ed., *1939-1940 International Motion Picture Almanac* (New York: Quigley Publishing Company, 1940), 104; "It's our year! It's Paramount year!" 198.

⁶³ Martin Quigley introduced the *1939-1940 International Motion Picture Almanac* as follows: "Compressed into these pages is the whole picture of the motion picture and related arts and industries..."

⁶⁴ The advertisement features a subtitle for the book: "Why there is and how there came to be a "Production Code." Ramsey, ed., *1939-1940 International Motion Picture Almanac*.

See the aforementioned *Yale Law Review* "Censorship of Motion Pictures," for a complete portrait of Quigley's activities within the industry.

⁶⁵ Phillip French, *The Movie Moguls* (London: Pelican Books, 1969), 25 discusses the financial hit taken by many of the movie moguls in the stock market crash, including Louis B. Mayer. Baxter, *Hollywood in the Thirties*, discusses the retrofitting of the industry required for the change to sound in the early 1930s. This will be further discussed as it also affected the "hierarchy" in the studio process. See Ceplair and Englund, 2.

⁶⁶ Leo A. Handel, "Hollywood Market Research," *Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 6 (1953): 309. *JSTOR*.

⁶⁷ Louis Mayer, "Thrills in Films," *New York Times*, December 30 1923: A. *The New York Times Encyclopaedia of Film 1896-1928*, ed. Gene Brown (New York: Times Books, 1984).

⁶⁸ Powdermaker, 19-21.

⁶⁹ Adolph Zukor and Dale Kramer, *The Public Is Never Wrong* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1953) in addition to the title of his memoir, "the public is never wrong" was the philosophy with which Zukor operated toward in terms of making pictures in his words.

⁷⁰ Norman Zierold, *The Moguls Hollywood's Merchants of Myth* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1969), 275; Crowther 11-12.

⁷¹ French, 39.

⁷² Eyman, Scott. 2005. *Lion of Hollywood The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 18.

⁷³ "Mayer Dies 'In Exile' From Films," *Variety Obituaries 1957-1963* 5 (New York, Garland, 1988).

⁷⁴ Charles Higham, *Merchant of Dreams* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1993), 18.

⁷⁵ Dorothy Kilgallen, "Voice of Broadway," *New York Journal American* August 11 1950. Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Sunset Blvd. Clipping File.

⁷⁶ Budd Schulberg, "Hollywood," *Holiday* 5 (1949): 41.

⁷⁷ Upton Sinclair, *Upton Sinclair Presents William Fox* (Los Angeles: Published by Author, 1933), 93-95.

⁷⁸ "William Fox Dies In N.Y. After Long Illness," *Variety Obituaries 1948-1956* 4 (New York: Garland, 1988); Terry Ramsaye, ed., *1939-1940 International Motion Picture Almanac*, 231; Sinclair, 96.

⁷⁹ Sklar, 145; French, 43.

⁸⁰ Louis B. Mayer, "The Motion Picture and the World Today," Address before *Newspaper Advertising Executives Association Annual Convention* at San Francisco, CA, July 7 1947), 3.

⁸¹ "Mayer Dies 'In Exile' From Films," *Variety Obituaries 1957-1963* 5.

⁸² French, 57.

⁸³ "Mayer Dies 'In Exile' From Films," *Variety Obituaries 1957-1963* 5; Crowther, 269.

⁸⁴ "Mayer Dies 'In Exile' From Films," *Variety Obituaries 1957-1963* ;

Mayer's dealings have come under more suspicion and tall tales persist about how much influence Mayer and his public relations man Howard Strickland wielded with the Los Angeles Police Department. Allegations of

affairs, shady land deals, union busting, and blackmail have all been levied, but seem to be unverifiable. The most salacious account is Charles Higham's *Merchant of Dreams*, but this is not to be relied upon due to its use of unspecified anecdotal interviews, and even some factual mistakes, as shown in a well-researched debunking article "Crash Course," <http://www.snopes.com/movies/actors/gable2.asp>. Norman Zierold in *The Moguls Hollywood's Merchants of Myth*, 329 alludes to the fact that his next of kin destroyed his personal papers after his death. While this in of itself proves nothing, it will certainly make either proving or disproving these allegations very difficult. Budd Schulberg remained highly critical of Mayer and alluded to his unscrupulous negotiating tactics in "LOUIS B. MAYER The Lion of Hollywood," *TIME Magazine* December 7 1998.

⁸⁵ French, 62.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Zierold, 253-254.

⁸⁸ Bosley Crowther, *Hollywood Rajah The Life and Times of Louis B. Mayer* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 188.

⁸⁹ Louis B. Mayer, "The Motion Picture and the World Today," 3.

⁹⁰ Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 16 - 99. Much of the book is fascinating at examination the role that the press played in shaping popular conceptions of movie stars and the industry as well as the give and take between the press agents and gossip columnists. Chapter 2 "Tom Swift and His Flying Type Writer" is a sprawling, but formidable coverage of the trade press with an interesting first-hand perspective.

⁹¹ *Yale Law Review* "Censorship of Motion Pictures," 103.

⁹² Chester B. Bahn ed., *Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures 1940* (Los Angeles: Film Daily), 39

⁹³ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) records, 1931-1990, *Panic In The Streets* Folder, Reviews clipped from *Variety* June 14 1950; *The Hollywood Reporter* June 14 1950; *Motion Picture Daily* June 14 1950.

⁹⁴ University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *The Blue Gardenia* Folder, Publicity File, "The Blue Gardenia," *Motion Picture Daily* March 13 1953.

⁹⁵ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Fred MacMurray and June Haver Papers, Double Indemnity Clippings, Will Mooring, "MacMurray becomes an actor at last," *Picture Goer* June 24 1944.

⁹⁶ University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *Mildred Pierce* Folder, Publicity Clips, Harold Heffernan "Good Tag Line Can Do Lot For Movie" *The Detroit News* July 3 1946: 6.

⁹⁷ University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *The Big Sleep* Folder, Publicity – Press Releases, "Production Notes "The Big Sleep"."

⁹⁸ Rosten, 114.

⁹⁹ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, *Sunset Blvd.* Clipping File, Howard Thompson, "Hollywood Hurrahs by Holden," *New York Times* August 13 1950.

¹⁰⁰ Goodman, 41-42.

¹⁰¹ University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archive, *The Unsuspected* Folder, Publicity Folder 1 of 6, Louella O. Parsons, "Ted (Michael) North Gets Break in 'Unsuspected' for Curtiz" *Los Angeles Examiner* January 1 1947.

¹⁰² University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *Mildred Pierce* Folder, Publicity Clips, Sheila Graham, "Hollywood Today," *Daily Mirror* January 7 1945.

¹⁰³ Goodman, 34-40.

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Hedda Hopper Papers [61.f – 2680], Note to Billy Wilder September 11 1961.

¹⁰⁵ University of South California, Warner Brothers Archives, *Mildred Pierce* Folder, Publicity Clips, Louella O. Parsons, "Joan Crawford Given Star Role in "For Sentimental Reasons"," *Los Angeles Examiner* August 9 1945.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Jensen, *The Amazing Tom Mix The Most Famous Cowboy of the Movies* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), 88; Brownlow, 497-507,

¹⁰⁷ Powdermaker, 19-21.

¹⁰⁸ Max Wilk, *Schmucks With Underwoods Conversations With Hollywood's Classic Screenwriters* (New York: Applause, 2004), 300.

¹⁰⁹ Wilk, 304.

¹¹⁰ Wilk, 36.

¹¹¹ Baxter, 22-40.

¹¹² No doubt this was an exaggeration by the typically hyperbolic Warner; however studio communiqués between the Breen Office and directors do indicate he had a more hands on and even personal touch toward the movies he made than executives at the bigger studios such as MGM or Paramount. This also seems have been the view held toward Harry Cohn at Columbia, see "Death Strikes 'Last of Studio Czars'," *Variety Obituaries 1957-1963* 5, March 5 1958 (New York, Garland, 1988).

¹¹³ University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archive, Michael Curtiz Director Folder, Michael Curtiz Legal File 13/13, "Jack Warner to Mr. Michael Kertesz April 14 1928,"; "Contract with Warner Brothers April 4 1929."

¹¹⁴ Mervyn LeRoy and Alyce Canfield, *It Takes More Than Talent* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 4.

¹¹⁵ Baxter, 56.

¹¹⁶ Andrew Bergman, *We're In the Money: Depression America and its Films* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 74.

¹¹⁷ Peter Bogdanovich, *Who The Devil Made It* (New York: Ballantine, 1997), Forward & 267.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archives, Howard Hawks Director File, Legal File, "From Legal Department to Mr. Einfeld Re: Howard Hawks Director December 19 1929."

¹²⁰ Ibid, "Hal B. Wallis to Roy Obringer September 13 1935."

¹²¹ Ibid, "Howard Hawks to Charles Einfeldt [sic] December 22 1944"; "Howard Hawks to Jack Warner December 22 1944."

¹²² University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archive, Michael Curtiz Director Folder, Michael Curtiz Legal File 1/13, "Sam Schneider to Roy Obringer December 31 1953."

¹²³ Ibid, "Michael Curtiz to Jack Warner January 15 1954."

¹²⁴ University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archives, Howard Hawks Director File, Legal File, "Jack Gordean (Famous Artists Agency) to Jack Warner November 10 1959."

¹²⁵ This element recurs throughout Frank Capra, *Name Above the Title: An Autobiography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), but is captured in the first chapter "It's About Time, You Bum," 3-16 or as quoted on 237: "I had reached a lifetime goal: Making something out of nothing; a nobody became Mr. Somebody – and I made the world like it."

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 44, 187 & 238.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 371; Manny Farber, "Mugging Main Street," *Farber on Film*, ed. Robert Polito (New York: The Library of America, 2009), 307-308.

¹²⁹ Irwin Shaw, "Hollywood People," *Holiday* 5(1949): 55.

¹³⁰ Bergman, 62.

¹³¹ Rudy Behlmer and Tony Thomas, *Hollywood's Hollywood* (Secaucus: The Citadel Press, 1975), 100. *Hollywood's Hollywood* is a thorough account of Hollywood films about the film industry and has coverage and stills from many lost or out of circulation silents.

¹³² Ibid, 103. *Souls For Sale*, which at the time of publication of Behlmer and Thomas was a rarity, has since found release on commercial DVD as part of the Warner Brothers Archive series.

¹³³ Ibid, 120.

¹³⁴ Baxter, 16.

¹³⁵ Brownlow, 3.

¹³⁶ Ceplair and Englund, 2.

¹³⁷ Wilk, 32.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 2-4.

¹³⁹ Wilk, 37.

¹⁴⁰ Ben Hecht, *Child of the Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954),116.

¹⁴¹ Donald Ogden Stewart, *By A Stroke of Luck: An Autobiography* (New York: Paddington Press, 1975), 217.

¹⁴² Hecht, 68.

¹⁴³ Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, "George Cukor," *Celluloid Muse* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1969.), 61.

¹⁴⁴ Koch, 84.

¹⁴⁵ An instructive example stems from a lawsuit brought against Warner Brothers and James M. Cain from a playwright who claimed her work had been stolen by Cain for the source novel of *Mildred Pierce*. In order to safeguard themselves, the studio legal department devised a full report of the eleven writers, including William Faulkner, who had worked on the film uncredited. See University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archives, *Mildred Pierce* Folder, Story Files, "Karp to Roy Obringer "Mae Caro vs. Warner Bros. Pictures Inc and James M. Cain May 12 1949. Studios often had specialized writers who could punch up dialogue or shape scenes as a specialty uncredited. The pay was often lucrative, but as noted by famed screenwriter Sidney Buchman in Wilk, *Schmucks With Underwoods* (p. 36) there were many writers toiling around the studio without pictures to work on, which made credit all the more important for a job done for those who were not already firmly established.

¹⁴⁶ Terry Ramsaye ed., *Motion Picture Almanac* of 1939 -1940 is full of ad space for accomplished individuals who had produced successful work. Actors usually used headshots, while writers and directors relied on their credits to push their worth. Some like Claudette Colbert (p. 639) had sufficient star power to print nothing but their name, and humorously Alfred Hitchcock's famed profile silhouette sketch that would be the logo for his later television series is used in Chester B. Bahn, ed. *The Film Daily Yearbook 1939* for his ad space, with slightly more hair atop than the later more famous image. (p.100)

¹⁴⁷ Ceplair and Englund, 37-38.; Mayer and others were accused of a tacit black list of writers who side with the Screen Writers Guild. The Guild did in fact take a complaint before the National Labor Review Board in 1939 which indicated that producer's had coerced "members and prospective members and had fostered the Screen Playwrights." See Hollis Kennahan. "Labor in Review" *The Film Daily Yearbook 1940*, Chester B. Bahn, ed, 71.

¹⁴⁸ Wilk, xii. "Underwood" was a famous manufacturer of typewriters.

¹⁴⁹ Sklar, 189.

¹⁵⁰ P.G. Wodehouse, *Blandings Castle* (New York: Arrow Books), 282. This is not to say that these stories lacked charm, but they were definitely comic in nature. Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1999) is another fine example. Sklar's portrait is ultimately incomplete as far as literary treatments of Hollywood goes, but Sklar is likely intending to mention literary novels by former screenwriters and not the general conception of Hollywood in fiction, which will be expanded upon further here in a subsequent chapter.

¹⁵¹ Zierold, 119.

¹⁵² Sklar, 191.

¹⁵³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Last Tycoon* (Toronto: Penguin Classics, 2010), "Leaving the studio he was still tense..." (74).

¹⁵⁴ Budd Schulberg, *What Makes Sammy Run* (London: Allison & Busby, 1992).

¹⁵⁵ French, 39.

¹⁵⁶ Zierold, 9-11.

¹⁵⁷ Ceplair and Englund, 30.

¹⁵⁸ Howard Koch, *As Time Goes By* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 176.

¹⁵⁹ Nathaniel West, *The Day of the Locust* (New York: Penguin Books, 1939), 168-183.

¹⁶⁰ See Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes To War* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) for the best account of the Hollywood war effort and the effects it had on the industry, particularly in terms of relations with Washington and the United States Government and the Office of War Information.

Chapter 2 L'Argot Noir: Hollywood Fiction In a Hard-Boiled World

Nathaniel West's "Dantesque" journey through the circles of Hollywood life in *The Day of the Locust* concluded by telling of a violent mob burning down a movie theatre as it hosted a film premier. It may have been the best effort yet in the quest that famed literary critic Edmund Wilson labeled an effort to "lay bare the hearts and bowels" of the motion picture industry amongst the literary establishment.¹⁶¹ However, the literati, through a tendency to condescend against genre fiction, had missed a brewing articulation of disdain for Hollywood that was emanating from inside the studio gates and the town around the movie factories. It may have been pulp fiction, but what started as Californian hard-boiled fiction and evolved throughout the 1920s and 30s created a unique anti-Hollywood stylization. It would then eventually be the underpinning for the filmic style which would starkly contrast the wholesome content of the screens from the realities of American life.

The noir lens germinated in the fiction of the thirties and its practitioners vented a first-hand frustration for working in Hollywood. It was the by-product of working and living in Los Angeles, a city that created the most glaring abrogation of the American dream from the American reality at a time when the arts were preoccupied with this notion. Curiously, but also crucially to its success as commercial art, it functioned much the same way as Hollywood's puritanical notions of middle-brow wholesomeness and fantastical fairy tales of glamour. This brand of fiction took a ribald glory in airing the antithesis of Hollywood values was eventually a readymade instrument to sharpen focus on Hollywood's inequalities.

David Madden, a scholar of novelist and screenwriter James M. Cain, opined that there were only three literary modes that came to fruition in the 1930s: hard-boiled, proletariat, and the "tough guy," with the tough guy being a bi-product of the former two.¹⁶² This is an oversimplification, but not an altogether useless delineation. All of these were progressions from the early twentieth century

naturalists such as Theodore Dreiser. The articulation of an American Dream is said to have gained popular traction with John Truslow Adam's 1931 bestseller *The Epic of America*.¹⁶³ The conflict between the dream and reality preoccupied the fiction of famous literary writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald in his *The Great Gatsby* in 1925 and *Tender Is the Night* in 1934. Fitzgerald was the type of novelist a critic such as Edmund Wilson implored to write the great Hollywood exposé, and a man who died in the process of doing his best at it in the aforementioned *The Last Tycoon*.¹⁶⁴ Of this generation the man most sought after for emulation was, of course, Ernest Hemingway. The hard-boiled strain, most famously attached to Dashiell Hammett, was a genre reaction to the proletarian writing of, for example, John Steinbeck, in twentieth century literature, but Hemingway would be Hammett's model in a variety of ways, both positive and negative.

Hemingway's 1927 short story *The Killers* has been credited as the first hard-boiled story. It is a sparely written story that removed the glamor of crime by lingering on the cold state of inevitability that anticipated a contract murder. A diner's staff is held hostage by two gunmen waiting on their hit, the Swede, at his place of work.¹⁶⁵ The danger of the moment is in the cold and lingering promise of violence. In letters to his publisher, this is the style of literary distillation that, at his best moments as a writer, Hammett hoped to bring to the American detective. Hammett, as a practitioner of what was considered mystery fiction, wished to immerse the reader in the hardened straights of actual crime. He wanted to obliterate the ostentatious cleverness and refinement of the debonair literary sleuths such as S.S. Van Dyne's Philo Vance and the legacy of brilliant detectives that went back to Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Allen Poe.

This would happen at his best moments. Otherwise, as his letters made clear, Hammett churned out detective stories for money. Hammett began with ambitions to write for the higher-profile literary magazines. He originally submitted stories, hoping to capitalize on his past experience in life as an

employee of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, to the literary magazine *Smart Set* edited by H.L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan.¹⁶⁶ Richard Layman, Hammett's biographer, theorized that he was informed in his now lost correspondence with Mencken that he should set his aim to where his stories would have the most appeal, the little secret of the literary establishment.¹⁶⁷ Layman noted that *Smart Set* was a labor of love, but one that lost money and the profitability of the enterprise depended on the legendary pulp mystery magazine *Black Mask*.¹⁶⁸

Mask was where Hammett toiled and honed his craft. Hammett wrote his eventual novel publisher Blanche Knopf about his ambitions as a mystery writer. He hoped to raise the style of the genre to the level of literature.¹⁶⁹ He also hoped to re-invent the wheel by taking the reader into a "stream of consciousness" narrative where the mystery would unravel through the thoughts of the detective.¹⁷⁰ These were ambitions he would never come to fully realize, and it became clear that financial considerations dominated the majority of his literary output for the rest of his life. He wrote his wife, Josephine Dolan Hammett, that he was set to do "Blackmasking" which was how he paid the bills.¹⁷¹ He readily changed and censored the contents of his novels to make them less graphic and harsh for novel publication.¹⁷² This was not unheard of for even famous authors of the time, even Hemingway had to agree with Scribner's to make the language in *A Farewell to Arms* less explicit, but the reality was that Hammett had to produce to pay bills.¹⁷³

With this in mind, it is unsurprising that he was eager to take in Hollywood money. His first attempt at Fox went nowhere, but after the publication of his first two novels *Red Harvest* and *The Maltese Falcon*, in 1928 and 1929 respectively, had made him a literary celebrity and he was brought to Hollywood at a party hosted by Darryl F. Zanuck at Warner Brothers.¹⁷⁴ The reality is that for all Hammett's tough content, he was actually exactly the voice that fit with a major segment of the Warner studio brand at the time. The pre-code gangster films such as *Little Caesar* and *The Public Enemy* (both

1931) were sensations and, as always with Hollywood, Warner and the other studios all sought to imitate past successes. Hammett himself wrote to his editor at Alfred A. Knopf, Harry Block, that he planned to write a novel about a "gunman" but felt he had been scooped by W.R. Burnett's *Little Caesar*.¹⁷⁵ Hemingway himself felt that there was a difference between selling out and "cashing in" which was what giving your material to the movie studios entailed.¹⁷⁶ Thus there is nothing unconventional about Hammett going to Hollywood, except that it distracted him from writing and stunted the development of his hard-boiled style and his writing was no longer as cutting as that which eventually became the film noir. His style, as it stood when his final serious novel *The Glass Key* in 1931 was published, was an exact fit with the gangster cycle that was a Warner staple cash cow (along with musicals) in the 1930s, where he could produce snappy tough talk such as the following from *Red Harvest*: " "Knock the dents out of your hat and put your necktie in front, so you won't disgrace me going through the streets," I ordered after I had run a hand over his clothes and found nothing that felt like a weapon. "You can suit yourself about remembering that this gat is going to be in my overcoat pocket, with a hand on it.""¹⁷⁷

Gradually, Hammett, in no small part due to alcoholism, began to dry up as a writer in favour of living grandly in Hollywood. He had no interest in motion pictures, and wrote to his daughter that he thought little of them when he infrequently attended, including the gangster picture he penned for MGM in 1931 *City Streets*.¹⁷⁸ He eventually acclimatized commercially to Hollywood and wrote his final novel, and subsequent film script and the first two sequels as well, *The Thin Man* (1934).¹⁷⁹ The successful films with William Powell and Myrna Loy as Nick and Nora Charles were a reliable commercial staple for Metro Goldwyn Mayer, and eventually made Hammett rich as he satirized his own life with his partner Lillian Hellman, making witty, carefree bon-vivants out of the detective and his wife. He wrote to Hellman that he found his own characters "insufferable" and had clearly done exactly the opposite of his original ambition.¹⁸⁰

What Hammett left on the page in his novels is often credited as the source material for the first real film noir. His most famous novel *The Maltese Falcon* was thrice adapted by Warner Brothers. The final and most famous version in 1941 directed by John Huston and starring Humphrey Bogart, would become the film that many use as the launching pad for the noir cycle.¹⁸¹ The film as it stands now is a classic, but has little of the styling of a film noir, and when seen in the context of the Warner's "tough guy" cannon of the 1930s, is actually very much more of that type.¹⁸² Huston's achievement, in his own words, was to use Hammett's words as the two previous adaptations had strayed from doing.¹⁸³

Yet the film actually does streamline the novel toward a fit for Warner Brothers' mantle. There are obvious production code deletions such as the extramarital affair between Bogart's Sam Spade and his partner Miles Archer's wife, but as John T. Irwin points out, Huston also deleted the one digression in Hammett's narrative a story Spade tells Brigit O'Shaughnessy about an anecdote about a man named Flitcraft who, dissatisfied, runs out on his wife to another life and family only to have a near death experience and abandon another family to continue wandering. Noir historian Robert Porfirio used this incident as an example of the existentialist underpinnings of Hammett's writing, but, as Irwin stated, this was an exaggeration as the Flitcraft anecdote is an albatross in the novel and in Hammett's work.¹⁸⁴ Instead the final film is a terse, tough parlor play that worked on the Humphrey Bogart star persona that had been established in *Dead End* (1937) and *High Sierra* (1941) where Bogart was a thoughtful gangster.

This was the final evolution of the gangster cycle in Hollywood, which should be demarcated from film noir. It was part of a process through which the gangster aligned himself with the figures of authority, and became a rogue, but one who ultimately acted morally. The early gangster pictures had occurred as far back as Josef von Sternberg's *Underworld* (1927), written by Ben Hecht and began to be churned out at Warner's by 1931 with *The Public Enemy* and *Little Caesar*.¹⁸⁵ Hecht had a journalistic

background in Chicago and Hollywood was quickly developing an interest in crime as sensation. The most controversial of the gangster films, which ran up against state censorship boards, and surely accelerated the pace of instituting the provisos of the eventual Production Code, was Howard Hughes' production of *Scarface* (1932).¹⁸⁶

Director Howard Hawks recalled that the film was a take on the Borgias set in the Depression era criminal underworld, but screenwriter Ben Hecht recalls in his memoirs an incident where he was visited by two of Al Capone's henchmen in his hotel room. Allegedly they were told to make sure the film was not about the gangster.¹⁸⁷ Whether this is accurate or not, Hecht, as mentioned, became one of the most successful screenwriters in the business before getting himself in trouble for voicing his political views. He even collaborated on the memoirs of gangster Mickey Cohen and thought of writing a screenplay off of those experiences.¹⁸⁸

This was a time when stars such as George Raft could be seen enjoying the company of nefarious racketeers at Los Angeles nightclubs such as the Trocadero.¹⁸⁹ The first two sound gangster pictures at Warner's were *The Public Enemy* and *Little Caesar* which were produced by a young Darryl F. Zanuck, who brought Hammett to Hollywood. Warner's two adaptations of Hammett's *Maltese Falcon* were not successful, although the first version of *The Glass Key* with George Raft in 1935 met some success. The code did nothing to extinguish the gangster as a popular figure in film, but it did lead to a rationalization of criminality that only Hays Code Hollywood could intellectualize.

The Code-era gangster had to be punished for his crimes and thus became a repentant social crusader who eventually ended up sacrificing himself for the good of his friends or society.¹⁹⁰ This tortured mentality can be seen in Metro Goldwyn Mayer's *Manhattan Melodrama* (1934). The story follows two childhood friends who grew up and took two different paths, one (William Powell) became a district attorney, and the other (Clark Gable) became a reckless racketeer. They continued to be friends

while skirting the fact that they were on opposite sides of the law, but when Gable's character went too far and murdered a debtor who would not pay, it becomes an inevitability that Gable would have to pay for his crime. Still, the story was spun in such a way that Gable sacrifices himself by taking the rap to save the reputation and integrity of Powell's District Attorney which made Gable noble in his trip to the electric chair. The cycle of Hays Code gangster pictures continued at Warner Brothers with successful James Cagney films such as *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), and *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) where the gangster tried to avoid succumbing to the temptations of his criminal past but eventually succumbed in order to help society on the whole. Cagney even played the title character in *The G-Men* (1935) and thus the toughness of the gangster had already turned to the other side of the law before Huston's *Falcon*.¹⁹¹

Hammett's protagonists had always been men operating under a moral code. Even Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*, while presented as an amoral, even hedonistic, opportunist, likened repeatedly with physical traits that evoke "Satan" incarnate (likely the reason Warner's titled the second adaptation of the Falcon, *Satan Met A Lady* (1935)) eventually came to act according to his principles.¹⁹² In the novel he is blonde and thin with yellowish eyes.¹⁹³ He's no facsimile of Humphrey Bogart, but Bogart was by 1941 perhaps the embodiment of the Warner Brothers male tough-guy star, and the film would make him one of their biggest stars on the roster. Similarly, in the 1942 film version of *The Glass Key*, Hammett's Ned Beaumont, in the novel a mustached "tubercular" gambler, became a tough enforcer played by Alan Ladd.¹⁹⁴ Ultimately, for all the perceived amorality of Spade, his decision in the end to turn over Brigit O'Shaughnessy for the murder she committed, demonstrated that Spade had a code that he lived by and needed to keep above all: "Don't be too sure I'm as crooked as I'm supposed to be. That kind of reputation might be good business – bringing in high-priced jobs and making it easier to deal with the enemy."¹⁹⁵ It was with this shared sense of a moral code that Hammett's first sleuth, the Continental Op, purged the crime city of Poisonville in *Red Harvest*. He was guided by a standard of right and wrong that told him what needed to be done and how to enforce that idea.¹⁹⁶

Hammett had fallen off the course of evolving the detective story toward an interior perspective of the working life of the crime solver. He did, however, leave behind a legacy of strong novels that would be pointed to as the hallmarks of the hard-boiled genre by anyone who followed or read American crime fiction. It became habit of critics to lump all of hard-boiled crime fiction under one label and this tendency has led to some haphazard simplifications, perhaps due to simple inattentiveness as in a survey such as *The Angry Decade* by Leo Gurko which examined the literature of the 1930s and gave only a brief passing mention to the hard-boiled writers and in one breath.¹⁹⁷

Other writers followed on from Hammett but one particular strand is of note because it took the hard-boiled style and transposed it to Los Angeles. Hammett only ever dealt with Los Angeles or Hollywood once in his fiction, in "On the Way," a short vignette in *Harper's Bazaar* about the Hollywood social scene, which featured the ending: "Is this going to be one of those things where the guy that talks the loudest wins?"¹⁹⁸ By that point Hollywood screenwriters had taken to moonlighting, often under pseudonyms, as writers of crime and vice stories in Los Angeles. It was the perfect setting as it epitomized the glaring contradictions in American life like no other place. The first proper novel in this strand was written by George Carrol Sims as Paul Cain, called *Fast One*, who had been a *Black Mask* writer and screenwriter at Universal Studios. This is a fairly ordinary crime story, but with Los Angeles as a backdrop, drunken movie stars became characters and longed to be real-life gunmen and heroes are chastised as follows: "You've seen too many gangster pictures - that's what's wrong with you..."¹⁹⁹

The novel also dealt with the city's famed political graft system, which made L.A. a readymade crucible for American vice. Film noir historian Foster Hirsch noted that the French expression of noir was a literary term that predated film and was used to address the gothic novels of the late 19th century.²⁰⁰ Independent then from Hammett's brand of hard-boiled stark toughness that vied for gruffness in mystery was the newly romanticized brand of crime fiction that was theatrically violent, highly

sexualized, and gloried in the false promises of the American dream. These novels were the fuel for American noir. Los Angeles was the ideal setting for the private detective. As John Buntin described, detective agencies were hired by the city of L.A. to investigate the firebombing of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1910.²⁰¹ It was a city where newspapers feuded and editor of the times Harry Chandler thought he ran the police department. Movie stars were seen cavorting with gangsters such as Bugsy Segal at night spots several of which were owned by the editor of the *Hollywood Reporter*.²⁰² All of this went on in the specter of the Hays era of Hollywood where the film factories were projecting a simplified wholesome brand of straight-laced charm to the rest of the country from the most chaotic cultural landscape in the United States.

Historian of Southern California Carey McWilliams called the region "man-made, a gigantic improvisation."²⁰³ It was a place that came to be known for its vaunted "artificial" predictable climate.²⁰⁴ The concurrent real-estate, movie money, and tourist trade booms made the region double in population from 1920 to 1930.²⁰⁵ By then it resembled "an agglomeration of various movie sets" and ended up as the displaced "junk-yard of the nation."²⁰⁶ Runaways and divorcees fled scandals at home, the sick and elderly went there to rest, and movie hopefuls came with little else in the way of discernible skills.²⁰⁷ McWilliams regarded Los Angeles as becoming the height of vapidness, a place obsessed with image-consciousness, where pets outnumbered children, and the whole city depended on a "lifeline" stemming from aqueducts that made the arid landscape useable. It suffered from higher than average suicide and divorce rates, and ultimately had more white collar individuals than jobs, which led to a vast glut of service jobs and significant labor unrest.²⁰⁸ It was a get rich quick dream, whether it was in the orange groves, the oil boom, the real-estate market, or most potently, crime or the movies. It was also, as poet Hildegarde Flanner is quoted in McWilliams, a place where writers were "aliens in a land which it was impossible to remain indifferent."²⁰⁹

Critic Edmund Wilson detected that there was a distinct voice in American literature emanating from the West Coast during the 1930s in his "Boys In The Backroom" essay. He collected the likes of John Steinbeck, William Saroyan, and John O'Hara into a class of novelists who had developed into a post-Hemingway pact of writers interested in American tragedy all of whom had worked for the studios. Wilson, too, thought that the climate had something to do with the effect of the writing, and also surveyed the growing pre-occupation toward mounting the Hollywood exposé novel.²¹⁰ He ultimately concluded that none of the efforts yet seen had really crisply articulated what the movies meant to America, and felt that the only real way to grapple with Hollywood was to do what John Dos Passos had done in his *U.S.A. Trilogy*, that is incorporate it into the fabric of American life.²¹¹ Wilson had little time in his evaluation for the genre detective fiction of Dashiell Hammett, but he did single out James M. Cain as reasonably talented. He noted that Cain worked as a screenwriter and labored under the censorship practices there, and in his novels he was actually creating a "Devil's parody of the movies."²¹² In Wilson's view Cain's limitation was that he relied on tricks, plot twists, and reveals that were germane to motion picture structure.²¹³ While Cain's merits a litterateur may be slight, Wilson's off-handed chide about movie structure hinted at what would go on to be the influential value of Cain's fiction.

Cain had been a journalist, columnist in many newspapers, and took an interest in covering the methods of criminals.²¹⁴ He worked for Columbia Pictures as a screenwriter in the 1930s and had published a novel that generated a fair bit of press for its "salacious" content in 1934, this being *The Postman Always Rings Twice* about two lovers who conspire to murder the woman's husband to eliminate him and take possession of his business. He followed it up with an imitation that drew fewer headlines but caused much more debate in Hollywood, *Double Indemnity*, a novella serialized in *Liberty Magazine* in 1935 about another pair of lovers who try a murder for insurance scheme.²¹⁵ The Hays Code office was adamant that *Double Indemnity* not be adapted, with letters going out to all the majors after Metro suggested it as a potential film in 1935.²¹⁶

Cain hated pictures, saying that "none of them was truly good." Yet his work came to be in the mind of novelist and critic James T. Farrell a sort of "movietone realism" when adapted for the screen.²¹⁷ Farrell thought that the screen relied on trickery which changed the parameters of Cain's stories and took the motivations out of the hands of the characters and made them subject to plot contrivances. Cain did, however, rely on the practice of tantalizing the reader in the same way Hollywood did for its brand of glossiness.²¹⁸ Part of what became film noir is undeniably the "movietone realism" of Farrell and it is significant evidence that salient observers noticed the trend as it occurred through the 1940s.

Indicative of this structure and content was the trend in the pulps for using the Hollywood parable of the naive young person being corrupted on the way to pursuing a dream of being a star in the movie business. This became analogous to the same way in which Cain's strong-headed and ambitious straight laced male heroes fall to temptation in the hazy lifestyle of Los Angeles. The most obvious example of this variety was Horace McCoy's *I Should Have Stayed Home* in 1938. McCoy was another beleaguered screenwriter, and his other novels would be adapted for the big screen, most notably the film noir *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1950) with James Cagney and the cult classic film *They Shoot Horses Don't They?* (1967). *I Should Have Stayed Home* was an obvious piece designed to revile Hollywood and theatrically made it a parasitic place full of unseemly hedonists and an old vamps looking to prey on the handsome young wannabe actor named Ralph Carston who served as the novels protagonist.²¹⁹ It was the language of the book that makes these incidents seem unhealthy as the sunlight evoked fright in the characters and the loading of a film cartridge into a projector is the metaphoric image for the young man deciding to make his way into the business by selling his body to a connected older woman who acts as his patroness.²²⁰

The most intriguing aspect of the novel was a passage in which a screen writer who befriended Ralph's live in friend Mona, drunkenly rants about his intention to fill the need of writing the great

American Hollywood novel. He says that “[Ben] Hecht, Hemingway, or [Gene] Fowler could have done it,” but he intends to do it to get even with the place that had made him miserable.²²¹ The writer gets his lucky break and loses his ambition to get his revenge on Hollywood, in a tawdry statement about artistic integrity by McCoy, once he is able to secure his financial prospects. The thread of frustration with Hollywood through this fiction was evident and there were a number of frustrated voices from within the studios writer's buildings producing angry and unflattering pulp fiction that gloried in making Hollywood and Los Angeles as gloomy as possible.²²²

Ultimately, Raymond Chandler was the author who achieved the literary design required to vent the negative sentiments that the writers in California had developed toward the Hollywood industry and the city built around it. Chandler, a limited plotter, but a wry and forceful stylist achieved Hammett's ambition of putting the reader inside the detective's head as his Phillip Marlowe journeys through his cases, but strayed quite far from Hammett's efforts at tough realism. Chandler himself opined that American readers did not "see the strong element of burlesque in my kind of writing... The mystery writer's material is melodrama, which is an exaggeration of violence and fear beyond what one normally experiences in life."²²³

Chandler's childhood travels took him out from Nebraska as a small boy to England where he was educated.²²⁴ He traveled Europe as a young man where he had youthful aspirations to write highbrow poetry.²²⁵ He came back to America and eventually landed in Los Angeles.²²⁶ He stated that he had to conscientiously re-learn the American vernacular, an important point as it explains his similes and mastery of street gab. He wrote that he had to "learn American just like a foreign language. To learn it I had to study and analyze it. As a result, when I use slang, colloquialism... I do it deliberately."²²⁷ He was also wounded in the First World War and his time in hospital fuelled a particularly vivid imagination for violence.²²⁸

He was not a hard-boiled writer in the sense of Hammett who had attempted a declension of the detective from the lofty heights of pseudo-sophistication. Chandler re-polished the private eye in a new romanticism. His cipher, the lonely Phillip Marlowe, wandered through an amoral mirror world like an urban Orpheus, and sought to rationalize what was a totally self-interested social structure around him. He was a loner and Chandler was the first to admit that he was "a rather discursive writer who falls in love with a scene or a character or a background or an atmosphere."²²⁹ He created a new pulpy template for skewering the unpleasantness of 1930s' Los Angeles and it was a bold stylization built in the style and milieu of Cain's "movietone realism."

Chandler hated Cain's writing, considering it lurid, but, while Cain's point-of-fact reportage style was the antithesis of Chandler's elevated stylization, Cain uncovered the terrain that Chandler animated vividly.²³⁰ Chandler lived in Los Angeles for years. He had actually been a successful manager at an oil company during the boom of the twenties, but had begun drinking destructively and lived as an increasingly derelict drunk wandering the bars, and at least according to a biographer, gaining plenty of experience with the local police in drunk tanks.²³¹ This was the background and experience he brought to *Black Mask*, which re-ignited his interest in writing.²³² He started there with an underwhelming Hollywood short story, something he would stray away from, but kept the movie savvy references in his descriptions, and loved the magazine for its "forceful and honest" style.²³³ He honed his craft up to the point of novel writing. His character Marlowe went unnamed in most of the original stories, but was actually retroactively re-named in the original stories by publishers when Marlowe became a television and radio series in the 1950s.²³⁴

Chandler's novels were his best works. His plots were never especially sound, but it allowed him to flesh out his central conceit as a fiction writer in the mystery genre "in which the search is not for a specific criminal but for a *raison d'être*" and Chandler achieved this by putting Marlowe right in the soup

of Los Angeles with a phony snappy descriptive wit that sugar coated a pervasive sadness.²³⁵ He set the scene of the sunny paradise of sin time and time again with paragraphs such as this:

It was one of those clear, bright summer mornings we get in the early spring in California before the high fog sets in. The rains are over. The hills are still green and in the valley across the Hollywood hills you can see snow on the high mountains. The fur stores are advertising their annual sales. The call houses that specialize in sixteen-year-old virgins are doing a land-office business. And in Beverly Hills the jacaranda trees are beginning to bloom.²³⁶

The destabilizing influence of the shallow and disposable Hollywood culture amidst the natural order was a running theme. There was also, like the other pulp writers of the time, the tendency to use movie icons and tropes as descriptive shorthand.

Chandler was the master of a descriptive simile. He evocatively described a voice as sounding like "Orson Welles with his mouth full of crackers" or a much needed bed as being "made of roseleaves. It was the most beautiful bed in the world. They had got it from Carole Lombard. It was too soft for her."²³⁷ Chandler lingered on the ambiance of a scene. "Down the hall the radio still blared through the transom and exaggerated alcoholic laughter accompanied it from across the corridor" indicated the periphery through which Marlowe investigated his crime scenes. Chandler also expanded on Marlowe's ordinary routines, as when he took a break for an "eighty-five-cent dinner [that] tasted like a discarded mail bag and was served to me by a waiter who looked as if he would slug me for a quarter, cut my throat for six bits, and bury me at sea in a barrel of concrete for a dollar and a half, plus sales tax."²³⁸ Chandler's self-diagnosed "burlesque" streak and penchant for "melodrama" are clear.²³⁹

This was the style that provided the narrative engine to dissect the superficiality of the Hollywood that was so unbearably mannered and replete with artificial people. It could present the bright and splashy while the interior monologue of the narrator observed on the flaws beneath the veneers of fake and polished people. It was the style of writing that Budd Schulberg played with to write

his classic Hollywood novel *What Makes Sammy Run?*. His narrator was a New York reporter, Al Mannheim, who played the moral balancing scale and observer as Sammy Glick is corrupted by ambition in Hollywood. Mannheim wandered the haunts of Hollywood's low rent districts the same as Marlowe and had all the same tendencies for summing people up vividly. He drank alone and ruminated on the flawed world that surrounded him. Schulberg's Mannheim observed about a young woman flung over as Glick took off for Hollywood: "Her eyes were red and soggy. When I took her hand and said Glad to see you [sic], it was soft and rubbery, like a half-blown balloon."²⁴⁰

Mannheim's barstool ruminations on his case, the mystery of Sammy Glick, invoke Marlowe's: "On the way home I stopped in '21' and had a drink by myself, somehow hoping to find the answer to Sammy Glick at the bottom of my glass... So that's what I sat there saying to myself that night as I downed my Scotch and tried my very best to love Sammy Glick along with all the rest of my fellow men."²⁴¹ As Mannheim found his way in the studio, he encountered the hucksters "in the office across the hall [who] told me Pancake was a credit hound, one of those writers who practically have convulsions over sole screen credits, so I knew I was in for trouble."²⁴² Mannheim had the same cunning for weeding out the angles of L.A. as Marlowe and in a sense *What Makes Sammy Run?* seemed to be set in Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles and the studio of Sammy Glick populated by a crew that would be fit for Chandler's rogues gallery

Chandler's wry tone did him no service with critics who attacked his first novel, *The Big Sleep* with reviews claiming it was scandalous. Chandler himself resented this stating to his publisher Alfred A. Knopf that he did not like the idea of writing "depraved" books.²⁴³ He admitted to himself that in his first novel he "[ran] the similes into the ground" and while *The Big Sleep* has been immortalized in the cannon it is not as accomplished as many of his other Marlowe novels especially *Farewell, My Lovely* and his best novel *The Long Goodbye*.²⁴⁴ He was capable of imbuing a glance into the underside of Los

Angeles with the ability to glorify like a Hollywood close-up as he did here: "She was lying flat on her back with a cotton comforter pulled up to her chin. One of the little fluffballs on the comforter was almost in her mouth. Her long yellow face was slack, half dead. Her hair straggled on the pillow."²⁴⁵

Chandler did not set out to explicitly write the great Hollywood novel. Although his novel after leaving Hollywood, *The Little Sister* is rife with shots at the movie business, he expressed his own inability to "write the Hollywood novel that has never been written, but it takes a more photographic memory than I have."²⁴⁶ Chandler would take out his anger on Hollywood in magazine coverage for *The Atlantic* in 1945 and possibly the most barbed and nihilistic moment in his whole body of work in *The Little Sister* (1949), when a drunk Marlowe lashes out at the entire city in a multi-page rant.²⁴⁷

Ultimately, Chandler's lasting achievement was being the last link in a chain of the pulp novelists, detailed in this chapter, who took the hard criminal world of America and gave it the perspective and style which would make it the descriptive prism best suited to analyze literarily the division between Hollywood's choice superficiality and a lasting style born in opposition to it. This was the stylistic fusion of tone, atmosphere, and attitude that when combined with the right cinematic minds would be a toolkit to tell stories, which worked as solid Hollywood stories while being the antidote to the studio panacea of wholesome Americana. It was the marginalized voice that had been seen as too slight for appreciation as literature and had been as much a product of many good writers going to Hollywood, absorbing it and spitting it out antithetically as a means of finding an outlet from within the studios. Chandler took the opposite course, but was consequently ready to bring what he had developed into the studio gates of Hollywood.

¹⁶¹ Leo Gurko, *Angry Decade* (New York: Harper, 1968), xi.; "The Boys In the Back Room," in Edmund Wilson, *Classics and Commercials* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Company, 1950), 48.

¹⁶² David Madden, *Cain's Craft* (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1985), 1.

¹⁶³ John Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New York: Garden City Books, 1931).

¹⁶⁴ Gurko, 104; Wilson, 55.

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- ¹⁶⁵ "The Killers" in Ernest Hemingway, *The Short Stories* (New York: Scribners, 1955), 79-89.
- ¹⁶⁶ Richard Layman, *Shadow Man The Life of Dashiell Hammett* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 31.
- ¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 36.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 33.
- ¹⁶⁹ "To Blanche Knopf 20 March 1928" in Richard Layman and Julie M. Rivett, ed. *Selected Letters of Dashiell Hammett 1921-1960* (Washington: Counterpoint, 2001), 45-47.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁷¹ "To Josephine Dolan Hammett November 1926" in Richard Layman and Julie M. Rivett, 34-35.
- ¹⁷² "To Blanche Knopf 20 March 1928" in Richard Layman and Julie M. Rivett, 45.
- ¹⁷³ Leonard J. Leff, *Hemingway and his Conspirators Hollywood, Scribners, and the Making of American Celebrity Culture* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 1999), 98.
- ¹⁷⁴ Richard Layman and Julie M. Rivett, 59.
- ¹⁷⁵ "To Harry Block 16 June 1929" in *Ibid*, 50.
- ¹⁷⁶ Leff, 64.
- ¹⁷⁷ Dashiell Hammett, "Red Harvest" in *Complete Novels* (New York: The Library of America, 1999), 86.
- ¹⁷⁸ "To Lillian Hellman 30 April 1931," in Richard Layman and Julie M. Rivett, 74; "To Mary Hammett 21 February 1936," in Richard Layman and Julie M. Rivett, 99.
- ¹⁷⁹ Layman, 169.
- ¹⁸⁰ "To Lillian Hellman," in Richard Layman and Julie M. Rivett,
- ¹⁸¹ Paul Schrader, "notes on film noir."
- ¹⁸² "The Gangster As The Tragic Hero," in Robert Warshaw, *The Immediate Experience* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 129-130.
- ¹⁸³ Lawrence Grobel, "Playboy Interview John Huston," *Playboy* September 1985 in Robert Emmet Long ed., *John Huston Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 179.
- ¹⁸⁴ John T. Irwin, *Unless The Threat of Death is Behind Them* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 9.
- ¹⁸⁵ Hecht, 447. Stephen Louis Karpf, *The Gangster Film: Emergence, Variation and Decay of a Genre 1930-1940* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 43 & 61.
- ¹⁸⁶ Karpf, 200.
- ¹⁸⁷ "Howard Hawks," in Peter Bogdanovich, *Who The Devil Made It* (New York: Ballantine, 1997), 275; Hecht, 454.
- ¹⁸⁸ John Buntin, *L.A. Noir The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), 68.
- ¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 8.
- ¹⁹⁰ Warshaw, 130-131.
- ¹⁹¹ Warshaw, 128; Karpf, 200.
- ¹⁹² Dashiell Hammett, "The Maltese Falcon" in *Complete Novels* (New York: The Library of America, 1999), 393.
- ¹⁹³ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁹⁴ Dashiell Hammett, "The Glass Key" in *Complete Novels* (New York: The Library of America, 1999), 591 & 603.
- ¹⁹⁵ Dashiell Hammett, "The Maltese Falcon" in *Complete Novels* (New York: The Library of America, 1999), 583.
- ¹⁹⁶ Dashiell Hammett, "Red Harvest" in *Complete Novels* (New York: The Library of America, 1999), 1- 188.
- ¹⁹⁷ Gurko, 232-233.
- ¹⁹⁸ Dashiell Hammett, "On The Way," *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1932: 102; Layman, 132.
- ¹⁹⁹ Paul Cain, *Fast One* (London: No Exit, 1936), 65 & 206.
- ²⁰⁰ Hirsch, 8-9.
- ²⁰¹ Buntin, 33.
- ²⁰² *Ibid*, x & 103.

- ²⁰³ Carey McWilliams, *Southern California An Island on the Land*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1973), 13.
- ²⁰⁴ Ibid, 6.
- ²⁰⁵ Ibid, 14 & 136.
- ²⁰⁶ Ibid, 231 & 344.
- ²⁰⁷ Ibid, 128, 230 & 237.
- ²⁰⁸ Ibid, 110, 200, 238-9,
- ²⁰⁹ Ibid, 363.
- ²¹⁰ Wilson, 22.
- ²¹¹ Ibid, 55. He attached a later codicil to the essay which dealt with *The Day of the Locust* and *The Last Tycoon*.
- ²¹² Ibid, 22.
- ²¹³ Ibid, 23.
- ²¹⁴ Madden, 27.
- ²¹⁵ James M. Cain, "Double Indemnity" in *Novels and Stories* (New York: Everyman's Library), 107-216.
- ²¹⁶ Murray Schumach, *The Face On The Cutting Room Floor* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 64.
- ²¹⁷ Madden, 42.; "Cain's Movietone Realism" in James T. Farrell, *Literature and Morality* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1947), 86.
- ²¹⁸ Ibid, 87-89.
- ²¹⁹ Horace McCoy, *I Should Have Stayed Home* (New York: Midnight Classics, 1938)
- ²²⁰ Ibid, 5 & 120.
- ²²¹ Ibid, 74. Fowler was a successful screenwriter and novelist and wrote *What Price Hollywood?* (1932).
- ²²² Ibid, 161.
- ²²³ "To Bernice Baumgarten March 11 1949" in Dorothy Gardiner and Kathrin Sorley Walker ed., *Raymond Chandler Speaking* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 53.
- ²²⁴ Tom Hiney, *Raymond Chandler A Biography* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997), 11.
- ²²⁵ Ibid, 22-25.
- ²²⁶ Ibid, 38-39.
- ²²⁷ "To Alex Barris March 18 1949" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 77.
- ²²⁸ Hiney, 41-43.
- ²²⁹ "To Helga Greene April 20 1957" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 234.
- ²³⁰ Madden, 7.
- ²³¹ Hiney, 62-69.
- ²³² Ibid, 75.
- ²³³ "To Hamish Hamilton November 10 1950" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 26.
- ²³⁴ Hiney, 177.
- ²³⁵ "To James Sandoe May 20 1949" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 57.
- ²³⁶ *The Little Sister* in *Raymond Chandler, Later Novels and Other Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 203.
- ²³⁷ Ibid, 281; Raymond Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely* (New York: Vintage), 171
- ²³⁸ *The Little Sister* in *Raymond Chandler, Later Novels and Other Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 245.
- ²³⁹ "To Bernice Baumgarten March 11 1949" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 53.
- ²⁴⁰ Schulberg, 37.
- ²⁴¹ Ibid, 23.
- ²⁴² Ibid, 62.
- ²⁴³ "To Alfred A. Knopf February 19 1939" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 209.
- ²⁴⁴ "To Alfred A. Knopf February 8 1943," in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 212; "To Alex Barris April 16 1949" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 222.
- ²⁴⁵ *Farewell My Lovely*, 114.
- ²⁴⁶ *The Little Sister* in *Later Novels and Other Writings*, 299.

²⁴⁷ *ibid*, 267-70.

Chapter 3 Wilder's Touch: Film Noir in Hollywood and of America

Raymond Chandler's assignment on arriving in Hollywood was to take a long gestating property that had been deemed unsuitable by the Breen Office and adapt it to the screen under the watchful eye of one of Hollywood's most acerbic and cantankerous directors. Billy Wilder and Raymond Chandler's collaboration was not a happy one, but it produced as clear and coherent a cinematic texture as any in American film. Critics, historians and film aficionados are all aware of the trace elements of film noir: the discombobulated post-war lifestyle of urban alienation dramatized through nonlinear narrative devices such as flashbacks and voice-overs, the ferment of existential quandary from the influx of German expressionist directors represented through chiaroscuro lighting and angular cinematography and, of course, an amoral streak which went against the pervasive Production Code moral dictums. These are all devices present in the film noir, but the central linchpin of the noir style, which will be explored in this chapter, tends to be overlooked in the evaluation of these diffuse formal and sociological markers.

What film noir did for American film was to project outward all of those elements from within an anti-Hollywood stylization that was chiefly synthesized in the tandem effort of Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder. It became a countervailing expression against the dominant institution stuck atop the film medium in the United States from within its own walls. It fused Chandler's pulp writing tone with Wilder's cinematic stylization to vocalize and visualize a new brand of snarky disenchantment and rye frustration with Hollywood the institution that was an evocative offshoot of Hollywood's brand of lifestyle. The frustration that had germinated in the pulp fiction of the 1930s by disquieted film screenwriters was vented by Wilder as both one of their own but also the apprentice of Hollywood's best film stylists. In true Hollywood fashion, it became a type of film. A type explored by similarly attuned stylists as Wilder and Chandler while being concomitantly diluted as it sunk into the Hollywood film language.

The scope of the influential by-products of noir in film language is so broad that noir remains difficult to define retrospectively. In fact, independently, those elements had all been used in cinema previously but noir is an example where the sum is more than the parts. To this point this study has endeavoured to trace the galvanization of noir's inspirations as they evolved into its full realization, but it is prudent to pause and examine the spectrum of these techniques and why each in isolation is not a credible explanation of noir or its evolution. The stark picture of the icons of film noir has given rise to the maxim that noir is difficult to explain "but you know it when you see it."²⁴⁸ If one relies, however, solely on the visible techniques, any definition therein crumples quickly to obvious precedents in film.

It is worth deflecting canards, thereby weeding out the imitators, in order to arrive at the key inspiration that made the best film noir so inimitable. That uniqueness is, frankly, circumstantial and down to a moment in time where a targeted stream of frustration hit at the studios' constructed conception of modern life. Without the overbearing studio mentality, the noir loses its verve as a contrast, even if it was often capably applied elsewhere later. The film noir is so fervent because it was originally more than just a style that could be applied to a story, but from the ground up, plot, performance, and film aesthetic and content it was all aimed subversively at its oppositional counterparts in the holier than thou filmic value structure in major studio Hollywood.

A frequently noted observation about film noir is that it sprung up from directors who came out of the German expressionist tradition of the 1920s. Siegrid Kracauer's famous history of German cinema between the First World War and the rise of the National Socialists, *From Caligari to Hitler*, focused on expressionist cinema and the tendencies it revealed in the mindset of the populous in Weimar Germany. The book was criticized by filmmakers of the time such as Fritz Lang, and even American critic James Agee was sceptical of its application.²⁴⁹ Still, the thoroughness of the overview make the book a definitive survey of the period even if the theoretical assertions which link Weimar film content to the

rise of the impulses that abetted the Nazis may well be overstated. What it reveals emphatically was that German films had long found a market in the United States and several of the expressionistic classic German films generated stirs on their release and were box office hits in America.²⁵⁰ Indeed, Hollywood's importation of German talent far preceded the 1930s and was commonplace in the 1920s with the arrivals of master directors such as Ernst Lubitsch and F.W. Murnau.²⁵¹ It cannot be said that expressionism or that European cineastes coming to Hollywood was a new causation for the arrival of film noir.

The techniques which are associated with noir, the low-key lighting, urban alienation, psychiatric instability through dream imagery, and nonlinear narrative structure, were all making their way into the studio system long before film noir. In the gothic stylistics of the genre horror cinema, created through the early thirties at Universal Studios, there is a clear overlap. Director Edgar G. Ulmer claimed to have done uncredited work on the famous dream world sets of the seminal German expressionistic masterpiece *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) for Robert Weine at Germany's Universum Film AG studio.²⁵² He plied his trade in a terrific gothic horror in 1934 entitled *The Black Cat* (1934) at Universal which paired Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff as old friends separated by the First World War. Lugosi's Dr. Werdegast returns with a young couple to Karloff's Poelzig's estate to confront his old friend about the past. After Ulmer left Germany for the United States he was instructed by production chief of the time at Universal, Carl Laemmle Jr., to use the techniques that had made *Caligari* such a landmark on the film and it resulted in an especially atmospheric film.²⁵³ Ulmer would go on to make *Detour* (1945), one of the most widely praised B film noirs a decade later. Another worthy example from the 30s would be *The Back Room* (1935) starring Boris Karloff in a dual role as twin brothers in the 19th century, one a murderer who assumes his brothers identity, which Graham Greene referred to as truly "gothic."²⁵⁴

John Alton was a long time Hollywood cinematographer who worked predominantly in B pictures and horror films until reaching his peak photographing some of most highly regarded 1950s crime dramas for director Anthony Mann. Alton, in his "how-to" guide to film lighting, *Painting with Light*, demonstrated in two sections the basics of "mystery" lighting.²⁵⁵ This is the silhouette driven low-key lighting associated with the atmosphere of film noir. It is a mood he simplifies as a natural to the medium given the ancient fears of being afraid of the dark. His section on "criminal" lighting also demythologizes noir stylistics when he claims that safe-cracker Jimmy Valentine (a reference to a now lost MGM film from 1929 thought to be the studio's first talkie) had light shown up at his face in close up from beneath frame due to the fact that the flashlight he was using to look at the lock would have been positioned there.²⁵⁶

Film noir scholar Alain Silver miscast Alton's conclusions as an example of filmmakers knowing that they were deliberately making *noir*.²⁵⁷ In reality, Alton is arguing that these were old staples of film atmosphere that could be used whenever a certain mood was required and in the process actually refutes their direct relation to noir. It is very difficult to enforce a single notion of noir as a strictly definable visual style in a certain group of films. Alton alluded to the fact that the stylistics of the 1940s and 1950s crime films were not newly applied techniques in Hollywood, but part of a known set of tricks of the trade. One only need go as far as, and could go much further, the execution montage sequence in Hawks' *Scarface* (1932) or the final sequences in William Wellman's *The Public Enemy* (1931), which showed startling uses of violence in night time shadow, to confirm this notion.

Fritz Lang, the most famous expressionist director and a key influence on importing those styles to Hollywood, believed that Kracauer's book did a lot of "damage."²⁵⁸ Kracauer stated that in the inter-war period UFA made several films, perhaps the most noteworthy being the highly expressionistic *Die Nibelungen: Siegfried* (1924) by Lang based on an epic poem and adapted by his wife Thea von

Harbow.²⁵⁹ This operatic film was said to embolden the national pride in the German people. Lang would then make his *Dr. Mabuse* films about a mind-controlling gambler and thief who ran amok through the German populace.²⁶⁰ Vincent Brook in his study of the German Jewish émigré directors of the 1930s made the observation that Lang had already tied expressionistic atmosphere to the crime milieu before coming to Hollywood as he had in *Mabuse* both, a cunning sleuth and an “arch” criminal.²⁶¹ Lang said that he made the film deliberately to foist Nazism by explicitly putting their slogans in the film ironically. Lang would follow up with his last German film, the masterwork, *M* (1931) which tells of child-murderer being rounded up and put before a mob-trial.²⁶² Kracauer believed that these films told of a slinking wraith within the German mindset and a destabilized reality in the streets where mob justice was required to wipe out deviance and disarray.²⁶³ Lang fled to Hollywood as the Nazis came to power, and left behind his wife and collaborator, the novelist and screenwriter Thea von Harbow, who became a leading voice for the Nazi's film industry.

It is true that among the very first batch of films that the French received after the blockade against American films during the Second World War, Lang's *The Woman in the Window* (1943) was among the ones that led Jean Chartier to write that the "Americans Also Make Noir Films."²⁶⁴ The "also" is not to be overlooked. Chartier was referring to the fact that the French had long been making films of this sort themselves. They were stylized thrillers and tales of existential woe amidst a displaced France, many of which were arguments for Popular Front politics from directors such as Jean Renoir. Jean Gabin, the French movie star, came to be a poster boy for this weary toughness and made fashionable the fedora and trench coat before Humphrey Bogart or Robert Mitchum in America and anticipated the screen persona of the romantic tough guy by a few years.

Film critics typically refer to this movement in French film as "poetic realism." Graham Greene was especially fond of Jules Duvivier's film *Pépé Le Moko* (1937) calling it one of the most “poetic”

thrillers ever made.²⁶⁵ Greene, who wrote his film criticism in the British newspaper *The Spectator*, demonstrated again that film critics in mainstream outlets were writing on international and foreign language cinema by the 1930s perceptively in English and noted these film trends. This is further evidence that it is an overstatement that English language critics needed the French "to teach the [Americans] how to read their own popular culture," as one noir book states.²⁶⁶ But at the same time the French cinema's contribution to film noir has been underplayed, probably because fewer of their filmmakers had an immediate hand in the American films.

Greene believed that two of the best directors in film were Duvivier and Lang. He was sorry for Lang's difficulty in getting films made in Hollywood, and was worried the same fate would fall Duvivier.²⁶⁷ Lang's early noir film *The Woman in the Window* (1944) came after a period where Lang toiled without work for a year in Hollywood as they had nothing at MGM for his particular talents. After arriving in Hollywood, he spent the time learning American expressions through the news media and in 1936 made his first American film, *Fury* (1936). *Fury*, even with a sentimental ending, is a much more hard-hitting film than the later 1940s thrillers Lang made in his first cycle of American films - which went up until his own claims that he was black-listed in the late 1940s - and if Lang's blistering social criticism films draped in expressionistic lighting style were the genesis of American film noir, then noir would have to have been ushered in 1936 and not the early 40s. For example witness the bars and shadows in Spencer Tracy's prison cell.

The Woman in the Window was chastened for Hollywood by Lang himself, despite its atmospheric, by making the entire murder plot a dream. In fact, Lang stated he was recalling the ending he had suggested for *Caligari* years before in Germany to give his film a moral reason for existing, it was otherwise in his view senseless.²⁶⁸ Lang's other film with the same stars, Edward G. Robinson, Joan Bennett and Dan Duryea, *Scarlet Street* (1945) was actually a re-make of poetic realist Jean Renoir's *La*

Chienne (1931) and brazenly kept the ending which had the murderer get away with his crime. Lang claimed there was no real protestation from the Breen Office because the murderer was tormented by his action.²⁶⁹ Lang had plied his expressionistic style talents earlier on the atmospheric *Ministry of Fear* (1944), based on Graham Greene's novel, with a screenplay that Lang hated, although the first half of the film is choice Hollywood pot-boiler fair and his technique is most effective.²⁷⁰ This is not at all to say that the noir cycle should be given a 1936 inception point with the arrival of Lang's films in America. Merely that it cannot be said that Lang's personal style as a filmmaker gave birth to noir with *The Woman in The Window* when his 30s films at MGM and, certainly his German films unless noir existed before it is frequently held to have been in existence. Lang would continue to churn out a mixed slate of crime programmers and Westerns for the rest of his stay in America. The point being, that stark stylistics that Lang mastered in Germany, and used in America were easily deployed by him in many genres and seem to concur with John Alton's conception of film style being transmutable between genres and eras.

In much the same way, *The Maltese Falcon* in 1941 has been selected by many film historians as the inception point of noir, but this becomes almost an arbitrary periodization on examination. Boris Ingster's *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940) was a much more expressionistic and dream-like crime film than *Falcon*, and indeed a scene in the crime thriller *I Wake Up Screaming* (1941) where Victor Mature and Betty Grable hid out in a bike repair shop had much more noir atmospherics on display than any scene in *The Maltese Falcon*. *Citizen Kane* (1941) itself was as starkly expressionistic and as formally playful as any 1940s film and it, could be seen as, a veritable goldmine for assignation of points of origin for many of the aforementioned techniques often being noted as indicative of a film being a noir. As Andrew Sarris put it, *Kane* was "one of the fonts of the style."²⁷¹

Periodizing noir has proven to be an arbitrary and endless process, as Vincent Brook has pointed out, if one tries to mark the noir cycle with individual films. Some cyclical models have taken it to

unbelievable lengths including one observer who marked it at *King Kong* (1933) to *2001 A Space Odyssey* (1967).²⁷² This has not been an attempt to overthrow the existing opinions about the range of the noir cycle, but merely to show that if you begin with a hopelessly broad definition about common attributes in the form of vague sociological and philosophical views of postwar life in the films and the application of film techniques to those latent ideas, the process is endless and interminable. This is, however, an attempt to logically construct the motivations of what is traditionally film noir and how it came from within the studios and was sparked by the long-simmering frustrations of working and living there. Without the source material that initiated the "movietone realism" of James Cain through the style of Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder film noir has no core. All of the factors listed elsewhere can be seen in the backgrounds and attitudes of the noir filmmakers, but the most cutting noirs assembled them into something more readable than a pot-purri of characteristics and it was never more clearly articulated than with the landmark film, *Double Indemnity*.

Murray Schumach observed that while *Double Indemnity's* plot would have blared across the headlines had it been real, and perhaps had, in the actual occurrence that inspired James Cain to write his similar novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, it would have been far too sordid for the screens.²⁷³ A timely occurrence had slightly marginalized the Breen Office since the publication of Cain's original novella. Along with the rise of independent producers, came the Consent Decree in 1941 between studios and their exhibitors which had lessened the ability to "block" book pictures.²⁷⁴

Essentially, this ended the practise that tied the exhibitor, or theatre owner, to a whole batch of films if they wanted the rights to show a new major blockbuster. This meant that individual films, and their increasingly ambitious producers working within the studios, had a stake in the quality of the marketing of each picture. Thus under this new arrangement, a distinct tone for each movie was encouraged, and while this should not be overstated, it may have been enough to push certain films

through the studio process. *Double Indemnity* was produced by Joe Siström at Paramount, a studio which had always been run more by a federation of producers rather than a Warner - or Mayer - type czar.²⁷⁵ The job of making the picture fell to Billy Wilder who was undoubtedly, in retrospect, the man for the job.

Some noir historians pluck Wilder as an auteur and therefore remove his films from the noir cycle, as is the tendency to do with Alfred Hitchcock's work.²⁷⁶ Others use his seminal films as the landmarks for the evolution of the cycle. Neither is ideal, but the latter is certainly much more instructive for understanding noir. Wilder is undoubtedly the most illustrative practitioner of film noir's style, but the formal gloss of his 'A' budget films has put them apart from the rank and file 'B' noirs. Nonetheless, the B films were, par for the course in Hollywood, made in imitation of a landmark, and many of them did intriguing things with what was being offered, but *Double Indemnity* was the touchstone.

Wilder was an Austrian born expatriate who had worked as a screenwriter in Germany at UFA before leaving for France, earlier than most of his colleagues, to avoid the Nazi's. He worked as a screenwriter in France, where he no doubt picked up on the poetic realist movement during his time there.²⁷⁷ Intriguingly, in 1927 a Wilder script was made into a film directed by a veritable laundry list of filmmakers who would go to Hollywood and make notable film noirs. Also working on *People on Sunday* (1927) were future noir directors Robert Siodmak and the aforementioned Edgar G. Ulmer. It was a low-budget "street" film made without professional actors, although Wilder mawkishly said this was due to a lack of money to hire them.²⁷⁸

Wilder went to Hollywood still very much learning the English language.²⁷⁹ He eventually was partnered with one of Paramount's most prestigious scribes, Charles Brackett. The two were polar opposites, and indeed despite publicity that said otherwise, were prone to boisterous arguments, yet

they formed perhaps the most successful screenwriting duo in Hollywood during the late thirties.²⁸⁰

Brackett had been an East-Coast novelist of some repute, and was one of the few of that demographic who went to Hollywood and took to it. Brackett was a proponent of the industry and his home was center spot in the cocktail party circuit. He even put up and loaned money to a broke Dashiell Hammett in the early thirties.²⁸¹

Brackett and Wilder collaborated like sugar and spice writing snappy barbs for Paramount's brand of successful and polished romantic "screwball comedies." They worked under the maestro of the genre Ernst Lubitsch known for his "hairpin-on-the pillow tricks" in the words of Wilder.²⁸² Film historians usually refer to this as "the Lubitsch touch," which can be as difficult to exactly define as film noir, but it involved his ability to hint at sexy and sexual themes underneath a refined layer of glamour and wit that made it inoffensive and innocuous on the surface but richly naughty to prying minds.²⁸³ Wilder and Brackett wrote two of Lubitsch's classics in a row *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1938) and the masterpiece *Ninotchka* (1939).

Wilder had toiled for years at Columbia Pictures before getting his plum job at Paramount and had had to suffer through many hacks and egos. His temper was legendary and his acid tongue has produced many of the best Hollywood anecdotes, but his scripts made many very successful films. He was rueful when they were bungled, as he felt was the case with Mitchell Liesen on *Midnight* (1939), and as Wilder and Brackett shifted toward drama Wilder was absolutely furious with star Charles Boyer who modified a scene in *Hold Back the Dawn* (1941) of which Wilder was especially proud.²⁸⁴ Wilder's blow-up was total fury and he would never forgive the meddling of actors, directors and producers in his work. He and Brackett agreed to write a comedy for Howard Hawks, *Ball of Fire* (1942), in Wilder's words because he wanted to watch a master work.²⁸⁵ In the wake of Preston Sturges gaining his own

writer/director/producer position at Paramount, Wilder followed suit.²⁸⁶ He directed two features, and his third was one ripe to scrape the knuckles of the Hollywood establishment.

Wilder said he believed he was "subconsciously" inspired by Fritz Lang, but it must also be said that his relish for the sordid and his ability to polish criminality was in many ways the cheap and gaudy counterpoint to Lubitsch's rich and glamorous "touch."²⁸⁷ Wilder's dramas were hybrids of Lang and Lubitsch and the result of this concatenation was the original undertone of *Double Indemnity*. Wilder was actually the ideal film stylist to put the perspective of Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles on-screen. As writers they were perhaps too much the same. Wilder had a legendary facility for barbed remarks and had also pieced together the American vernacular from afar. Raymond Chandler, through his wife mainly, was an appreciator of film, saw international films, and had opinions about the likes of Orson Welles, of whom he was a fan.²⁸⁸ There was no real contempt for the movies in Chandler when he went to Hollywood or after he left it unlike a Hammett or Cain, but he certainly developed contempt for Wilder.

In Brackett's stead and with Cain being unable to work on the project as he was actually busy working on *Hangmen Must Die* (1943) for Fritz Lang, Chandler filled the void of Wilder's oppositional figure in a writing one-time-only partnership.²⁸⁹ Chandler had an understandably inglorious temperament toward Hollywood as he lived in Santa Monica only a drive to the Paramount lot.²⁹⁰ He had no grand aspirations toward the project of writing a screenplay, but with his novel sales being slight, he saw it as an opportunity for some quick money. He got Billy Wilder instead. Their long story sessions in the Paramount writers building have become the stuff of legends for their hostility. It seems to be the case that Chandler's long period of sobriety ended for good during this period and he began authoring long complaint missives about Wilder's crude language and manners. Both men seem to agree the experience was "life-shortening."²⁹¹ Wilder opined to his biographer Maurice Zolotow that Chandler's

eventual discontent and departure from the movie business was all whining and that it was his alcoholism that made him feel alienated.²⁹² Chandler would satirize what he believed were Wilder's mannerisms in *The Little Sister*:

"I sat down again and killed my cigarette and took a deep breath.

"It could only happen in Hollywood," I grunted. He made a neat turn and glanced at me.

"I beg your pardon."

"That an apparently sane man could walk up and down inside the house with a Piccadilly stroll and a monkey stick in his hand."

He nodded. "I caught the disease from a producer at MGM. Charming fellow. Or so I've been told."²⁹³

All this acrimony led to the creation of one of the most enduring films of all time. There was enough investment on both sides to explore the material to its fullest however. Studio records show that the crew expensed a trip to San Quentin prison to research the gas chamber as a means of creating a realistic one on the studio lot for an alternative ending and framing device for the film's later flashback structure.²⁹⁴ Wilder believed that this was the best scene he had ever shot and was upset an audience never saw it. The Breen Office forbade it and even Luigi Lurashi at the Paramount's legal department stated it would not pass.²⁹⁵ However, the censor's intolerance for the explicitness of the combined vision of Chandler and Wilder made the devilish allure of the film all the more potent. In comparing the novel as a text to the changes in the finished film, it becomes obvious how much of the ultimate appeal of film noir is in the suggestive and maniacal glint in Barbara Stanwyck's eyes as her husband is murdered in the backseat of a car off-camera.

Wilder said Chandler's contribution was as simple as the fact that he "had a sinuous poetry in his descriptions of Los Angeles. He wrote amusingly vicious dialogue."²⁹⁶ Maurice Zolotow was weightier in

terms of Chandler's value, and he was no fan of Chandler, stating that he "drenched himself in the ambiance which enveloped the persons of the movie...Chandler's acute responsiveness to Los Angeles seeped into the movie. It was not even directly on the paper - which was the stunning fact of it."²⁹⁷ Wilder himself alluded to some osmotic dynamic as he picked up Chandler's style in time and even wrote some of wordplay in the film which is seen as definitively Chandleresque.²⁹⁸

The novella *Double Indemnity* is an altogether less accomplished piece of popular art as a work than the film and began a trend in noir cinema where the final film exceeded its source material which is not all that common. The wonder of film noir is in how it revealed how cinema was an exceedingly strong medium to handle stylized pulp tales through an actor's performance traits and visual playfulness. What is explicit in the novella is dramatically hinted at with style in the film. The atmosphere of the film was responsible for implicitly conveying a fatalistic course, which saved it from some of the turgid passages in the novella where the characters spell out their secrets, as when Phyllis tells Walter Huff that "there's something in me that loves Death... I know this is terrible. I tell myself it's terrible. But to me it doesn't seem terrible."²⁹⁹ In the film we are only made aware of the pathological nature of Phyllis through Barbara Stanwyck's smoldering performance.

Both works are roughly similar in the general parameters: an insurance salesman named Walter Huff (Neff in the film for legal reasons and played by Fred MacMurray) visits a house in the Hollywood hills to renew a policy where he encounters Phyllis Nerdlinger (Dietrichson in the film played by Barbara Stanwyck) and is drawn into an affair and a murder plot to get rid of Phyllis' husband in order to cash in on his insurance policy. Cain's novella is more matter of fact from Huff's narrative voice, in both the film and novella the story is recounted from his confessional narrative. However, in the novel this is not revealed until near the ending. The film's opening scenes hooked the audience immediately knowing that the protagonist had been through an ordeal and had much to tell. This became a staple of noir

narrative structure. The film's narrative abrogation in the form of Neff stumbling and bleeding toward his office at night to record his confession on a Dictaphone, is a hook which allowed its themes to be taken for granted and thus conveys them stylistically rather than explicitly in the text. This is much of the skill that would be carried through to the subsequent generation of noir thrillers.

James T. Farrell thought that the movies removed the authentic emotional motivations of Cain's characters, and that, in the case of Cain's *Mildred Pierce* - adapted by Warner Brothers in 1945 - the studio had tacked on a flashback structure to take the impetus of the story off character conflict and onto a plot driven mystery structure where a murder at the start of the film is explained through the course of the narrative.³⁰⁰ Warner Brothers' records for *Mildred Pierce* (1945) would seem to indicate that Farrell was on to something as the studio story department frankly discussed that Cain's novel was tough to adapt because of its complicated anti-hero dynamics and its lack of a climactic scene.³⁰¹ It thus needed to be shaped into a Hollywood narrative. It was *Double Indemnity* where this pattern was coined and formal trickery worked to coyly lure the audience into a plot engaging without stringing out a linear progression into a linear tragedy. The film noir took this plot structure for granted, and as Hollywood always did at its best, imbued a familiar story and theme with life in cleverly applied film stylistics, energetic performance, and clever witticisms.

The actual plot alterations, specifically the novella's laborious ending in which Huff takes the reader through an elaborate attempt to cover his tracks in Los Angeles' Griffith Park only to get setup himself, were due to the fact that Wilder found the original ineffective.³⁰² In the novel, Barton Keyes (played by Edward G. Robinson in the film), Huff's colleague and the man in charge of leading claims investigations, actually gives Huff a chance to run off with Phyllis and get away with murder. This obviously did not have a chance of getting around the Production Code's mandate that wrongdoers be punished. The novel's epilogue, in which the doomed lovers commit a dual suicide carries through the

fatalistic streak in the novella, is a strained abstract conclusion. This was omitted from the film and it had been flagged in 1935 when MGM first took the property to the Breen Office, but was also not in Chandler's draft of the screenplay.³⁰³

The murder scene which occurs in the back seat of a car is seen from Huff's point of view and Cain actually dodges the lurid moment by using a line "I won't tell you what I did then." to deliver word of the murder.³⁰⁴ In the film the camera focuses in on Barbara Stanwyck's glowing eyes as the fatal tussle occurs in the backseat. In actual fact, the novella is much less evocative at the moment of violence than the final film. Chandler and Wilder were masters at relaying without showing. In much the same way Lubitsch could relay a sexual encounter with a "hairpin on a pillow" Wilder's equal part nastiness and style made him as adept at showing a cold blooded murder in a look without making it revolting to the audience.

The frustrated Hollywood screenwriter and nostalgia for the pioneering era of Hollywood is a key theme in the novella and continued to wander in the lexicon of noir. Huff observed that in the old days "what a Hollywood actor wore on Monday a Filipino house boy wore on Tuesday, but now, if you ask me, it's the other way around, and the boy from Manila beats Clark Gable to it."³⁰⁵ The professional dynamic between Keyes and Huff, while actually more affectionate in the film, is fascinatingly close to the showbiz mantras of Hollywood. Keyes seems cut from the cloth of an old movie producer who relies on a well hewn sense of intuition and a sixth sense about people. He is also an invasive supervisory authority figure. His puritanical moralistic principles also make him a curmudgeonly stickler.

The confrontation between Keyes, as the old guard with long standing pedigree in feeling for the truth of a situation and reading responses, has his investigation stymied by a young bureaucrat firm owner Mr. Norton, of family connection, who conservatively avoids taking a chance on Keyes instincts to weed out a con. All of this evokes the notion of the frustrated functionary in the studio rigmarole who

constantly witnesses bold aspirations being quashed and the safe churning of programmed material for a wide mass audience. Mr. Norton, the boss of the insurance company, tells Keyes "not yet. Maybe later, I don't know. But so long as we can do the conservative, safe thing, I don't get mixed up with the other kind."³⁰⁶ Cain seems to be extrapolating the stymied frustrations of Hollywood to the business of America itself and the death of inspiration and cavalier gusto to a soupy mixture of middle managers and chastened expectations. Cain indicated this was a novella about a humbled America afraid of chances in the wake of the depression and those that stray from the beaten path to take matters into their own hands.³⁰⁷

Wilder's film is removed from that. Yet the concept of a dusty and dying world in Los Angeles, the phony vestiges of which Chandler had brought into the light in his fiction, were conveyed with film technique. Wilder told his director of photography Joseph Seitz to evoke the notion of disuse and made the living space in Phyllis' Hollywood hills mansion.³⁰⁸ The effect is perhaps the definition of noir cinematography in the Dietrichson living room. The windows shutters are splashed with light and cast horizontal strip shadows on the walls of the room. The dust in the room swirls about subtly and is visible in the contrast lighting which has streaks of light and darkness to make this all the more palpable. It's a shut-in and ossified climate of inactivity and moral laxness.

The film makes use of all the techniques of expressionism, not new to American cinema, but applied to this material it adds romance to the sordid intentions of its heroes and by heightening and fetishization their atmosphere and actions. It was the birth of a mainstream bit of film style which relayed seductively the countervailing elements in society: graft, corruption, cheap fashion, pathological illness, anti-social behavior, lust, and greed all get treated with the relish which worked out of the same tradition as Hollywood's commodification of proud, virtuous conduct, lavish wealth and acts of character and righteousness. This was the achievement of film noir and it came out of this trail that led out of

frustrated pulp literature and the fusion of it with the displaced émigré directors who came from a film style of displacement and found a way to integrate and construct a milieu, a lexicon, and a style of film that was a potent combination of elements.

Chandler benefitted greatly from his affiliation with Paramount and *Double Indemnity*. He subsequently worked with producer John Houseman on an original screenplay for the *The Blue Dahlia* (1946) and was according to Maurice Zolotow greatly aided in his reputation by the studio driven press campaign. This proved timely given his books had finally been put out at paperback rates, causing his sales to skyrocket.³⁰⁹ As he pointed out, the imitators were inevitable given that *Double Indemnity* was a giant financial success and received multiple Academy Awards nominations including Best Picture. Chandler himself said that "*The Maltese Falcon* did not start the high budget mystery picture trend, although it ought to have. *Double Indemnity* and *Murder, My Sweet* did, and I was associated with both of them."³¹⁰

It was not his writing that made the noir cycle so crisp and replicable, as can be seen with the adaptation of *The High Window*, *The Brasher Doubloon* (1947), or Robert Montgomery's point-of-view adaptation of *The Lady and the Lake* (1947). When taken too literally from the text and not imbued with the proper atmospherics the results could be cringe inducing. Even when handed to a great director and given a movie star such as Humphrey Bogart, the result was hardly much of a film noir at all. It must be said that noir in its vibrancy was not present in all crime films of the period. Chandler's lens was a very useful vehicle, but his writing could be adapted squarely in the conventional way, and for that matter the results of that could make for a decent film such as Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* (1946) or a terrible one as the proceeding adaptations mentioned. Chandler himself left Hollywood and published a snarky column in *The Atlantic* that drew the ire of Charles Brackett and the two carried on a sparring correspondence.³¹¹

"I think everyone was right who pointed out that it is a shameless combination of formulas - of the murder in-aspic *Laura* sort of thing, with the deep-city, Chandler kind which the existentialists will probably start discovering, and explaining, and imitating, almost any year now" stated James Agee in *The Nation* (he also wrote a column in *TIME*).³¹² James Agee was obviously a skeptic of the value of forties crime pictures and thought most of them were cold calculated products that lacked the spark of the pre-code films (unspecified as to which he is referring) that dared in the same directions. He praised some for having the temerity to return to the screen some of the moral complications that they had in those days but was often nonplussed about films now considered classics of the genre.³¹³

He was more enthused when John McManus of *PM* magazine questioned whether Cain's "ugly America" was "fit to be us in the eyes of [Motion Picture Association of America president] Eric Johnston's believing world" where Hollywood had a role in exporting America's values abroad.³¹⁴ Agee then used his column to opine that the controversial pictures were much closer to the mark of American life than the typical wholesome studio efforts.³¹⁵ Film noir, by being salacious, filled a gap that hungry observers of film recognized. Agee may have been guilty of inconsistent editorializing in the way Manny Farber noted in his retrospective of the esteemed critic as he could be inconsistent from publication to publication.³¹⁶ Farber, one of the most crisp articulators of thoughtful and punchy film criticism in America, was nonplussed by the "mystery films" saying that they were "sometimes though - I think wrongly - to be a form in which Hollywood is more realistic, spade-calling and unrestricted than it is in Westerns, bedroom farces, epics and other forms... The characters though, are allowed to roll around as incredibly and easily in evil as other movie characters roll around in goodness."³¹⁷ This rebuke by Farber may have been incidentally much closer, to the ambitions of the noir filmmakers and perhaps ultimately, whether he held it to be estimable or not, betokens their real achievement.

Many of the more interesting films that were a part of the blast of genuinely noir films are uneven, and none were the perfect effort that *Double Indemnity* was, but often they feature enthralling and entirely novel visual sequences. Often this comes back to the “émigré” director and pulp novelist combination of sources that worked for Chandler and Wilder. Unfortunately, Chandler’s writing was of a standard that was infrequently matched in the pulp novels and scripts of these films. In much the same way that only a few of the Chandler adaptations achieved the essence of his novels, the adaptations for another crime novelist, Cornell Woolrich, a minor, yet innovative crime novelist, were often bungled.

Instructively, when Hollywood attempted to create a conventional tough guy film out of a noir novel, the results were ordinary fare. For example, *The Black Angel*, written in 1943, is one of Woolrich’s strongest novels, and is told from the first person narrative of an innocent house wife who sets out to prove her husband was innocent of the murder for which he was wrongfully convicted. This perspective allowed the reader to share in the neophyte Alberta Murray’s naive wanderings through the underworld in much the same way as Chandler’s interiority made Marlowe’s crime odysseys more colourful. While the novel does become a less than stellar crime thriller as the plot resolves itself, the perspective, again, and the interiority give it a fresh novelty. The film adaptation from 1946, however, expanded an incidental character in the novel and made him, played by Dan Duryea, the central tough guy protagonist. The result is a customary film that has noir style photography, but is a typical Hollywood melodrama.

Robert Siodmak, a contemporary of Wilder in Berlin and even more of a stylized expressionist than either Lang or Wilder, directed *The Phantom Lady* (1944) a film that anticipated *Double Indemnity*’s release in the same calendar year, but was an imperfect effort. The film was based on another Woolrich novel, which had a very similar plot to *Angel*, but reversed the focus to the condemned man.³¹⁸ In Siodmak’s film, there are remarkable moments of what noir could subtly do for an ordinary crime film,

and are perhaps illustrative of what made it such a distinguished new style when applied creatively. The story involved another man wrongfully put away for murder, this time of his wife, because his alibi for the evening of the murder has disappeared. The search for the “phantom lady,” in the film, made Ella Raines who plays the man’s secretary protagonist, and used noir’s atmosphere of paranoia to bring the audience into her perspective of her contact with an underground criminal enterprise and the villainous, pathological murderer Franchot Tone (an early example in the new stock psychologically driven Hollywood villains).

The film itself is often hackneyed and silly, but features a pulsating backroom be-bop jazz session that is edited to the tempo of a drummer's syncopation which creates a highly eroticized sequence where the tempo of the music and intercutting between Rains and the drummer (Elisha Cook Jr.) becomes analogous to sex. James Agee noted this remarkable sequence as well in a review of the film and it was demonstrable that noir films often provided moments of high style which contravened Hollywood’s established cinematic patterns while often turning out to be fairly ordinary films on the whole.³¹⁹ Siodmak, in that scene, created a visible bit of montage that was almost experimental given the Hollywood studio’s long held standard of continuity editing that made camera cuts as subtle as possible. Siodmak was using the medium of cinema to imbue content with an erotic charge that could not be censored because it stated or showed nothing untoward. Noir relied on moments such as this, in the camera or out of the actor’s performance to weed through and subvert Hollywood norms. *The Phantom Lady* is not a great film, but it has great moments of cinema that ultimately evoke clearly the value of noir as a mode of cinematic expression.

Siodmak is frequently alluded to as a noir director, but not always for the right reasons as many of his later films stray closer to a Hitchcockian type of gothic suspense than actual noir. His most famous film was a solid adaptation, and fleshing out, of the Hemingway story which may have most directly

started the entire hard-boiled realism of pulp crime, *The Killers* (1946). To create a film out of the vignette, the script created a full back story for the character of The Swede (Burt Lancaster) which obviated the effort of the original story. It did, however, embody the trend that James T. Farrell called "movietone realism" in that it began with yet another flashback as did *Indemnity* and as would the adaptation of Cain's *Mildred Pierce*.

The flashback as a hook was not a new concept, but there came to be an engrained trend in the 1940s noir films toward narrative trickery by deviating from the typical linear plot structure of a Hollywood film. Film historian David Bordwell's essay on John Brahm's *The Locket* (1946) noted the film's modernistic linkage of story layers on top of one and another.³²⁰ Another sterling example of this was Jaques Tourneur's terrific *Out of the Past* (1947). This was a fascinating element that began to skew the typical conventions of Hollywood forms of linear storytelling and objective narrative perspective. It was came straight from the pulp novels, such as *I Should Have Stayed Home* or even *The Black Angel*. In the long run, in addition to perspective narration, nonlinear narratives from the literary sources were also tremendously influential on the uniqueness of film noir as Hollywood filmmakers were experimenting with form in such a way that they had not since before the Hays Code era streamlined film format.

However, the studios and American directors began to drain the vivacity of noir by replicating its techniques within the old parameters of the tough guy crime film. Rather quickly the result was that the visual style of noir was present in crime films of all sorts, but only a few directors made genuinely noir films, and since the big budget studios attempted to reproduce the success of *Double Indemnity*, the most interesting noirs were often not the most expensive ones. When a stalwart director like Howard Hawks, who knew how to use shadow in crime films as he had done in 1932 with his *Scarface*, adapted

Chandler's source material, it lacked the subversive streak and funnelled Chandler's surface into a star vehicle for Humphrey Bogart's on-screen persona.

The film Hollywood ended up making out of *The Big Sleep* (1946) was right in keeping with the tough guy action cinema, which Manny Farber delineated as a being quality "trash." Farber was referring to the notion of genre films which quietly did more than they seemed which originated from the critic Otis Fergusson, who had preceded Farber at *The New Republic*, and was well on his way to becoming a major American film theorist before his untimely death in 1943.³²¹ In fact, Fergusson said of Hawks that "he [could] be faultless in a sense of how to speed up a situation, or make it flexible and easy with the right emphasis, grouping and understatement."³²² This quality made Hawks a polymath master of Hollywood's studio style, but exactly the wrong director for film noir. In its rootedness it comes off as just another studio film. For all its reputation and talented contributors, *The Big Sleep*, was a lifeless studio film. It famously starred Humphrey Bogart, donning the fedora and trench coat once again, to play another tough sleuth. The studio's ad campaigns as mentioned famously stressed Bogart's former success in tough-guy roles, and his starring turn as Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*.³²³ This time as Phillip Marlowe, Bogart is on the case to unwind the web of shady associates linked to two wealthy sister socialites who are in trouble. The other ingredient that the film offered was another chance to co-star Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall after a successful film pairing in *To Have and Have Not* (1944) also directed by Howard Hawks and much more suited to his talent. The playful double entendre between Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall actually undermines *The Big Sleep's* atmosphere.

Agee praised the previous 'Bogie' and Bacall pairing with Hawks *To Have and Have Not* for having "no plot at all... a leisurely series of mating duels between Humphrey Bogart at his most proficient and the very entertaining, nervy, adolescent new blonde, Lauren Bacall."³²⁴ Hawks was working at Warner Brother's through his independent production company and had landed the

property. He famously, along with his screenwriter William Faulkner, telegraphed Chandler to ask him to explain the plot of his own novel. Chandler responded that he had no idea.³²⁵ This, to Hawks, was a revelation in terms of making entertaining films, it was about the moments and chemistry of the leads and the singularity of their articulation that made a good entertainment.³²⁶

In the film, Marlowe is enlisted to find Sean Reagan by the ailing General Sternwood, father of the sisters, and ends up finding the younger sister, Carmen, embroiled in a drug and pornography operation which she fell into on no small part of her seemingly nymphomaniac tendencies as is explained explicitly in Chandler's novel, and many of the film's reviews, but is very vaguely noted in the film. Hawks' quick pace avoids the need for an explanation – indeed this is true for much of the film's labyrinthine plot – but lacks the noir talent for imbuing a moment with subtext.³²⁷ The elder sister, played by Lauren Bacall, strings Marlowe along and they develop a relationship which actually takes over the film. The original cut of *The Big Sleep* was shelved and re-shot in order to maximize these moments, and the film was released in 1946 while being finished in 1945.³²⁸

The film was filtered through several screenwriters. William Faulkner handled several drafts, including re-writing the ending to the film on a trolley ride back to Mississippi.³²⁹ That ending in that draft was closer to the farmhouse confrontation between Marlowe and Carmen that ends the actual novel. It then went to a Hawks favorite, Leigh Brackett, and finally to specialist Jules Furthman. The picture, as stated, was re-cut after middling previews and was actually more of an example of big studio refined modulation to broad taste than any kind of avant garde grittiness for which was attributed to be in many papers at the time. It was heralded as part of a much tougher trend in cinematic realism from many contemporary critics, including Bosley Crowther in the *New York Times*.³³⁰ *The Big Sleep* was an assembled studio product, perhaps even a good one, but the crispness of *Double Indemnity* came from

two distinct eyes and perspectives igniting over one property. Here, the entire armada of studio professionals made a professional studio film in the ordinary mould of a previous success.

In a sense *The Big Sleep* took Sam Spade, the tough guy *Maltese Falcon* character, added a crime story structure that it had hotel room gun battles reminiscent of a thirties gangster picture and set it on top of Chandler's world without ever going into Marlowe's viewpoint. A key missing piece to this is the boredom and the lingering fascination with which Marlowe ruminates on a subject, which Wilder and Chandler actually achieved through narration and montage in *Double Indemnity*. Marlowe in *The Big Sleep* doesn't come home to an empty room, there's always someone waiting for him. When he eats alone and ponders the world in novels, here the film shows him thinking and quickly snapping to attention with an idea. On a stakeout there's no lingering on the hours spent waiting, and only a smoked cigarette belies how long Marlowe has been waiting. The atmospheric malaise that was so pivotal to the anti-Hollywood conception of action setups and quick pace had here been reined back into the Hollywood pace. This was an important element in differentiating the genuinely consecrated antithetical noirs from the studio vehicles which just wore the clothes, talked the talk, and shined the right lights.

Another major studio that rarely even strode toward noir even in aesthetics and certainly had significant problems bringing it off with an A calibre cast and director was MGM. The studio's *Undercurrent* (1946) was a clumsy effort which features Vincente Minelli directing Katherine Hepburn, Robert Taylor, and Robert Mitchum, in a typically MGM style romance vehicle that flirted with some of the deeper ingredients that noir tended to circle. It involved a small-town spinster in the making, Katherine Hepburn, daughter of a chemist and patent holder, being whisked off by a wealthy pharmaceutical baron played by Robert Taylor. Their marriage grows dark when she uncovers an unfortunate relationship to a black sheep brother (Mitchum) and Taylor comes to seem increasingly unbalanced and prone to bursts of rage. It is in many ways a Hitchcockian gothic tale set in modern

times and granted a film noir aesthetic. It took the action from Washington D.C., to several country houses, and was exactly what the studios began to churn out during the noir era when the picture was a conventional romance. It is a polished technical film but a soap opera-like romance thriller that hinges on the MGM stylistic of creating an alluring fantasy in the real world. It was more importantly a thorough demonstration of noir style being adopted as fashionable by the studios and their ability to drain it of any originality or merit.

There is no real attempt to delve into Taylor's psychological hang-ups beyond the fact that they were a vogue plot point to justify a suspenseful dynamic. Alfred Hitchcock attributed the arrival of psychoanalysis to the thriller to Ben Hecht's thoroughly researched *Spellbound* (1945) screenplay, which ushered in a new fashion much like he had done for the gangster in the previous decade.³³¹ However, imitators were plenteous and seized on Hitchcock's earlier *Rebecca* (1941), which predated *Spellbound*, as a gothic psychological drama. There had been a spike in the number Freudian pictures, but the films weren't interested in psychoanalysis, as much as looking for a new device to explain the motivations of a villain. Examples include Claude Rains' bachelor serial murderer in Michael Curtiz's *The Unsuspected* (1947), Michael Redgrave's in *The Secret Beyond The Door* (1947) by Fritz Lang, and even Herbert Marshall's in *The Spiral Staircase* (1945) directed by Robert Siodmak. It seemed to be the case that trying to contrive a mechanism to explain the maniacal and murderous glint born out of Barbara Stanwyck's eyes in *Double Indemnity* deadened the dramatic weight of the seemingly inexplicable allure of the dark side which the best film noir stylized. The reality was that the inspired qualities of noir were harnessed quickly into predictable and pat story convention. While many very good films came out of the cycle, many of them have also been given too much credence in the eyes of film scholars. The delineation of which ones were ingeniously devious from those that were contrived thrillers will only further efforts to define film noir.

What was carnal and remarkable about film noir was its skewering of Hollywood style and convention before eventually being mired in it. In that case then, the remarkable moment when this anti-Hollywood dynamic became explicit can be seen as the culmination of noir style. It began in the Los Angeles obscured by the Hollywood limelight and Walter Neff's drive up into the Hollywood hills in *Double Indemnity* and achieved its full expression in Wilder's 1950 crowning achievement, *Sunset Blvd.* The premise of the film was not new. There was something of a resemblance to Horace McCoy's *I Should Have Stayed Home* in the structure of the narrative of a young struggling Hollywood type being persuaded into service of an older, washed-up Hollywood socialite for career purposes. Yet an earlier version of the script makes clear that Wilder and Brackett knew they were up to something as it asked those reading it to keep the content secret due to its "unusual" nature.³³² They knew, based on this, that they were skirting controversy with their new project regardless of Wilder's later statements about his intentions with the film.³³³ It was a marked achievement to drain the well of Hollywood's Golden Age by communing with the industry's ghosts from the silent industry before with the entrenchment of the Hays Code bureaucracy of the studio system.

Sunset Blvd. seized on the contempt for bureaucratic Hollywood and furiously condemned the pressures and forgetfulness of the movie colony while quietly edifying the period gone by where Hollywood was new and bold. It was nostalgia for the era where, as Dorothy Kilgallen put it, exoticism was prized and "every celluloid kiss was fraught with danger."³³⁴ The film gloried wistfully for a bygone era. It was the culmination of an attitude that had long been brewing and in many respects it was the purging of the Hays code mentality and the unleashing of the pre-Code myths back into the public eye. *Sunset* obviously did not kill the studio system, but it did come at the perfect moment to revel in its decline and represented the on-screen fulfillment of the noir counter-system milieu with a direct and explicit use of this method to finally foist Hollywood at its own game. As *Newsweek* phrased it evocatively on the film's release: "It passes beside the fabulous, historical Hollywood that F. Scott

Fitzgerald was trying to write about in *The Last Tycoon* (and which the film *A Star Is Born* didn't quite convey); the Hollywood of fake Spanish baroque homes."³³⁵

In many ways it was a remarkably similar construction to *Double Indemnity*, and in some ways the methods that were opened by *Indemnity* created the artery through which it was possible to tell a sordid tale on-screen about Hollywood's selfishness. Instead of Walter Neff this time it is Joe Gillis a struggling screenwriter played by William Holden who takes a detour to an old Hollywood mansion. Intriguingly both the Dietrichson house and the mansion of Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson), the reclusive silent film star who ensnares Gillis in her delusional dream world where she is still a film star, are arid and shabby but evoke the glamour passé of the 20s as bastions of temptation and corruption. The fact that Gillis is this time an actual screenwriter, instead of a cipher, is all the more telling about the film's effort to do the Hollywood exposé that had long been attempted, but needed to be done in a way that vented the frustration of Hollywood's long suffering class. This time it is explicit that the long oppressed screenwriter finally took the mantle of the protagonist through which the L.A. view of Chandler, Cain and the other pulp writers, as well as the screen craftsmen who had fuelled noir, told their stories. It was what Budd Schulberg had endeavored to do in *What Makes Sammy Run?* but here it was actualized perfectly on the screen by Wilder and Brackett and L.A. noir lens to explicitly excoriate Hollywood.

The flashback device in *Sunset* is another level of unusualness. This time Wilder narrates through a dead man, a device that was attacked as tawdry by critics of the time, but now seems oddly appropriate.³³⁶ In a sense Holden's character is communing with the dead through much of the film. One of the most affecting scenes is Norma Desmond's card game with long forgotten showbiz types such as Buster Keaton and H.B. Warner and not to mention her butler played by the pioneering director Erich von Stronheim. It may be a slightly labored allegory, but there is something pertinent about the notion

of Wilder the long struggling screenwriter creating a film which finds a writer toying with uncorking Hollywood's past and finding himself reduced to dependence as a kept man and gunned down on his escape.

There's a sense of playing with fire, but perhaps the real flame of the system that was being castigated had already been doused. *Sunset* was not all that risky a proposition because noir had already stuck out to contravene the studio conception. The movie factories by 1950s were becoming rapidly labile as they moved toward their dissolution and the moguls were losing their grip. Wilder said that the reception to *Sunset Blvd.* in the industry was that they felt he had betrayed the industry and bit "the hand that helped him out of the water and is feeding him now."³³⁷ Maurice Zolotow produced an anecdote in his biography of Wilder which, like all Hollywood stories can only perhaps be seen as an illustrative parable and not fact, although Zolotow claims to have multiple witness accounts: after attending a screening of *Sunset Blvd.*, L.B. Mayer is said to have approached Wilder and castigated him harshly for assaulting the industry. Wilder's profane two-word brush-off of a response was perhaps the best possible illustration of the underpinnings of film noir that can be had.³³⁸ It was the frustration of the factory setting, the communion with the past era, and the chance for a frustrated employee to screen his antipathy and inside to turn the place out from the inside.

Sunset Blvd. may be the most explicit film in which film noir's motivations were evident; however, it is also demonstrative of why film noir is so difficult to construct a linear timeline for. In fact, by the time Wilder had made his style point explicit, Hollywood had already repurposed noir as a new reusable genre. Noir existed inside a continuum and ran concurrently with its imitators and offshoots because of the replicative nature of Hollywood cinema. *Double Indemnity* remained the spark which set off the style, and *Sunset Blvd.* was a worthy survey of the ashes, but noir made its way into the filmic language. Noir can hardly be said to have died at this moment in 1950, merely that its subversive nerve

no longer had a specific target for which to be the antithesis. As it finished with the studio system, noir went out in different directions and, as *Time* magazine said of *Sunset Blvd.*, tackled the "jungle mentality that flourished in the U.S. far beyond the boundaries of Hollywood."³³⁹ And, indeed, the style of filmmaking trigger by noir would be a key tool in shining a light on that jungle.

²⁴⁸ Hirsch, 212.

²⁴⁹ Jean Domarchi and Jacques Rivette, "Interview with Fritz Lang," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 99 September 1959 Translated by Glenwood Irons in Barry Keith Grant ed., *Fritz Lang Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 23; "Movies in 1946," *The Nation* January 25 1947 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, ed. Michael Sragow (New York: The Library of America, 2005), 273.

²⁵⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 126.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 48.

²⁵² "Edgar G. Ulmer" in Bogdanovich, *Who The Devil Made It?*, 559-62.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, 575.

²⁵⁴ "The Back Room," *The Spectator* September 20 1935, in Graham Greene, *Graham Greene on film collected film criticism 1935-1940*, ed. John Russell Taylor (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 22.

²⁵⁵ John Alton, *Painting with Light* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 44.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 54.

²⁵⁷ Alain Silver, "Introduction," in *Film Noir Reader*, 7.

²⁵⁸ Jean Domarchi and Jacques Rivette, "Interview with Fritz Lang," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 99 September 1959 Translated by Glenwood Irons in Barry Keith Grant ed., *Fritz Lang Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 23

²⁵⁹ Kracauer, 91-93.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 81-84.

²⁶¹ Brook, 57.

²⁶² Gene D. Phillips, "Fritz Lang Remembers," *Focus on Film* 20 Spring 1975 in Barry Keith Grant ed., *Fritz Lang Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 179.

²⁶³ Kracauer, 121 & 150.

²⁶⁴ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 4 of 5*, William Safire "On Language," *New York Times* April 28 2002: 1; Kauffman "on Film's Underworlds," 30.

²⁶⁵ "Pépé Le Moko," *The Spectator* April 23 1937, in Graham Greene, *Graham Greene on film collected film criticism 1935-1940*, 145.

²⁶⁶ Hirsch, 10.

²⁶⁷ "L'Homme du Jour/You and Me," *The Spectator* July 1 1938, in Graham Greene, *Graham Greene on film collected film criticism 1935-1940*, 145.

²⁶⁸ "Fritz Lang" in Bogdanovich, *Who The Devil Made It?*, 204 & 227.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 206.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 205.

²⁷¹ Quote from Andrew Sarris, *You Ain't Heard Nothing Yet?* In Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 4 of 5*, Jon Strickland, "Film Noir at American Cinematheque," *L.A. Weekly* April 4 2003: 36.

²⁷² Vincent Brook, *Driven To Darkness Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 8.

²⁷³ Schumach, 63.

²⁷⁴ Brook, 17.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

- ²⁷⁶ Andrew Dickos, *Street with No Name : A history of the classic american film noir* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 6.
- ²⁷⁷ Maurice Zolotow, *Billy Wilder in Hollywood* (New York: Putnam, 1977), 51.
- ²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 42.
- ²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 58.
- ²⁸⁰ *Ibid*.
- ²⁸¹ Layman, 162.
- ²⁸² Zolotow, 63-4.
- ²⁸³ Baxter, 52.
- ²⁸⁴ Zolotow, 66 & 91.
- ²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 93.
- ²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 71.
- ²⁸⁷ John Allyn, "Double Indemnity: A Policy that Paid Off," *Literature/Film Quarterly* Spring 1978 in Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 138.
- ²⁸⁸ Hiney, 75.
- ²⁸⁹ Zolotow, 111.
- ²⁹⁰ Hiney, 133.
- ²⁹¹ "To Hamish Hamilton November 10 1950" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*.
- ²⁹² Zolotow, 120-121.
- ²⁹³ *The Little Sister* in Chandler, *Later Novels and Other Writings*, 299.
- ²⁹⁴ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Paramount Production Records for *Double Indemnity*, "Studio Memo Re: Expenses July 6 1943."
- ²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, "Memo Luigi Lurashi to Joseph Siström September 28 1943."
- ²⁹⁶ Zolotow, 112.
- ²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 125.
- ²⁹⁸ John Allyn, "Double Indemnity: A Policy that Paid Off" in Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews*, 139.
- ²⁹⁹ "Double Indemnity" in James M. Cain, *Novels and Stories* (New York: Everyman's Library), 124.
- ³⁰⁰ Farrell, 87.
- ³⁰¹ University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archive, *Mildred Pierce* Story File, "March 4 1949 Tom Chapman to Roy Obringer The Adaptation of *Mildred Pierce*."
- ³⁰² John Allyn, "Double Indemnity: A Policy that Paid Off" in Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews*, 135.
- ³⁰³ Schumach, 64; Zolotow, 113.
- ³⁰⁴ "Double Indemnity" in James M. Cain, *Novels and Stories*, 149.
- ³⁰⁵ "Double Indemnity" in James M. Cain, *Novels and Stories*, 144.
- ³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 167.
- ³⁰⁷ Madden, 27.
- ³⁰⁸ John Allyn, "Double Indemnity: A Policy that Paid Off" in Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews*, 137.
- ³⁰⁹ Zolotow, 118.
- ³¹⁰ "To Cleve F. Adams September 4 1948" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 52.
- ³¹¹ "Writers in Hollywood" *The Atlantic* November 1945 in Chandler, *Later Novels & Other Writings*, 993-1003; Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Charles Brackett Papers.
- ³¹² " " *The Nation* September 14 1946 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, ed. Michael Sragow (New York: The Library of America, 2005), 253.
- ³¹³ " " *The Nation* October 14 1944, *Ibid*, 142.
- ³¹⁴ University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archive, *Mildred Pierce* Publicity Clips, John T. McManus "James Cain's Ugly America," *PM* September 30 1945.
- ³¹⁵ " " *The Nation* October 13 1945 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, ed. Michael Sragow (New York: The Library of America, 2005), 206.

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- ³¹⁶ "Nearer My Agee to Thee" *The New Republic* November 8 1957 in Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, ed. Robert Polito (New York: The Library of America, 2009), 499.
- ³¹⁷ "Crime Does Pay," *The New Republic* February 26 1945 in Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, 222.
- ³¹⁸ J. Hoberman, "Noir Town."
- ³¹⁹ "*The Nation* February 26 1944 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, ed. Michael Sragow (New York: The Library of America, 2005), 96
- ³²⁰ David Bordwell, "Chinese Boxes, Russian Dolls, and Hollywood Movies," *Observations on Film Art*. Posted June 6 2011. <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/06/06/chinese-boxes-russian-dolls-and-hollywood-movies/>.
- ³²¹ "Underground Films" *The New Republic* November 1957 in Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, ed. Robert Polito (New York: The Library of America, 2009), 496.
- ³²² "Goodbye Please," May 31 1939 *The New Republic* in Otis Ferguson, *The Film Criticism of Otis Ferguson*, ed. Robert Wilson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1971), 256.
- ³²³ University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archive, *The Big Sleep* Publicity File.
- ³²⁴ " " *The Nation* November 4 1944 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, ed. Michael Sragow (New York: The Library of America, 2005), 144.
- ³²⁵ "To Hamish Hamilton March 21 1949" in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 221; "Howard Hawks" in Bogdanovich, *Who the Devil Made It?*, 334.
- ³²⁶ "Howard Hawks" in Bogdanovich, *Who the Devil Made It?*, 324.
- ³²⁷ Reviews accessed through University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archive, *The Big Sleep* Press Clippings.
- ³²⁸ University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Warner Brothers Archive, *The Big Sleep* Story File.
- ³²⁹ Ibid.
- ³³⁰ Bosley Crowther, "Violence Erupts Again," *The New York Times* September 1 1946; Although numerous critics used it as an example of the gap between movie content and novel content particularly on the topics of nymphomania and narcotics which are in Chandler's novel see Virginia Spies "The Pick of the Pictures," *Liberty* Sept. 7 1946; others welcomed the removal of said content in favor of a more focused story, see Lee Mortimer, "'The Big Sleep' Is Exciting Mystery," *New York Post* August 13 1946.
- ³³¹ Alfred Hitchcock in Peter Bogdanovich, *Who The Devil Made It?*, 512.
- ³³² Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Rudy Behlmer Papers, *Sunset Blvd.* Script December 21 1948.
- ³³³ Wilder called the film a "valentine" in Joseph McBride and Todd McCarthy, "Going for Extra Innings" *Film Comment* January/ February 1979 in Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews*, 142.
- ³³⁴ Kilgallen, "Voice of Broadway" August 11 1950.
- ³³⁵ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Sunset Blvd. Clipping File, "Sunset Boulevard: Hollywood Tale That Gloria Swanson Makes Great" *Newsweek* June 27 1950.
- ³³⁶ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Sunset Blvd. Clipping File, "The Screen In Review," *New York Times* August 11 1950.
- ³³⁷ Joseph McBride and Todd McCarthy, "Going for Extra Innings" *Film Comment* January/ February 1979 in Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews*, 142.
- ³³⁸ A version of the same anecdote is also mentioned in Gene Phillips, *Some Like It Hot The Life and Controversial Films of Billy Wilder* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 124-125, the debate seems to be whether Wilder swore at the ranting Mayer or merely stuck his tongue out. Phillips humorously notes the hypocrisy of Mayer assailing someone for being an "immigrant" but also notes that Wilder believes the confrontation cost him votes at the Academy Awards; Zolotow, 167-68.
- ³³⁹ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, *Sunset Blvd.* Clipping File. "New Pictures," *TIME Magazine* 15 1950.

Chapter 4 The Long Night: Noir's Place In American Film and Toward *Neo-noir*

Critic Andrew Sarris cautioned against defining Hollywood's eras along decade lines in a short piece in 1982 entitled "A Few Kind Word for the 50s." In it, he assailed another critic who implied that after the "fast-paced" 1930s, and "gritty" 1940s there was "something wrong" with the stodgy 1950s. Sarris noted that treating the fifties solely as the decades where the studios declined, felt the on-rush of television and resorted to Cinemascope projection gimmicks to keep people in theatres belied that there was still a many great films from that period. He also notes that, while it is useful shorthand to remember the screwball 1930s and the noir 1940s, most of the films made during either decade are long forgotten programmers that were heaped on the public by Hollywood during those years.³⁴⁰ Thus charting the impact of noir through the decades after the on-rush of the 1940s, and even trying to situate it within the forties, is an imperfect science. Yet, trends emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, which used the impression of 1940s film noir and showed its likeness being recycled over time. This also led to the germinal moments for the neo-noir invention in the 1970s.

Of course other factors, such as the dawning of a new multimedia period with the popularization of television, the revision of the Production Code in 1956, and the period of the Hollywood blacklist all loom largely in the landscape of the film industry during the mid 20th century. However, the films themselves also read as a roadmap through the evolutions of film noir. Eventually, a "New" Hollywood arrived and, by the mid-1970s, promulgated a new aestheticism in film to counteract the slide toward both cliché and realism in the preceding decades as starkly as *Double Indemnity* and its immediate successors had in the 1940s. This was the moment when a viable conception of neo-noir became noticeable. It was a collision of cineliterate directors and the rise of American critics that used the French lens of aesthetic criticism to "back-read" the forties films into a legacy on which to draw for directors looking for the dark side of American life.

The notion of a cyclical noir has been discussed frequently in this study, and this chapter will demonstrate that noir did not evaporate but simply immersed – or even re-immersed if one takes the view of cinematographer John Alton - itself into popular film's language to be drawn from as needed. It would return and be re-purposed and re-invigorated however with Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976). Martin Scorsese himself actually chose a film directed by Robert Aldrich, *Kiss Me Deadly* (1954), as his end of the version batch of noirs, because after that point the films went away from dealing with "personal" themes.³⁴¹ Paul Schrader, *Taxi Driver's* screenwriter, cited cycle ending with *The Touch of Evil*. Raymond Durgat believed there were four cycles within the larger cannon of film noir that culminated with Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1956).³⁴²

All of these theories of periodization are interesting prisms from which to view the films, but ultimately there is always a film such as *Experiment in Terror* (1962), directed by Blake Edwards, or all of John Frankenheimer's work in the 1960s to name only a few, which makes the "end" point seem arbitrary and artificial as a concept in the same way that plucking one film as an inception point. There were disparate elements before *Double Indemnity* and film noir certainly lived on after *Sunset Blvd*. However, after *Sunset*, which was exorcism of the old Hollywood frustrations that had given noir its pulse, the core of the style was somewhat blunted by becoming an all-purpose lens to deal with contrasts in all walks of American life. Consequently, noir became much more of a surface stylistic by the late 1940s and was frequently applied without much thematic weight to generic thrillers. The degree to which the visibly noir style remained impressive in the 1950s ranged wildly depending on how each filmmaker used it. In fact, it was easily reproducible and could be applied quite casually. Wilder's next film, after *Sunset*, an unsuccessful film at the time called *Ace in the Hole* (1951), applied his techniques to the world of sensationalistic journalism. The film centered on a cynical opportunistic reporter (Kirk Douglas) who exploits the story of a man trapped in a cave-in for his own celebrity. Wilder stated that he was "opening up and unrolling the problem of the "quick buck" and the American mania for it."³⁴³

Wilder was not the first to go in this direction, but this was where film noir traveled in the 50s; out of the studio, out of Los Angeles and on to locations in wider America. By Raymond Durgnat's periodization this would be the realist phase in the noir cycle or Foster Hirsch's "street" film. It could be more usefully described as the "exposé" period. In examining the literature of the Hollywood Black List, Thom Anderson in his essay "Red Hollywood" begrudgingly coined the term *film gris* to describe the evolution in noir toward the street and grappling with the inequities of America's most prominent legal, corporate, and social institutions. He linked this to the leftist politicization in a certain East-Coast New York segment of the Hollywood community with names such as the actor John Garfield, the writers Budd Schulberg and Abraham Polonsky, and directors such as Elia Kazan. All of these individuals, and those others who eventually made up the famous Hollywood Ten, faced blacklisting and testified before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.³⁴⁴ Of this batch of films, Jules Dassin's *Thieves Highway* (1949), Robert Rossen's *Body and Soul* (1948) and Polonsky's own *Force of Evil* (1948) are the most accomplished and noteworthy for their location or *faux* location shooting.

Billy Wilder and the returning Charles Brackett used their combined sway, especially after the blockbuster success of *Double Indemnity*, to lobby to get the extra money to shoot *The Lost Weekend* (1945) in New York.³⁴⁵ Interior sets began to reflect a more naturalistic aesthetic as they had to match up to real exteriors rather than those of the back lots. James Agee remarked that "one of the best things that is happening in Hollywood is the tendency to move out of the place."³⁴⁶ Critics such as Agee and Manny Farber enjoyed many of the exposé films for their real setting and applauded the efforts of Italian neorealism such as Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945).³⁴⁷ Farber was more critical of orchestrated realism that softened the blow of hard living by giving melodramatic contours to the story and did not take to Vittorio De Sica's famous *Bicycle Thieves* (1947) and was as sceptical of false sentiment in real world settings as in a studio.³⁴⁸

In several cases while these films did go into the streets, they became a conservative step in the noir pantheon, and in many cases actually reined in the high style of the 1940s films. It also reframed and moralized the ethical parameters of the stories. They became crusading films that examined the roles of honest cops or journalists or witnesses trying to go straight reporting on rackets, corruption and organized crime. As a recent article in *The Los Angeles Times* described it, in the light of day “the underworld loses its allure.”³⁴⁹ Artificiality for the studio shot noirs had enabled over-the-top set designs and shadow patterns, which skewered Hollywood glamour on its own turf. While the move to the streets was of crucial importance for the development of America's cinema over the following decades this first batch was still made under the parameters of the unrevised Production Code and the Breen Office and led to some paralyzing moral equivocation about taking the perspective of the criminal in these films which has undermined the longevity of their appeal.

To take the films into the realm of "fact fiction," as Agee branded them, the *film gris* needed to coattail to institutional authorities they were representing. Realist films such as *The Naked City* (1948) offered a firsthand look into New York City policing, *T-Men* (1947) the United States Treasury Department, and *Call Northside 777* (1948) into Chicago crime reporting. In order to pass the code the film's had to stay away from defaming social institutions and as such these films became stilted hagiographies irrespective of their cinematic merits.³⁵⁰ The moralizing and supplication toward traditional authority made the films actually serve as an unintended corrective to the gritty first blast of noir. The director Elia Kazan used his clout after his successes on the New York stage and took his films into the America. He shot his “fact fiction” film *Boomerang* (1947) in Connecticut with Dana Andrews as an assistant D.A. going to the brink to expose judicial corruption.³⁵¹

Ultimately, the societal institutions would squelch the poisoned element in these films. Another problem with this realism was that the films still needed to skirt issues of sexuality and substance abuse.

Panic In the Streets (1950) was another of Kazan's on location films which took Jack Palance into battle with racketeers in New Orleans. For all the depictions of violence and criminality, the Breen Office memos for the film continued to stress that Barbara Bel Geddes' character's costume not be too revealing in order to avoid projecting an image of promiscuity.³⁵² Fritz Lang sympathized and relayed an anecdote from an earlier film, *Manhunt* (1941), where in order to show the interior of a single woman's apartment and prevent the association that a single woman who afforded her own apartment with no other visible means might be a prostitute he had to "prominently show a sewing machine in her apartment: thus she was not a whore, she was a "seamstress"! Talk about authenticity."³⁵³

The blunt instrument that was the Breen Office continued to be an issue in the 1950s and the industry remained on alert after the anticommunist House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) investigations of the late 1940s. The tendency to explicitly clarify a moral position in crime films eroded any new innovations in verisimilitude. Respect for law and honest American values led to a speechifying tendency in scriptwriting. Additionally, as had been the case with the early gangster films of the 1930s, title cards which praised the efforts of law enforcement returned to the screens as seen in the aforementioned *The T-Men* (1947) directed by Anthony Mann. This trend spread and was even used by writer/director Samuel Fuller in tribute to the exploits of American journalists in *Park Row* (1952) set in turn of the century New York. Fuller said: "My film was going to be a personal gift to American journalism."³⁵⁴ The film featured a text scroll that actually said "DEDICATED TO AMERICAN JOURNALISM."³⁵⁵

There were many films "dedicated" to the institutions of American society. Fuller was an interesting figure in American film and his docu-noirs are often terrific, but it became necessary to get the "fact-based" angle in the marketing. The films began to offer the illusion that they knew the inner workings of law enforcement. Fuller did research with the NYPD for his film *Pickup on South Street*

(1953) about the culture of police informants and petty criminals.³⁵⁶ Facts such as these were cut into trailers as selling points to blazon the true to life aspects of films and the credits proudly displayed "Thanks to" and "With the permission of" certificates from law and order institutions. The private eye detective was being phased out in favor of the beleaguered everyman with a badge. As Farber noted, the "new scripts are tortured by the "big statement"... a film hardly gets inside the theatre because most of the movie is coming out of somebody's mouth."³⁵⁷

Ultimately the noir paradigm of glorying in the naughty circumvention of Hollywood's moralistic conception of life was blunted into re-enforcing the need for authority and morality to keep society safe. The filmically subversive element did seem to dissipate as the American filmmakers took the films into the real world. Sam Fuller stated with typical pragmatism about Hollywood in his autobiography that "yarns about cops always make good movies because there's plenty of conflict and action."³⁵⁸ However, the police procedural deadened the 1940s crime film and would become a staple for television dramas as a reliable and engrained genre template which allowed for streamlined transposition of B film quickies to the rigors of television shooting schedules. As John Buntin noted the most famous and influential of these was *Dragnet* which advertised the fact that it was based out of the case files of the L.A.P.D.³⁵⁹

Manny Farber was a perceptive critic and cut through film noir as style from the outset but also considered it a slightly worrying trend as addressed in Chapter 3. Film critics of the time did not miss the film noirs, but they did disregard them in the interest of films which strove away from in-studio style. Farber saw the street films as minor parts of his favorite strain in American cinema, the "underground" film.³⁶⁰ Farber's "underground" film was a notion that presaged the auteur theory in American film discourse. Underground films- which he admired within his broader definition of "termite" art, which subtly ate away at a norm from within - were typically made by "male action directors" who Farber

believed forced the canny audience to look into films to distinguish between good trash and bad. He blamed the noir stylistics for making obvious what the directors such as Howard Hawks and Raoul Walsh had always done in their crime films with "a suave, cutting efficacy."³⁶¹ He thought highly of Hawks' *The Big Sleep* for its "gangster" action, but derided the crime films of the latter half of the forties for being "supertabloid geeklike films... turning life inside out to find the specks of horrible oddity that make puzzling, faintly marred kaleidoscopes of a street face, or gesture."³⁶² This was directed at several films, among them John Huston's caper film *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950).³⁶³ However, it was precisely the unsubtle imagery that made noir so parasitic to Hollywood's vision and if anything the verisimilitude of the street era actually worked to re-align the crime film with Hollywood's moral parameters. James Agee, who wrote a fawning appreciation of John Huston, liked the moment in *Jungle* where during a heist, Huston interposed a shot of alarm bells ringing out at night down an empty street. Among the films of this sort, which focused more on the criminal point of view, Farber singled out *The Set-Up* (1949), *Act of Violence* (1948), *No Way Out* (1950) and, again, *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). One could certainly add *Armored Car Robbery* (1950) and *Criss-Cross* (1949), which took the noir film inside crime procedurals and, in turn, created the backlash toward returning to the perspective of the lawman.³⁶⁴

As mentioned, *The Big Sleep* was the first step in which the major studios and a great "male action director" reacted to the success of the lusty *Double Indemnity* and actually drained that vibe by reforming the product into a tough-guy film, which had often been made in the 1930s. This time however the style of noir was snatched for use as a device for atmospheric ambiance. It is important to distinguish the noir films from crime films, and they were made concurrently as the films mentioned by Farber, but also coincided with films such as *Out of the Past* (1947) and the works of Robert Siodmak which continued to use the textures of pulp crime to toy with Hollywood form and style. In this respect it is a shame that perhaps lacking perspective, James Agee found the terrifically stylish and complex *Out of the Past* "conventional" at the time.³⁶⁵

Critics in America did not miss noir as an event, but lacked the perspective to gauge its impact on American cinema. However, critics still to this day, due to a liberal standard of definition are caught missing this point. Foster Hirsch stated that there was a tendency to believe, if it's noir "it must be good."³⁶⁶ This is an enduring problem, as a film could be tough, stylish, and "good" without being noir. If the films of John Huston such as *The Maltese Falcon* or Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep*, along with films such as *Boomerang* (1947), a favorite of Agee, or Farber's adored *Phenix City Story* (1955), continue to be linked with what was achieved with *Double Indemnity* then the vitality of film noir is undermined greatly.³⁶⁷ In this respect, the contemporary French film theorists, such as Borde and Chaumain, were more lax than the Americans in observing the film product because they attempted to fit films under the noir umbrella.

The urban film did become part of Hollywood's new product. Samuel Fuller expressly said that even when he was working on sets, he was always envious of the naturalism of the Italian neorealists, and encouraged his set decorator to go for the naturalistic look.³⁶⁸ The naturalistic streak was an option that continued to be part of the amorphous nature of 1950s' cinema. It was simultaneously a period where naturalistic, urban, mainly New York, films sprung out, while the studios confusedly searched for riches and security in the changing marketplace by relying on Cinemascope and Vistavision. Some were able to handle both academy ratio black and white and widescreen colour filmic milieus, as the aforementioned Samuel Fuller recounted how he made war films for Darryl Zanuck at Fox in Cinemascope because it was the new commercial edict.³⁶⁹

Adolphe Zukor closed his biography, written in 1953, with a sales pitch for these new techniques, which include 3D and the various widescreen projection film development systems, as a way to keep giving the audience what they wanted.³⁷⁰ Andrew Sarris noted that it was easy to consider this as the time when the studios became irrelevant and the product lost touch with the mass audience and

the studios gradually shrunk into wings of bigger corporations. Indeed, their expensive back lots were sold off in order to cut losses on unused sets and soundstages as production quotas continued to tumble.³⁷¹ Yet, widescreen and Technicolor allowed a director such as John Ford to make magisterial paintings out of the West in *The Searchers* (1956) and it is difficult to fully label the product of the 50s as a decline. There were pat programmed comedies with Doris Day that have become the object of ridicule for their stuffy adroitness, however Sarris keenly observed that the fondly remembered comedies of the 30s are heralded for their wit only when one selects the cream of the crop.³⁷²

Statistically the business suffered, the number of films produced by the majors fell and the way movies got made did change.³⁷³ Many of the picture programmers - a term for the standard issue genre 'B' films - were transportable to television. Conventional wisdom was that the nature of making a picture that got people out of their homes to go see demanded some conception of spectacle that could not be reproduced at home. However, this environment of change also made it a necessity to re-think the preposterous Production Code and Breen Office, which had made a mockery of itself for refusing to certify a light comedy about a young woman called *The Moon Is Blue* (1953), directed by Otto Preminger when the script used the word "virgin." Preminger decided with the agreement of United Artists to release the film without MPAA certification and its reception did not suffer.³⁷⁴ Preminger made a film two years later, an adaptation of Nelson Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), with Frank Sinatra playing a war veteran turned card dealer and "stuff" (heroin) addict Frankie Machine, which would also be released without Production Office approval.³⁷⁵

Finally, after it became obvious to even Martin Quigley, the author of the original Code, that it must change or become entirely irrelevant, the Code was formally revised to be more permissive toward social issues dealing with substance abuse and sex outside of marriage.³⁷⁶ It had been some time coming as there were clear inconsistencies in films such as Fritz Lang's hard-hitting revenge movie *The Big Heat*

(1954). Often held up as a noir classic, it is decidedly a product of the *film gris* world of principled individuals staking out for justice amidst a pacified and inattentive society. Glenn Ford starred as a police officer who goes it alone to avenge the murder of his wife by criminal Lee Marvin. The film is also notorious for the scene in which Marvin disfigures his 'mol' Gloria Grahame with a splash of hot coffee. This was a climate where, a few years earlier, in *Kiss of Death* (1947) actor Richard Widmark's killer had pushed an elderly handicapped woman down a flight of stairs. Sadistic criminals were dramatically feasible because the films were scrupulously constructed to contain social correctives which the filmmakers explicitly wrapped around their stories. It was also a prism where violence, if it was punished, was permissible, but the Breen Office would flag a married couple for showing "passion" while dancing. The *exposé film gris*'s unobvious tendency in drawing a dichotomy between average folk and the criminals made obvious what stodgy institution the Code was as opposed to the earlier noirs which were more subversive and blurred lines of morality.

That trenchant style and mystic of noir did largely retreat to Europe where "Brit-noir" and the terrific French crime films of the 1950s such as *Touchez pas au grisbi* (1954), *Du rififi chez des homes* (1955), *Bob le flambeur* (1956) and others owed a debt to the Hollywood efforts of the forties. Director Jules Dassin took the noir city abroad with *Night and the City* (1950) showing the shady operator played by Richard Widmark trying to wiggle into a pro-wrestling and night club scheme in an expressionistic nightmarish post-war London which Martin Scorsese described as an influential image of "Hades".³⁷⁷ The British director Carol Reed had achieved this hellish ruined city look previously in post-war Vienna with the classic *The Third Man* (1949) and his expressionistic *Odd Man Out* (1947). While the European films continued to be in love with and create a mystic around the night world of the criminal city, the American crime film lost its nerve and went back to tough guys and cops and robbers.

In his 1975 essay Paul Schrader's famous cycle of noir ended in 1958 with Orson Welles' *The Touch of Evil*. This is another in the many arbitrary end points, but the film itself is a fascinating hybrid of the 1940s high-expressionist styling in the desolate climate of a corrupt, lawless border town. The final film does deal with some narcotic use, although earlier drafts of the script were more expressly about heroine instead of marijuana, and sexual assault much more frankly than had been possible in decades previous. The film which came out only two years after the revised Production Code is still quite enamored with the screening of such things and in the old high style noir stylistics that Welles had used in his *The Stranger* (1946), *Lady From Shanghai* (1947) and his European efforts *Mr. Arkadin* (1955) and the later *The Trial* (1962). It is equally in-step with the 50s films in that Welles' corrupt dinosaur Capt. Hank Quinlan's amoral policing and reign over a border town is ended by a young visiting Mexican born cop of strong morals played by Charlton Heston.

Quinlan's lumbering death scene, where his wheezing and morbidly obese monstrosity of a frame tumble to the ground, has been seen as a eulogy for film noir, where the bloated corpse is the embodiment of noir and is put to rest with a nostalgic coda provided by Marlene Dietrich with the famous line that, "He was some kind of man." As mentioned, however, noir style cinematography continued well into the 1960s. Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) or Robert Wise's *Experiment in Terror* in 1962 certainly have as much in common with film noir as a film such as *The Big Heat* or other fifties films such as *The Prowler* (1951). *Touch of Evil* is, however, one of the most virtuoso use of noir stylistics and Welles' frontier ghost town of vice is a classic film locale, but in a sense it is more demonstrative of the fact that noir's diffusion had made it an ineradicable part of the bag of tricks of American filmmakers.

If the noir 'B' films of the fifties ultimately did dry up, it was because they were increasingly made of tawdry stuff. James M. Cain's *Mildred Pierce* was packaged into a terrific film version by Warner

Brothers in 1945, but subsequently Joan Crawford played increasingly implausible lead roles in imitations about a single woman's neurotic grappling with the stress of living and aging in *Possessed* (1947) and later *Autumn Leaves* (1956). Imitation drained the spark of inspiration from the genre and obviously, the novelty of thwarting Mayer's wholesome Americana lost its potency and even its frame of reference after *Sunset Blvd.*

Scorsese's opinion that the first noir cycle ended in 1955 with *Kiss Me Deadly* is interesting. *Kiss Me Deadly* is also indicative of the distilled and more conventional brand of noir that had become a normal element in the cultural product by the mid 1950s. While the film itself remains a terrific and highly regarded tough guy pot-boiler with a neat twist into the absurdity of current events, it is also nothing more than that. And that is what most of the noirs had become, a conventional genre piece. Further indicative of this is what had happened to the pulp literature that became the basis for these works. Mickey Spillane was the new tough guy writer of the moment, and his sleuth Mike Hammer was the tough guy PI for McCarthy era America.

Spillane is ultimately indicative of the rank and file mystery writer of the *Black Mask* era and typifies a xenophobic, conservative streak that ran against the melancholia of the Chandler efforts. Chandler, even to an extent Cain, had a literary focus to their efforts, but Spillane was more of a panderer of schlock: "A face that was willing to be kissed was really waiting to be splattered with blood." Sex and violence are constantly conflated and bluntly described in his novels.³⁷⁸ The characters weren't eating at a certain injustice in the spirit of America they were cynical and rough concoctions. Director Robert Aldrich thought that they were "fascistic" and played to the xenophobic voice in the American culture.³⁷⁹ Hammer was actually a conservative instrument of violent recourse against diversity or nonconformist identity.

The stylized anomie of the 1930s' fiction was gone and the notion of railing against a misapprehension of life gone wrong in America had become a tool corralled for commercial reproduction and functioned to drum up an aversion to dissimilar views. Chandler, perhaps correct in sizing up Cain's abilities as a fiction writer but wrong in calling him a pure sensationalist, was more on target to chastise the material of this era for what he reviled about his own literary roots. Chandler professed to being bored with the "comic book" pulp fiction of the time such as Spillane and preferred the work of the French master George Simenon.³⁸⁰ Chandler's Phillip Marlowe became a successful television series, and the PI on film became a routine and strained genre where Marlowe became mundane. James Garner played him in *Marlowe* (1969) an adaptation of *The Little Sister* that was aesthetically televisual and unremarkable. Paul Newman played a PI for the 1960s' establishment in *Harper* (1966), a more successful film than *Marlowe*, but a customary Los Angeles detective movie that began with the staple of a detective being summoned up to a mansion in the Hollywood hills.

The same had occurred to Hollywood in fiction. Tales of showbiz vice were very ordinary and Hollywood as a locale could no longer be described freshly. The pursuit of telling America about an inequity in its midst had been long achieved and, frankly, as the age of the movie studios and Old Hollywood became a memory, any attempt to recall it was a very bland anachronism. This can be seen in Gavin Lambert's *The Slide Area*. The written word on the matter had descended into a staple of paperback cliché:

"Countess Marguerite Osterberg-Steblechi lives in a big grey patrician house in the Hollywood hills. Steep and narrow roads twist through these hills, where living was fashionable in the twenties. Valentino and Nazimova built homes here. Stateliness hangs in the air. Most of the houses are large, but you have the impression half their rooms are closed now, furniture draped with old sheets and blinds pulled down."³⁸¹

After *Sunset Blvd.* a slew of self-referential "showbiz" biographies were made. Indeed, even the movie about the dark side of the movie business became similarly a staple for melodrama. Vincente Minelli's *The Bold and the Beautiful* (1952) film was about a B horror producer starring Kirk Douglas and Lana Turner. It dealt with Douglas character's greed and corruption as a producer who strays from his artistic principles that made him a B movie success. Robert Aldrich made *The Big Knife* (1955) that had Rod Steiger performing a venomous impression of Harry Cohn, and some of L.B. Mayer's famous pleading tactics as The two men were on their way out as Old Hollywood institutions. Aldrich, like many of his generation of filmmakers began to wax nostalgic for the moguls they had vitriolic excoriated on film and Wilder was among them.³⁸²

Charles Brackett even wrote a letter in the late fifties, which was indicative of how Hollywood self-awareness had lost its lustre. He proposed to Darryl Zanuck in 1954, still in charge of Fox, that he produce and Wilder direct a tell-all biography picture about the actress and mistress of newspaper baron William Randolph Hearst, Marion Davies, starring Marilyn Monroe. He pitched it as the Hollywood story to end all Hollywood stories, with good reason, but this was old news by then and went unmade.³⁸³ The lustre of subverting the 'boss' and the studio mandate had no more dramatic traction or aesthetical carnality because both the institution and its conception had receded from its dominant position. Noir had lost half its emulsion without the studio system to rail against and the devaluation of the material which originally gave it cache further led to a dissipation of the reality which motivated its invention. However, the residue of these films, as noted, remained engrained in mainstream cinema.

Those directors that continued to work as the old system crumbled seemed to be nearly unanimous in their nostalgia for the old factories. John Huston told *Playboy* in 1985 that "[it] was much easier then to get a picture made than it is today... They weren't accountants and bookkeepers, tax consultants and efficiency experts who don't know how to make pictures, or wheeler-dealers; that

element just seems to have taken over today - promoters who just want to get a part of the action rather than people who want to make pictures."³⁸⁴ Robert Aldrich believed that while the old guard was insistent up to a point, the sheer number of films made in the 1930s allowed for a few passion projects or gambles to get snuck in at a loss because the amount of money makers would even out the figures: "They used to make thirty pictures of which twenty-seven make money and three lose; they didn't care because it averages out - you take the house's gamble. But the house can't gamble anymore."³⁸⁵

For Billy Wilder, a man who gleefully went against the grain of the studios - although he also made a nearly unparalleled string of successes for them as well - being outside the confines of the studio system led him to remark with some remorse about the old days:

Before you were confronted with an illiterate, finagling, tyrannical guy who was very difficult to converse with, to convince, but once you did that job, that was it, you went ahead. But now there are twenty of those guys... Now the picturemaker wastes ninety percent of his energy getting the financing... Unless you are riding on an enormous hit, unless you have a deal with Travolta, unless you are willing to do *Damien III*, it is very difficult. You have to go to the money people, the Bank of America, you say "Hey listen, I've got this great story. I think it would make an absolutely marvelous picture. I need 4 000 000." They say, "Who is in it?"³⁸⁶

Stars were no longer under contract in the old sense of being employees of the studio, and it became an industry for talent agents, who put together material and movie star cache into a package that was marketable to financiers and could be distributed through the skeletal remains of the former studio enterprises.³⁸⁷ The dynamic of being hired talent on a star vehicle was the end of the line for many of the old stalwarts. Frank Capra quit a picture with Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby after finding it impossible to work on a serious film at the whims of his stars. There was no clear authority to turn to that kept the hierarchy in place. Capra had fought and loathed the autocratic Harry Cohn, but similar to Wilder, he felt once he had won the battle the picture was his to make. Eventually, that was no longer the case. Capra lost interest in commercial filmmaking in the 1960s.³⁸⁸ The early 1960s especially were

undoubtedly a period of transition, and the movie product of the era could rightly be denigrated as being antiquated and shapeless against the changing societal climate and audience.

Into the void stepped a new class of cinema appreciators in the audience. Directors such as George Stevens came to believe that the American film business had simply fallen behind the films of their European counterparts: "These European directors - and I know a number of them - are making films principally to make films... That motivation gets a very sincere response from audiences... These kinds of films are not made just to lure audiences in."³⁸⁹ The emergence of art cinemas and celebrity foreign directors such as Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Ingmar Bergman was another reason for the Production Code to move toward a revision and eventual transformation into a rating system in 1967 as the MPAA came under control of Jack Valenti, as the niche popularity of those films showed the willingness of young adult audiences to go to movies irrespective of their lack of MPAA certification.³⁹⁰

This coincided with the arrival of a new rigor in theoretical criticism in the United States. Returning from Paris with a mind full of the cinematic theories of the *Cahier du Cinema* French criticism, Andrew Sarris emerged to bring auteur theory into the United States' popular landscape. The theory, or more accurately the conception, of film criticism argued that the director of the film had authorial purview over the contents of the film. Sarris' film criticism in *The Village Voice* and his seminal *The American Cinema* were of immeasurable impact on a burgeoning market of young *cineliterate* people.³⁹¹ Film director Robert Benton recalled that "reading Sarris was like listening to Radio Free Europe."³⁹² Film attendance was falling, but film as a topic in books and on television talk shows was blooming and critics such as Sarris, and perhaps even more famously, Pauline Kael, developed celebrity personas of their own in film circles and had devotees.³⁹³

Sarris' famous book and interviews by individuals such as Peter Bogdanovich, brought the directors whom Manny Farber had called the "underground" filmmakers to light and made the director an important artist figure in popular culture in a way that they had not previously been. Film school programs expanded and new directors who were encyclopedic in their knowledge of film history and had a reverential appreciation for the films of the past created a mythology and a pantheon that baffled a filmmaker like Howard Hawks who simply put would not even acknowledge that he thought filmmaking was "art." Sarris and famed *New Yorker* film critic Pauline Kael even developed something of a rivalry where Sarris looked to categorize and find the value in the films that Hollywood had made and put them on par with the art films of the present. Kael's immediacy and passionate responses to bold attempts at startling the medium out of its conventions made for a newspaper and magazine sparring match. Kael and a circle of critics, dubbed the "Paulettes" including as he recalled himself Paul Schrader, and other in *New Yorker* David Denby and a young Roger Ebert, followed her instruction - according to Schrader - and campaigned for film's that Kael saw and felt needed to be trumpeted.³⁹⁴

Through the sixties, the star had become his own producer in the case of someone such as Warren Beatty.³⁹⁵ The "New Hollywood" or "Renaissance" would finally take into account the youth audience. Peter Biskind observed that the "shake up of '71" actually occurred ten years before in society at large, but "because movies are costly and take a long time to make" Hollywood is always slow to evolve.³⁹⁶ There is truth to this; however, a landmark in film history can be usually anticipated in the continuum of films and filmmakers in American cinema. For example, a director such as John Cassavetes had made his landmark New York neorealist film in *Shadows* (1959) independently in 1959, which attempted to encapsulate the bohemian Beat culture of the East Village in Manhattan.³⁹⁷ Cassavetes style was at least in part based on the East-Coast realism that had germinated since the "fact-fiction" docu-noirs of the late 1940s and 50s. Elia Kazan's early films had taken place in various already discussed

locales in America but his masterpiece *On the Waterfront* with Marlon Brando was made in New York.

Kazan described the difference between shooting on location and in Hollywood:

"In Hollywood, the entire organization aims at manufacturing amusement... In New York, you see, if you work starting from your apartment, you must indeed go to the corner of the street to buy yourself a pack of cigarettes and you see something - life is there all around, you are inside it. In California, you are in a protected atmosphere, and at the end of a year, or two or three, you have lost contact with America, and even with everything that happens... I need to work in the very setting in which my films unfold, as I have always tried to do, so that environment stimulates me."³⁹⁸

The films shot in New York, including the aforementioned *Park Row* by Samuel Fuller, a filmmaker who has been alluded to frequently because of his unusual ability oddly to compromise making films for commerce and splitting that from his occasional passion piece. He was almost atypical, and was a huge inspiration on directors like Martin Scorsese. Once Scorsese saw the landmark Cassavetes film *Shadows* he understood that there was no excuse anymore and that someone could go into the streets and make a film with a camera.³⁹⁹ Although as director Sidney Lumet remarked, "I know every once in a while somebody just takes a camera and goes off into the street, but what if you had a piece that doesn't belong in the street?" This inability to do away with the artificiality of studio moviemaking of old was, perhaps, in addition to the fading out of the old movie tycoons, the reason Hollywood took so long to come to terms with the youth counterculture.⁴⁰⁰

Directors such as Arthur Penn explicitly tried to make an American "European film." While his *Mickey One* (1965) was a disaster, it did open the door for a classic that changed the business.⁴⁰¹ Warren Beatty's subsequent project, which Jack Warner refused to make numerous times until he decided to leave the company behind and go on a retreat to the French Riviera and allowed it to be made as the power transition began, became *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967).⁴⁰² After consulting with the French New Wave director Francois Truffaut, Warren Beatty chose Arthur Penn to direct the edgy crime film. Penn strove

for a new kind of hard, vicious and theatrical violence that was shocking for its time.⁴⁰³ The film was not initially a critical success but it famously got the support of Pauline Kael, and her "acolytes" created a press campaign which galvanized interest and made it a blockbuster.⁴⁰⁴

This was the arrival of the new Hollywood, one that was briefly made up of young producers who bet on the director. The temperament had been fostered at United Artists in the late 1960s. Director John Schlesinger recalled it as a place where "everybody left their doors open, and you wandered around the passages, and if they were busy they'd wave you away, or if they weren't they'd say, "Come in."⁴⁰⁵ It was the age in which the auteur movie was fashionable and had given new interest in "studio employees with a voice, which included Stanley Kubrick or Robert Altman."⁴⁰⁶ This was coupled with the influx of a new crop of film brats who had come, mostly from film schools, and were taken under the wing of Francis Ford Coppola. This included names such as Martin Scorsese, Brian DePalma, George Lucas, Terence Malick, and to an extent, Steven Spielberg. The new era of the young, powerful director was "legitimized by its own ideology, 'auteurism.'"⁴⁰⁷

However, the new age of the director was only possible because a new age of executive gave them the space in which to work. Schlesinger recalled that "I wanted very much to work with Robert Evans, the producer" and Evans was emblematic of the new type, along with John Calley at Warner Brothers.⁴⁰⁸ As Adolph Zukor finally stepped aside, wresting control of Paramount to "Charlie" Bludhorn, Evans made his way to being head of production there at 36 years old in 1971.⁴⁰⁹ Evans recalled that the "big honchos, Harry Cohn, Louis B. Mayer, Jack Warner, were all gone now. They had been owners, not employees. Now the new game to play in Hollywood was musical chairs. No longer moguls for decades, rather kings for a day."⁴¹⁰

Evans was told by Paramount's President Stanley Jaffe to "give audiences something they haven't had for a while – stories about how it feels."⁴¹¹ To do this Evans famously "bet on the director,"

a career strategy that proved to be self-destructive but it did lead to a brief, but fairly glorious, bohemian phase in New Hollywood and a number of visionary films made it through the major studios.⁴¹² Buck Henry recalled that Evans and even Calley were guys who were “swimming in the same pool, and it gave you a sense of community. Those guys didn’t seem to be at the service of Wall Street. They seemed to be in the service of the filmmaker, and it made a huge difference.”⁴¹³

One of Evans’ most famous and successful gambles was *Chinatown* (1974). It was a Los Angeles private eye film from the New Hollywood perspective and turned an incisive, critical and glowering eye back on the history of Los Angeles that had been shrouded by Old Hollywood. In many respects, *Chinatown* became the definitive anti-noir as it was imbedded in the milieu or hotbed of noir’s birth and chose an ultra realistic and hard edged approach rather than the stylish coy quality of the earlier film noir. Director Roman Polanski spoke of his love for Hollywood detective movies of the past, but also decided in order to make the film that he would insist on absolute period authenticity in order to avoid making just another in a long line of genre films.⁴¹⁴

Screenwriter Robert Towne clearly attempted to steep the PI of yore and have him wrestle with history. The plot of *Chinatown* centers on historical Owens Valley swindle in which large parcels of arid land in the San Fernando Valley were bought up by public officials at basement rates, prior to the revelation that the city of Los Angeles was planning to build a new series of water canals which would irrigate the land and make it worth a fortune.⁴¹⁵ This is the scheme that is the backdrop for private eye J.J. Gittes’ (Jack Nicholson) journey into the lurid mystery of the Mulwray family. The casting of John Huston as the monstrous patriarch Noah Cross has not been acknowledged as an ode to Hollywood PI of years gone by, as Huston directed the famed *The Maltese Falcon*. However, it is difficult not to read this bit of intertextual casting as either a respectful link to the past or a more incisive critique about the role

old Hollywood had in covering up the sordid streak that ran through LA's corrupt past. Regardless, it was one of the more memorable tricks of casting in American film.

Chinatown masterfully succeeded in bringing the PI back down to earth and much closer to Sam Spade than Phillip Marlowe. Nicholson's Gittes is hard working and has a conscience, but is quick tempered when his profession is criticized for being little more than a digger of dirty laundry, probably out of a pang of recognition on his own part. He works divorces for a living and photographs spouses stepping out. Sam Spade may have had similar work, but he seemed all-to-prepared at times, whereas Gittes is a more realistically drawn individual who is competent and experienced but often over his head. The only wrong step in the film is a funny but inauthentic star scene for Nicholson in which he tears a page out of the record books in the Hall of Records to spite a snooty functionary.

The wearying nature of being overmatched and pummelled is increasingly visible on Nicholson. In comparison to the old 40s films, when Bogart as Marlowe was beaten badly in an alleyway in *The Big Sleep*, a nap and a stiff drink seem all that is necessary to restore him. Gittes is finally witness to the most cynical of endings to be seen in American film, and perhaps the most notably so since *The Maltese Falcon*. The revelation of corruption and moral depravity that ends *Chinatown* left Gittes beaten and mortified. It was the type of film Hammett's work had originally set out toward and it took the detective movie back to hard-boiled toughness that was light on noir's style and angst. Interestingly, this era also produced the languid, but underrated *Farewell My Lovely* (1975) with Robert Mitchum as Phillip Marlowe which was perhaps the most faithful film to Chandler's original tone.

It was the rise of cine-conscious directors who were more equipped to linger on and dramatize ennui and discontent through a more personal character focused style. The inspiration of the likes of Cassavetes and the European art films that had inspired and educated this crop of directors and given them the cinematic grammar to pace out a more distilled treatment of events. The old 1940s' films were

cut to a certain pace in the Hawksian sense of tempo and to the mogul's vision of staving off boredom, but finally the medium of storytelling had left enough room to capture what was of literary interest in the likes of Chandler and that was the rumination. Perhaps the most unusual Marlowe film is Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973). Altman set it in contemporary Los Angeles, and while the film is uneven, the early scenes where Marlowe skulks alone in his apartment and goes out in search of cat food at an all-night grocery store are perhaps the most acute, if certainly far afield, encapsulation of the spirit of what Chandler settled in on in his wandering detective in sprawling Los Angeles.

Arthur Penn's *Night Moves* (1975) was another strong example of how the distillation of Chandler had finally been harnessed and utilized by the medium of cinema. Gene Hackman's detective Harry Moseby is listless in his course through a mystery where he is tempted but holds to his own standard through a withdrawn, distant station as an observer. While these 70s' films are all interesting, there is something removed in their directness and demystification of the Chandler mantras. Ultimately, they seem almost in contrast to the ribald and gleefully iconoclastic original film noirs of the 1940s. The echo of noir had lost the fusion of the wandering LA type with the carnal urge to unseat Hollywood's illusion and the PI became an avatar for disenfranchisement of a different sort. Harry Moseby is almost an anachronism rather than a seer into the faults of his time and that makes the films seem slightly nostalgic. The crime on the docket does not really speak to a pervasive thread in American life but a sense of docility and an inability to reckon with the world. The crime cinema of the 1970s would need to achieve a synergy of the explicit theatrical violence of Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* and the high style cinematography of the Old Hollywood to achieve a forceful rebuke of the pervasive improprieties of 1970s America.

It was however at the moment of this deepened fascination with the Los Angeles detective figure as a skulking pseudo-existential wanderer that the notion of high-style shot back into the film

landscape. Amusingly, Martin Scorsese's first major feature film, *Mean Streets* (1973), was re-named such by producer Jay Cox from a line in Raymond Chandler.⁴¹⁶ For a city so completely dependent on the automobile, it is intriguing how little of Marlowe's Los Angeles philosophizing is done behind the wheel. This changed in Chandler's post-Hollywood novel, the aforementioned *The Little Sister*. In a bravura passage where an unhinged, no doubt drunk, Marlowe took a drive through Los Angeles and seethed with bitterness at any identifiable icon of American normalcy, from a working stiff suburban father stuck in traffic, to a fast food restaurant's neon signs, to anything that reminds him of Hollywood glamour as being gaudy, cheap, and phony. Chandler punctuated each segment of the rant with a refrain like that of a song as Marlowe reminded himself that "he's not human tonight."⁴¹⁷

It's this night time reverie that triggered the new nightmare urban noir of the 1970s in the guise of the seminal Scorsese masterpiece *Taxi Driver* (1976). Scorsese said that with *Mean Streets* he was aiming closer to a Warner's gangster film of the 1930s or *The Big Heat* by Fritz Lang, but with *Taxi Driver* it was a feeling that "movies are really a kind of dream-state, or like taking dope."⁴¹⁸ In this effort Scorsese with Paul Schrader's script was about to revitalize the aesthetics of the dark side with a jolt. "The overall idea was to make it like a cross between a Gothic horror and the *New York Daily News*" said Scorsese.⁴¹⁹ There was undoubtedly a touch of European art cinema and Scorsese's New York University "anti-Hollywood training" but also a studied approach to the classic noirs of the past, in particular Scorsese looked at Alfred Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* (1956).⁴²⁰ The film was peculiar as Director of Photography Michael Chapman noted the crew were "scandalized" by the idea of having Robert De Niro "get out of the car and [start] walking one way, the camera pans around the other way and meets him when he gets to where he's going... It was as if we were saying "Don't follow this guy, but look at the world he lives in."⁴²¹

Sullen Travis Bickle is a rueful and mirthless man who functions quietly as a New York city cabbie as though, either desensitised or hidden from the depravity and vice that puncture his nightly ride through the streets, in his little safe box inside the cab. Manny Farber's extraordinarily perceptive essay on the film described the opening sequence perfectly:

"No other Check cab seems to be operating at night in Manhattan except De Niro's cab, which never stalls, needs gas, or runs into the delays and quick decisions which are the cabbie's existence norm... With its nearly abstract shots of the cab slowly moving like the Jaws shark through liquidy situations, the use of lush-soft, often reddish lighting for the effect of New York's street jungle and a floating camera style that finds funny angles of perception, the movie is felled with a spooky exploratory beat."⁴²²

Unfortunately the interior is compromised by his passengers, and his ritual of cleaning out their residues is explicitly described. His bitterness mounts and his naiveté is trampled through his failed attempt to entice a young woman by taking her to an adult movie, which he mistakenly thinks is a normal setting for a date. Travis' eventual self-transformation into a grotesque vigilante is labored over and his isolation mounts through the film until it explodes in a horrible shootout as he tried to free an under aged prostitute from her saturnine pimp.

When asked directly, Paul Schrader denied that *Taxi Driver* (1976) was inspired by film noir. It seemed an accurate question given Schrader's famous essay on the subject. However, Schrader stated that film noir was a more socially motivated darkness: "you have these heroes who've got a dirty deal; they've come back from the war and their wife has gone and they don't have a job."⁴²³ This remark is a very casually applied standard of noir. It is true of certain films, including probably coincidentally the Raymond Chandler scripted *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), but his deflection of the comparison should be noted. This in spite of the fact that Martin Scorsese claimed that he spoke frequently with Schrader about Tourneur's *Out of the Past*, and the obvious fact that Travis Bickle himself was a war veteran

coming home to a “dirty deal.”⁴²⁴ Schrader himself said that there were very few script changes, and Scorsese has on multiple occasions almost disowned the film as being him “interpreting Schrader.”⁴²⁵

Apparently the violence in the film had to be toned down, literally, as the blood in the scene was desaturated to look pinkish rather than red in post-production.⁴²⁶ Still the shootout is a chilling backlash against the perverse street reality of *American Life* and in a sense takes the viewer out of a lull that has been accrued through the measured pace through the majority of the film's narrative. While the film is graphic and explicit in terms of sex, prostitution, violence and crime, it is by no means a chiefly realistic effort and Scorsese and screenwriter Paul Schrader had, in a sense, returned to the glint in Barbara Stanwyck's eyes by using the medium of film to heighten the atmosphere to an unsettling degree. This was the birth of a new stylization, less obtuse toward sex and violence on screen, but just as stylized and aggrandized theatrically. Ever perceptive, Farber again realized it at the time as he noted that “reconstituting pulp is central to both the movie’s writing and filming, always juicing up or multiplying a cliché notion so that the familiar becomes exotically humorous... a mythicized genre film with a mushroomed aestheticism which shows a new sophistication.” This was *neo-noir*.

As with *Double Indemnity* the first time around, *Taxi Driver* was the landmark and the tricky act of stitching repellent social ills with cinematic style has rarely been mastered as well. However, it is certainly something palpably worth distinguishing from the previous iteration of noir. Schrader continued this work in his follow-up films such as *Hardcore* (1979) and *American Gigolo* (1980). Perhaps his own sense of noir’s impact in his film criticism helped inspire his artistic work to revel in the smut of the time and use as much cinematic gusto as the old masters had used to tease at it under the Code. This new iteration had less of a central ambition than proper noir though and the motif of fusing the hard-boiled exposé with the nightmare voyage into the underworld that came with a tendency to fall to unbridled excess as in a film like *Cruising* (1980) directed by William Friedkin or Abel Ferrara’s *The Bad*

Lieutenant (1992). The effort became shock driven and worked to skewer audience with the limitations of falling off the straight and narrow with as depressing a collapse as possible. In essence while the early noirs were iconoclastic, the *neonoir* nightmares which followed *Taxi Driver*, were, at their worst, completely irredeemable visions of life that were exploitative and cynical. A *neonoir* as acute as *Taxi Driver* has been sporadic in its appearances and difficult to track to present. However, this was as *black* as major studio films have gone, but popular culture had another path for film noir in the following decades.

³⁴⁰ Andrew Sarris, "A Few Kind Words for the '50s," *Village Voice* September 14 1982: 47.

³⁴¹ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5* "Saved by Film Noir," *New York Times* September 26 1997.

³⁴² Raymond Durnat, "Paint It Black: The Family Tree of Film Noir," *Cinema* (1970) Reprinted in *Film Noir Reader*. ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 1996) : 38.

³⁴³ Lincoln Brackett, "The Happiest Couple in Hollywood," *Life* December 11 1944 Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 16.

³⁴⁴ Thom Andersen, "Red Hollywood," in *Literature and the Visual Arts in Contemporary Society*, Suzanne Ferguson and Barbara Groseclose, ed. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), 183 & 186.

³⁴⁵ Maurice Zolotow details how the release of the film was stalled p.129. However studio records and budget meeting transcripts demonstrate that Brackett and Wilder had enough sway at the studio to get the film made and shot on location in the first place: Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, *Lost Weekend* Paramount Production Records "Budget Meeting Transcript September 14 & 15 1944."

³⁴⁶ On *Kiss of Death* (1947) *TIME Magazine* September 15 1947 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, 430.

³⁴⁷ On Elia Kazan's *Boomerang* (1947) " " *The Nation* March 22 1947 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, 284; On Phil Karlson's *Phenix City Story* (1955) "Underground Films," *The New Republic* November 1957 in Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, 489.

³⁴⁸ " " *The New Republic* September 23 1950 in Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, 339.

³⁴⁹ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 5 of 5*, Sam Adams, "Noir, as seen in the glare of day," *Los Angeles Times* July 4 2010.

³⁵⁰ " " *The Nation* April 24 1948 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, 346-7.

³⁵¹ Lewis Gillenson, "Man of the Theater," *Harper's Bazaar* November 1951 in William Baer, ed. *Elia Kazan Interviews* (Jackson University Press of Mississippi), 4-5.

³⁵² Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) records, 1931-1990, *Panic In The Streets* Folder, Memo "Joseph L. Breen to Jason S. Joy January 3 1950."

³⁵³ "Fritz Lang" in Peter Bogdanovich, *Who The Devil Made It?*, 200.

³⁵⁴ Samuel Fuller, *A Third Face* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 280.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

³⁵⁷ "Ugly Spotting" *The New Republic* September 23 1950 in Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, 340.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

³⁵⁹ Buntin, 185-89.

³⁶⁰ "Underground Films" *The New Republic* November 1957 in Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, 495.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 489.

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- ³⁶² “Ugly Spotting” *The New Republic* October 28 1950 in *Ibid*, 229.
- ³⁶³ “Undirectable Director” *Life* September 18 1950 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, 378.
- ³⁶⁴ “Ugly Spotting” *The New Republic* September 23 1950 in Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, 339.
- ³⁶⁵ “ ” in *The Nation* May 31 1947 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, 368.
- ³⁶⁶ Hirsch, 212.
- ³⁶⁷ On Elia Kazan’s *Boomerang* (1947) “ ” *The Nation* March 22 1947 in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, 284; On Phil Karlson’s *Phenix City Story* (1955) “Underground Films,” *The New Republic* November 1957 in Manny Farber, *Farber on Film*, 489.
- ³⁶⁸ Fuller, 298.
- ³⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 309.
- ³⁷⁰ Adolph Zukor and Dale Kramer, 297-8.
- ³⁷¹ Sarris, 47; Sklar, 288-9.
- ³⁷² Sarris, 47.
- ³⁷³ Chester B. Bahn ed., *The Film Daily Yearbook 1950*, 77.
- ³⁷⁴ Schumach, 68.
- ³⁷⁵ *Ibid*.
- ³⁷⁶ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Production Code Administration Folder, “Code Revision in 1956.”; “Revision Reaction Martin Quigley.”
- ³⁷⁷ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, David Handelman, “Score One for Scorsese,” *TV Guide* September 27 1997.
- ³⁷⁸ *I, the Jury* in Mickey Spillane, *The Mike Hammer Collection Volume I* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 147.
- ³⁷⁹ George Addison, “Robert Aldrich Interview,” *Film Index* 6 1962 in Eugene L. Miller Jr. and Edwin T. Arnold ed., *Robert Aldrich Interviews* (Jackson University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 13.
- ³⁸⁰ “To Bernice Baumgarten May 14 1952” in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 233.
- ³⁸¹ Gavin Lambert, *The Slide Area Scenes of Hollywood Life* (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), 55.
- ³⁸² Alain Silver, “Interview with Robert Aldrich,” *Film Comment* November 1970 in Eugene L. Miller Jr. and Edwin T. Arnold ed., *Robert Aldrich Interviews*, 58.; Joseph McBride and Todd McCarthy, “Going for Extra Innings,” *Film Comment* January/February 1979 in Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 148.
- ³⁸³ Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, *Charles Brackett Papers*, “Letter from Brackett to Darryl F. Zanuck January 20 1954.”
- ³⁸⁴ Lawrence Grobel, “Playboy Interview John Huston,” *Playboy* September 1985 in Robert Emmet Long ed., *John Huston Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 179.
- ³⁸⁵ “Robert Aldrich” in Bogdanovich, *Who The Devil Made It?*, 792.
- ³⁸⁶ “Going for Extra Innings,” *Film Comment* January/February 1979 in Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews*, 148.
- ³⁸⁷ Sklar, 290; Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (New York Simon & Schuster, 1998), 19-21.
- ³⁸⁸ Capra, 416-418.
- ³⁸⁹ Hal Boyle, “George Stevens Interview” *Citizen-News* April 20 1953 in Paul Cronin, ed., *George Stevens Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 28.
- ³⁹⁰ Sklar, 296.
- ³⁹¹ *Ibid*, 300-1.
- ³⁹² Biskind, 16.
- ³⁹³ *Ibid*.
- ³⁹⁴ Schrader, 30.
- ³⁹⁵ Biskind, 24.
- ³⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 15.
- ³⁹⁷ Sklar, 324-5.
- ³⁹⁸ Michel Delahaye, “Elia Kazan Interview,” *Cahiers du Cinéma* March 1967 in William Baer, ed. Elia Kazan, 98-99.

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- ³⁹⁹ Anthony DeCurtis "What the Streets Mean" *South Atlantic Quarterly* Spring 1992 in Peter Brunette ed., *Martin Scorsese Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 161.
- ⁴⁰⁰ "Sidney Lumet" in Bogdanovich, *Who The Devil Made It?*, 801.
- ⁴⁰¹ Biskind, 28-29
- ⁴⁰² Ibid, 28-29, 36.
- ⁴⁰³ "The American Film Institute Seminar With Arthur Penn," October 7 1970 in Michael Chaiken and Paul Cronin, ed., *Arthur Penn Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 42-43.
- ⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, 40.
- ⁴⁰⁵ Ian Buruma, *Conversations with John Schlesinger* (New York: Random House, 2006), 116.
- ⁴⁰⁶ Sklar, 323.
- ⁴⁰⁷ Biskind, 16.
- ⁴⁰⁸ Buruma, 136.
- ⁴⁰⁹ Biskind, 146.
- ⁴¹⁰ Robert Evans, *The Kid Stays In The Picture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 173-74.
- ⁴¹¹ Evans, 176-77.
- ⁴¹² Ibid; Biskind, 148.
- ⁴¹³ Biskind, 147.
- ⁴¹⁴ "Incest Is Interesting," *Der Spiegel* December 16 1974 in Paul Cronin Ed. *Interviews With Roman Polanski* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 58.
- ⁴¹⁵ McWilliams, 188-191.
- ⁴¹⁶ Biskind, 241.
- ⁴¹⁷ "The Little Sister" in Chandler, *Later Novels and Other Writings*, 269-270.
- ⁴¹⁸ Scorsese, 45 & 54.
- ⁴¹⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴²⁰ Biskind, 227; Scorsese, 60.
- ⁴²¹ Biskind, 299.
- ⁴²² "The Power and the Gory," in Manny Farber (with Patricia Patterson), *Farber on Film*, 753.
- ⁴²³ Schrader, 126.
- ⁴²⁴ Anthony DeCurtis, *What The Streets Mean*, *South Atlantic Quarterly* Spring 1992 in Peter Brunette, ed. *Martin Scorsese Interviews*, 183.
- ⁴²⁵ Ibid, 182.
- ⁴²⁶ Biskind, 306.

Epilogue

In the intervening years between the advent of the “nightmare” neo-noir style and the present, film noir as a cultural item reached a tipping point. It went from a marginalized cult of appreciators and cinephiles to a full-blown pop culture fad. Ironists such as the Coen Brothers and, of course, Quentin Tarantino, in addition to stray efforts such as British director Stephen Frears’ *The Grifters* (1990), led to a stylized road-show and hip burst of gleefully coy films in terms of form in the early 1990s. The noir thriller became a way for directors such as John Dahl to make films about adults and have free reign over style while creating meaty roles for actors. In the 1990s the crime thriller became a pop niche for thoughtful films on a modest budget that were reliably successful in a world increasingly run by blockbuster “tentpoles.”

It was in 1999 that the American Cinematheque had its first film noir dedicated festival. This has become a regular annual event. There is even a Film Noir Foundation, chaired by Eddie Muller, author of *Dark City*, which writes on noir and advocates for film preservation.⁴²⁷ Martin Scorsese even hosted a series on film noir for American Movie Classics on television in 1997.⁴²⁸ Especially in Los Angeles, where, as *L.A. Weekly* Steve Mikulan stated, there was an audience backlash brewing against noir because of “an avalanche of literary and film revivalism.”⁴²⁹ As the UCLA Student newspaper framed the question following a noir screening festival of their own: “It will be the duty of future film historians, social critics, or perhaps psychologists to explain why film noir has enjoyed such a resurgence in the 1990s. Could it be this decade returns to paranoia, a maturation of the lust for sex and violence from the action movie level of the 1980s? Or is it just a random piece of retro fad?”⁴³⁰

Explanations were ready on the tongues of the media. Some claimed that the revival in noir interest had something to do with “nostalgia.” It was a yearning for a “pre-Microsoft” or “pre-Lewinsky” society in the minds of people tired of media saturation.⁴³¹ At this same point in 1997 *Newsweek* ran an

article noting that Pottery Barn had begun selling noir-themed household items such as a rotary phone and that Carly Simon released an album with simply “Noir” as a title. The middle 1990s saw a small but noticeable co-option of the noir mystic into a marketing scheme to try to harness the notion of a more resilient and hard time.⁴³² Terrence Rafferty noted in *GQ magazine* that "people of my generation tend to see these films as powerful images of our parent America's by gone accoutrement." In the wake of this revivalism, and in the re-appropriation of noir style by the generation's filmmakers dressing their characters in retro clothes, Rafferty noted they had inadvertently created "fashion icons."⁴³³

Magazines had a fashion shoots with the now elder femme fatales of the forties shot in smoke and shadow and an article called "Film noir fashion tips" appeared.⁴³⁴ It had become a stylish bit of American folkloric chic. It was here that film noir's exact parameters were drawn for posterity, and it was here that noir became for all intents and purposes a *genre* moving forward. In countless magazine articles, a brief paragraph that repeats the old tropes about film noir's origins serves to evoke an impression in the popular imagination even if it has by now strayed fairly far from the facts of the matter. And, indeed, that modern brand of style and mystic has made the new genre of *noir* as much an American staple as the Western. Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles may be long gone, but over time that Los Angeles has become a bit a landmark in the national imagination and serves is as evocative as the lawless streets of an old frontier town where two gunslingers will meet at noon to draw six shooters as the saloon doors flap open and shut rhythmically in the background.

Richard Rayner made an interesting observation in *The Los Angeles Times*:

"Hard-boiled crime fiction didn't spring fully formed from the hammering typewriters of... Joseph Shaw's *Black Mask* gang. It emerged too from the gaudy L.A. journalism of an earlier era. Through the 1920s a host of scandal sheets view with *The Times*, William Randolph Hearst' gleefully sensationalist *Examiner* and other morning and evening papers to report on a boosted city that that was bursting apart at the seams. Tabloid culture was born... Yes, it's an aesthetic of

corruption - although perceived through noir's lens, even the worst information can seem seductive, as well."⁴³⁵

In 2010, John Buntin's book *L.A. Noir* furthered this trend in reportage about Los Angeles' roots and based its premise on newspaper clippings in effect expanding the myth of the crime city. It relied heavily on the dynamic of the police vs. gangsters and the amoral, colourful city populated by show business glamour and research based chiefly around the newspaper writing of the 1920s and 30s to build up the legend even further rather than deconstruct it. It is not that this time and place did not exist, but that the lens for recollecting it historically has all the style of the film and literature in which it is steeped. Los Angeles in the first half of the twentieth century seems to have given new weight to the maxim from John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1960), in the opinion of Peter Bogdanovich the last great Old Hollywood film, that "when truth becomes legend, print the legend."⁴³⁶

And the legend is an attractive one. In fact in the hands of a writer such as James Ellroy 'noir' can be found as a separate subsection in the crime area of many book stores. There is some evidence of the old style in Ellroy's writing, such as *The Big Nowhere*, but it is also modish and fable like in its distance from its roots.⁴³⁷ There was something more fascinating in the original blast of thirties noir that came out of an actual frustration by marginalized writers whom "Hollywood contemptuously condemned... for the most part, to ill-paid B picture work." Now when that world is put into a film, as when Ellroy's *L.A. Confidential* was in 1997, it is a period piece, and while the film itself is very well made, it has essentially become a fantasy based upon a cheeky and exaggerated version of America's own past. By the middle 1990s the reputations of the pulp novelists had been raised to the point where The Library of America had been releasing "70 dollar" crime fiction anthologies of stories that had cost "2 cents" on their original publication.⁴³⁸

It has been a lucrative afterlife for the hard-boiled crime writers who have now been canonized for writing an originally American voice into the literary landscape of the 20th century. To turn a phrase

in the style in question, it has been a heady legacy for setting out to be as good at being bad as Hollywood was bad at being good. One critic thought Kim Basinger's *femme fatale* in *L.A. Confidential* (1997) gave a "mannequin" like performance, which spoke to an image of a now well known archetype in pop culture.⁴³⁹ In a sense, the subversive glint in Phyllis Dietrichson's eye in *Double Indemnity* can be paid an homage and replicated now, but the loss of its meaning has deadened the impact. In 2011 Rockstar Games released a video game entitled *L.A. Noire*, which featured a virtual interactive map of Los Angeles. The player is a police officer with a constant choice between honest and corrupt plot threads to follow. There will soon be the release of a feature film entitled *Gangster Squad* (2013) based on the Los Angeles Police Department's effort to bring down racketeer Mickey Cohen, much of which is covered as the central thread in Buntin's book. It seems that another entry is being placed into a genre that has come to serve today's Hollywood well, and why not, now that the Hollywood that fermented the frustration that created the *noir* feeling is now long gone.

⁴²⁷ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 2 of 5*, Ted Shaffrey, "L.A. where the sun never shines" *Los Angeles Times* October 27 2000.

⁴²⁸ Handelman, "Score One For Scorsese."

⁴²⁹ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, Steve Mikulan, " " *L.A. Weekly*, September 19 1997

⁴³⁰ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, Brandon Wilson, " " *UCLA Daily Bruin* May 9 1997.

⁴³¹ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, Stephen Holden, "Neo-noir's a Fashion That Fits Only a Few," *New York Times* March 8 1998.

⁴³² Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, David Ansen, "The Neo-Noir '90s," *Newsweek* October 27 1997.

⁴³³ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, Terrence Rafferty, "Culture Clash," *GQ Magazine*, October 1997: 87.

⁴³⁴ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, Barbara De Witt, "The Lady Is A Vamp," *The Outlook*, September 4 1997.

⁴³⁵ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 4 of 5*, Richard Rayner, "This town is rated noir" *Los Angeles Times* December 6 2006.

⁴³⁶ Biskind, 40.

⁴³⁷ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 3 of 5*, Ian Johns, "Watching brief... Film noir," *The Times of London* October 25 2001.

⁴³⁸ Terrence Rafferty, "Culture Clash," *GQ Magazine*, 87.

⁴³⁹ Margaret Herrick Library, *Film Noir Clipping File 1 of 5*, Margo Jefferson, "Film (and Song) Noir When Shadows Are Lighter" *New York Times* October 6 1997.

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