

DARK CINEMA

***American Film Noir in Cultural
Perspective***

JON TUSKA

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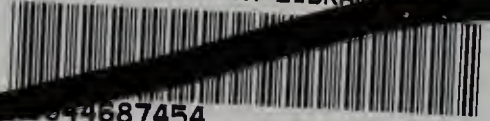
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DARK CINEMA

American *Film Noir* in Cultural Perspective

JON TUSKA

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This one is for
DUSTY

It could well even be a basic condition of existence that complete knowledge brings one to ruin—so that the fortitude of one's spirit might be measured by how much of the "truth" can be endured, and more significantly, to what degree one *might deem it necessary* to dilute it, veil it, sweeten, dampen, even falsify it.

—Nietzsche, BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

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Author's Note

Quotations from foreign languages, unless they be extremely brief, appear in translation only, with the title of the source given in both the original and in translation. The exception to this is reference to classical Greek and Roman plays in which case they are called by the titles by which they are traditionally known in English. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, have been made by the author and can be found adjacent to the quotation or in the footnotes.

I am a firm believer in dating. Accordingly, since a reader may not wish to refer continually to the notes, the first time a book or periodical is cited, it is followed in the case of a book by the year of publication of the edition being quoted or the original edition, whichever proved more convenient; in the case of a periodical with the month and year of publication and with the year of publication in the instance of an essay. More complete information can be found by referring to the appropriate footnote, and I have tried to use generally those editions most likely to be accessible to an interested reader. The only exceptions to footnoting have been brief Latin passages where the citation has been permitted to stand alone. Once a book, periodical, or essay is cited in the text, it will not be dated again. The exception to this is the title of a film the date of which may be relevant in a number of different contexts and, therefore, it may be dated more than once within the text.

Italics in all quotations, unless otherwise stated, are those to be found in the original.

Introduction

*Nous sommes foutus. Oui. Comme toujours. Oui. C'est dommage. Oui.*¹

—Ernest Hemingway

I

DARK CINEMA is different from my other books of cinema history and criticism insofar as it takes a cultural approach to the subject of *film noir*. The manner must fit the matter. The entertainment career of Mae West was such that I could treat of it in a single book along strictly categorical and chronological lines. The career studies of film directors which I wrote for the three-volume Close-Up on the Cinema series lent themselves easily to treatment in the form of the extended essay. The history of the detective film and the history of Mascot Pictures were subjects that could be dealt with adequately in terms of traditional linear historical narrative. The subject of the Western film alone was a genre too expansive for a one-book treatment, and hence I divided it into two parts: one volume, THE FILMING OF THE WEST (1976), dealing with the production history and personnel of Western films and a second volume currently in progress, THE AMERICAN WEST IN FILM, devoted to criticism of Western films.

DARK CINEMA is an outgrowth and extension of the chapter on *film noir* in my book THE DETECTIVE IN HOLLYWOOD (1978), and the point was already made there that *film noir* is both a screen style, about which I shall have something more to say presently, and a perspective on human existence and society which I propose to treat first. "All that an honest and forthright philosophy can undertake," William Troy wrote in "Thoughts on Tragedy," an essay contained in WILLIAM TROY: SELECTED ESSAYS (1967), "is to give the order and cogency of an intellectual construction to what must originally be

a movement not only of the intellect but of the whole being toward affirmation or negation.”² I tend to view a motion picture as an ensemble and, as a series of such ensembles, *films noirs* in terms of their thematic contents do put forward a forthright, if not always honest, philosophy. *Films noirs* as a perspective on life are in fact a movement toward negation the cultural origins of which can be traced all the way back to Greek and Roman tragedy; and, according to my reckoning, at least one motion picture version of Shakespeare’s *MACBETH*, that produced and directed by Orson Welles for Republic Pictures in 1948, can be viewed legitimately as part of the *film noir* canon.

I would be needlessly hedging if I did not admit that in everything written in English and French about *film noir* there is a wide divergence of opinion as to what exactly constitutes *film noir*, what is really *film gris*, and what is neither. For Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward in their book, *FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN FILM STYLE* (1979), “*film noir* could be termed a group movement like its contemporary, Italian Neo-Realism, or its antecedent, German Expressionism. . . . Irrefutably, *film noir* does recruit the ethical and philosophical values of the culture as freely as it recruits visual conventions, iconic notations, or character types from other extrinsic sources. The results of such a process are neither aesthetically invalid nor structurally amorphous. Such a process does, however, enrich and dislocate the *noir* cycle as a phenomenon and does so in a way that resists facile explication.”³

I do not propose to attempt a “facile explication,” or even an easy answer; but for my purpose in the present book *film noir* is a mood, a tone, a play of shadows and light, and beyond all of these a visual consideration that in its narrative structures embodies a world-view. “C’est avec de la nuit,” Eugene Fromentin, the French art critic, said of Rembrandt, “qu’il a fait le jour” [By means of the night he has created the light of day].⁴ In *film noir*, it is not so much an effort to see the light of day by means of the darkness of night, but instead a notion Nietzsche expressed in what his recent German editor, Karl Schlechta, termed “From the Posthumous Legacy of the ‘Eighties’” comes nearest the mark: “The principal error of psychologists [is that] they take the indistinct representation to be an inferior kind to that representation toward which the light is directed: however, what has been alienated from our consciousness, and therefore what has *become dark*, can nevertheless be perfectly clear. Becoming dark is a matter of conscious perspective.”⁵ *Film noir* is in my opinion a darkling vision of the world, a view from the underside, born of fundamental disillusionment perhaps, but also invariably the result, no matter how timid, of a confrontation with nihilism.

“What I would assert” R. J. Hollingdale wrote in *THOMAS MANN: A CRITICAL STUDY* (1971), “is that Mann’s novels and stories depict the European continent declining into this condition of nihilistic loss of values; and that what appears to be his conception of the *cause* of this decline is not only among the most prominent and characteristic of his themes but also identical with Nietzsche’s conception of its cause.”⁶ I would transpose these words a bit

and say of *film noir* that the cause of the nihilistic loss of values which Nietzsche, and after him Thomas Mann, perceived as at work in Europe was also at work in the United States and that *film noir* is an American attempt to engage this phenomenon.

Nietzsche, as Dostoyevsky, knew well the cause of nihilism and, although on the surface in many ways contradictory, their respective works were intended to be an antidote for nihilism. "Othello was not jealous," Alexander Pushkin once wrote; "he was trusting." "This remark in itself attests to that great poet's uncanny insight," Dostoyevsky wrote in *THE BROTHERS KAR-AMAZOV* (1880) as Mitya Karamazov recalls Pushkin. "Othello's heart was broken and his whole understanding of the world was dimmed because *his ideal had been shattered*." ⁷

For Nietzsche, "the untenability of one interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the suspicion that *all* interpretations of the world are false." ⁸ This remark, too, is from Nietzsche's "posthumous legacy," but he had already anticipated it in *DIE GÖTZEN-DÄMMERUNG* [*THE TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS*] (1888) when he scorned the English for their naive presumption that the tenets of Christian morality could survive the loss of belief in the Christian God. "Christianity is a system," Nietzsche wrote, "a consistently thought out and *complete* view of things. If a fundamental notion as the belief in God is broken off from it, the whole is shattered into pieces: of necessity one loses his grasp on everything. Christianity assumes that man knows nothing—is able to know nothing—of what is good for him, what evil; he believes in God who alone knows. Christian morality is a commandment; its origin is transcendent; it is beyond criticism, beyond even the right to criticize; it has truth insofar as God is truth—it stands or falls with the belief in God. —If as the English believe, that they know 'intuitively' what is good and evil, if consequently they believe that it is not necessary to have Christianity as a guarantee of morality, that this morality is merely a *consequence* of the tradition of Christian value-judgments and an expression of the *strength* and *depth* of this tradition: so that the origin of English morality has been forgotten, so that the very conditionality of its right to exist can no longer be felt. For the English morality is still no problem. . . . " ⁹ But in the Twentieth century, as Nietzsche foresaw, when the keystone of the Christian tradition has been shattered and with it the whole Christian system of moral values, when no tradition, however ingrained, has been able to cope properly with social cataclysms, then, even for the English, and no less for the Americans, as revealed in so many *films noirs*: morality *is* a problem. "And to say again at the conclusion what I said at the beginning," Nietzsche wrote in *ZUR GENEALOGIE DER MORAL* [*TOWARD A GENEALOGY OF MORALS*] (1887), "invariably man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will." ¹⁰

Many Americans felt after the last great war much as Raskolnikov feels in Dostoyevsky's *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* (1866). Philip Rahv in an essay on this novel in *DOSTOYEVSKY: A COLLECTION OF CRITICAL ESSAYS*

(1962) observed how Dostoyevsky succeeded in entangling Raskolnikov “in what is in truth a comedy of mistaken identity; an obvious victim of the historical process—a small man in search of personal security and happiness—laughably taking himself for its hero. In this sense he is no better than a clown, and he does indeed laugh at himself from time to time.”¹¹ Only for many Americans, with what meagre tradition they had intimately bound up with Christianity, who had always thought themselves free and masters of their own destiny, to awake suddenly and find themselves locked in by a social and, above all, an economic and political system seemingly of their own creation (for so they had been taught) and definitely outside their control, there was little about which to laugh. To go back might mean embracing evangelical fundamentalism; to stand still might mean escape into luxury, drugs, and pleasure. To be aware. . . . This last was without a real precedent in popular American tradition, anomalies such as Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe to one side; for so long a time popular American tradition had gone by another name which even though it be hollow and threadbare ambitious politicians still evoke in reverence: the American dream.

What Nietzsche wrote about all interpretations of the world coming to seem false if one is proven false certainly was borne out by the commercial fantasies and wish-fulfillments propounded by Hollywood prior to the advent of *film noir*. The profound difference between the two film styles is rather aptly symbolized by a little parable Sam Spade tells Brigid O’Shaughnessy in Dashiell Hammett’s *THE MALTESE FALCON* (1930). When Spade was an operative for a detective agency, a woman retained the agency to find her husband who some five or six years before had disappeared. She believed she had seen him in Spokane and wanted him traced. Spade was assigned to the case. He found the husband all right, a man named Flitcraft. The man confessed to Spade why he had left his wife. He had been a model husband, a good father, a provider, a hard worker. Then one day he was walking down a street and a beam came within inches of smashing the life out of him. It knocked a piece of cement out of the sidewalk which flew up and hit him on the cheek, drawing blood. The man ran away. Now he had re-established himself. He was operating a successful auto dealership. He was remarried. Flitcraft, as most people, was a creature of habit. When the tenuous quality of existence penetrated into his consciousness, he became painfully aware of the caprice by which we all live and die, what Quintus Curtius meant when he wrote “*contra Fortunam non satis cauta*” [in Fortune’s shadow no one stands secure]. Flitcraft fled from the suspicion that perhaps nothing ultimately means anything. But, after acting in accord with the irrational and purposeless nature of life for a couple of years, Flitcraft’s mind slowly deadened the shock of awareness. He crept again into his comfortable pattern. “Only the most courageous amongst us has, “Nietzsche admonished in *DIE GÖTZENDÄMMERUNG*, “the rare courage to admit what he really *knows*. . . .”¹²

If life *is* caprice, if the basis of human existence is irrational and logic a

human projection, if order is an illusion, men can still become so busy getting and spending that they can ignore reality, *what they really know*. Anxiety can be hidden in a quest for wealth, material possessions, security, or power. C. G. Jung, whose psychological theories in many ways might be viewed as a response to a pervasive nihilism, found that even theology itself is an elaborate structure erected to remove safely our fearful and easily unbalanced psyches from the immediacy of religious, which is to say irrational and frightening, experiences. “Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones,” Nietzsche observed in his “posthumous legacy,” “but by extreme positions, only *reversed*. Thus belief in the absolute immorality of Nature, in lack of purpose and meaninglessness, is the *affect* psychologically necessary once belief in God and an essentially moral order is no longer supportable.”¹³ In the Twentieth century, religious faith has been replaced by political fanaticism. Both the Soviet Union and the United States, nations in which Christianity was once the predominant moral force, have sought to escape nihilism through an obsessive materialism, regarding material well-being as a viable substitute for a divine order of things; and both nations seem prepared to end all life on this planet rather than surrender their political systems: can there be any more eloquent illustration of nihilism?

Hammett initially championed distrust over blind faith, skepticism over belief, cynicism over hope. Yet it is the truly unique individual who can sustain such a mental posture and go on as confidently as the man who relies on all manner of comforting fantasies to get him through. In the end, Hammett could not do it; he turned to Marxism for a “facile explication.”

In NEUE STUDIEN [NEW STUDIES] (1948) Thomas Mann wrote of Nietzsche that he was “a soul overburdened and weighed down, calling only to know, and not really born for knowledge and, as Hamlet, he was shattered by it. . . .”¹⁴ “Nietzsche, as a sacrificial victim, threw himself into the abyss of the times,” Karl Schlechta remarked in his afterword to his three-volume German edition of Nietzsche’s collected works. “The abyss closed; henceforth we can pass over it.”¹⁵ Reassuring words! But how true are they? The *film noir* style in American filmmaking has gone farthest among American films in recreating in the collective consciousness of the audience the emotional traumata and frightful sensations human beings undergo when they *really* know.

Ludwig Binswanger, whose uncle had cared for Nietzsche at the Jena Clinic after Nietzsche’s mental collapse—perhaps better described in German as *eine Umnachtung*, being enveloped by the darkness of the night—and who had been a student of both Freud and Jung, wrote to me shortly before his own death. He felt that psychoanalysis may have taken a misdirection in its effort to be therapeutically functional. As one of the founders of *Daseinsanalyse* [existential analysis], he summarized his position in a series of questions: What can the analyst do with a life that has been wasted, with a psyche that lives in a body shot up in war, imprisoned in a concentration camp, brainwashed, a psyche that cannot deal competently with deception, exploitation, frustration, and failure?

And what of impotence, old age, physical exhaustion, death? What is the therapy for these? If not religion, if not materialism, if not hard work so as to pay taxes, tithes, and interest so others need not work quite so hard: what then?

Appraising Sam Spade's moral code William Ruehlmann in his book, *SAINT WITH A GUN* (1974), commented that "Hammett's book is not a novel in praise of that code; it is an examination of its consequences for a man who has nothing else."¹⁶ But for the fact that John Huston was forced to make a traditional hero of Sam Spade, *film noir* might have received an early thrust from his make of *THE MALTESE FALCON* (Warner's, 1941). The Bogart persona, however, to which Huston contributed so much in terms of its projection on the screen in the films he directed with Bogart in the 'Forties and 'Fifties, prevented him from concentrating on the culpability of *all* the characters, the detective included. The American cinema still had its patriotic films, its family films, its Westerns with super heroes, its musicals with happy endings, its soap-opera melodramas, and its serials with master criminals dispatched in the final episode. But in certain crime films, those which eschewed being part of a series or part of the convention of a "master" detective or honest agent of a benevolent government fighting organized subversion of many kinds, if there was a detective or agent at all a new spirit was infused into the story, an unsettling, critical, pervasive, pessimistic representation of life, a negation of values that otherwise would have been regarded as commercially unfeasible.

"Dashiell Hammett's dialogues," André Gide remarked in his *IMAGINARY INTERVIEWS* (1944) translated by Malcolm Cowley, "in which every character is trying to deceive all the others and in which the truth slowly becomes visible through a haze of deception, can be compared only with the best in Hemingway."¹⁷ What Gide did not say, but what he could have added, is that the belief in truth is above all a *moral* premise. Faith in the ability to perceive the truth, even if only finally and only after great difficulty, is one moral premise *film noir* rarely abandons. "Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night," the late George Raft once described to me a nocturnal attack of emphysema, "and I am gasping for breath. I turn on the respirator and I breathe, as deeply as I can. I do that for a half hour, maybe an hour. I can breathe a little better then. But I can't get back to sleep." William Barrett in his book on existentialism, *IRRATIONAL MAN* (1962), observed that "the American has not yet assimilated the disappearance of his own geographical frontier, his spiritual horizon is still the limitless play of human possibilities, and as yet he has not lived through the crucial experience of human finitude."¹⁸ The classical conception of moderation voiced by Horace—"est modus in rebus, sunt certi denique fines" [there is a measure in things, there are certain definite limits]—is an almost completely alien notion to the American world-view.

All of these themes come together in *film noir*. It is a gasping for breath, a struggle to hang onto life. It is an essay in personal martyrdom, much in the sense of the highly personal speculations of Friedrich Nietzsche or Søren Kierkegaard, although their names would perhaps not be familiar to most people.

viewing these films. It is a depiction of the American *mise-en-scène* that tries to arrive at some statement of truth despite the haze of deception. At times, *film noir* almost dares a revaluation of all values, although, by the fade, it usually proves lacking in ultimate courage: the courage, not from conviction, but to attack *all* convictions. Its narrative structure is frequently *de temps perdu*, whether narrated by a character in the story to tell the viewer just how he got into his predicament, or a reconstruction of a man's past through one kind of investigation or another. Yet, before *film noir* could come to the screen, American literature itself had to undergo the atmosphere of distrust which informed the fiction of what I call the BLACK MASK school and which can be found in what I define below as the *roman noir*: the recognition that the real story is not the story everyone is telling and that the real story, when it does come to light, is not only unpleasant, it is often *worse* than anyone suspected it might be. This was, after all, the great achievement in Dostoyevsky's CRIME AND PUNISHMENT where the real story is Raskolnikov's futile efforts to find a motive for his crime. There is a corpse; there must be, there should be, a reason, albeit only a human reason, for that corpse to exist. "Never quite certain as to what it was exactly that induced him to commit murder," Philip Rahv wrote in the essay cited above, "he [Raskolnikov] must continually spy on himself in a desperate effort to penetrate to his own psychology and attain the self-knowledge he needs if he is to assume responsibility for his absurd and hideous act. And this idea of him as a criminal in search of his own motive is precisely what is so new and original in the figure of Raskolnikov."¹⁹ Through the dark visions of *film noir*, Americans shared Raymond Chandler's consciousness that looming in the streets are forces darker than the night; but—and this came to be the essential difference between Chandler's fiction and true *film noir*—there is no Chandleresque knight to brave the dark evils of the world.

II

The term *film noir* was coined in 1946 by Nino Frank, a *cinéaste* who derived it from Marcel Duhamel's SÉRIE NOIRE books which are mentioned in the chapter on the *roman noir*. As a film style it commenced in earnest in three films discussed in the chapter on the *noir* canon; Boris Ingster's STRANGER ON THE THIRD FLOOR (RKO, 1940), Orson Welles' CITIZEN KANE (RKO, 1941), and H. Bruce Humberstone's I WAKE UP SCREAMING (20th-Fox, 1941). However, while Welles' CITIZEN KANE was one of the founding pictures, it was not until THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI (Columbia, 1948) that Welles produced what might well be taken as a prototype of the style.

Film noir was not without its forerunners in the 'Twenties and 'Thirties, and I have dealt with these antecedent trends in two chapters, one of which focuses on German Expressionist cinema and one on the American cinema between the wars. Notwithstanding, as in the chapters which pertain to literary antecedents, the emphasis is always on the subject only in terms of its relationship to *film*

noir; in the literary chapters this tends often to be a thematic relationship, in the cinematic chapters a stylistic relationship. Conversely, both thematic and stylistic elements in numerous more recent films came about primarily as a result of *film noir*. Even while the glib fantasies of American television culture, so pervasive today, were but beginning, *films noirs* constituted an abrupt contrast; and some idea of the influence of the *film noir* style on more recent films can be had by glancing at the titles in the Filmography made following the principal years of the *film noir*, 1940–1959.

This book treats *film noir* in “cultural perspective.” I have found too often in reading the books by film critics that their cultural awareness has been confined to watching films and passing opinions on them. For my part I believe that the cinema historian cannot afford to be so facile or narrow in approaching a complex subject. One cannot always confine one’s sense of the meaning of a film to only the images on celluloid, as if there existed no larger macrocosm. To treat properly of *film noir*, I have found it necessary to combine references to literary antecedents with subsequent transformations into film, philosophical concerns with screen events, and occasionally even the comments of players or directors on certain of the characters in a *film noir*. The sole criterion of the cultural historian, according to Jacques Barzun in his essay, “Cultural History: A Synthesis,” is “the intelligibility of the whole, the relevance of the part. . . . This means that the cultural historian selects his material not by fixed rule but by the *esprit de finesse* that Pascal speaks of, the gift, namely, of seeing a quantity of fine points in a given relation without ever being able to demonstrate it. The historian in general can show, not prove; persuade, not convince; and the cultural historian more than any other occupies that characteristic position.”²⁰

In conversation one day with the late Howard Hawks, he brought up the story he was fond of telling about *THE BIG SLEEP* (Warner’s, 1946). While Hawks was filming the sequence where Owen’s car is pulled out of the water on Warner’s tank soundstage, Humphrey Bogart asked him who had killed Owen. After all, if Bogart was playing the detective and the point-of-view character, he really ought to know who had done it. Hawks did not know, but he said he would ask William Faulkner who had worked on the screenplay. Faulkner said he did not know. So Hawks wired Raymond Chandler who had written the novel and who was living in La Jolla, California. Chandler wired back, somewhat facetiously, that the butler had done it. It did not matter, of course, because *film noir* was changing the emphasis. One was more concerned, as is Raskolnikov, with *why* a crime has been committed, why there is a corpse, rather than with who committed the crime. If nothing else makes *film noir* unique, this concentration of teleology does.

Having spent almost fifteen years writing about various aspects of film I have learned that there is usually one way that is better than others to approach a particular subject. In preparing my critique of the Western film, *THE AMERICAN WEST IN FILM*, I found almost at once that of necessity I would have to adopt historical reality as my standard for evaluation and, in turn, must con-

concentrate on narrative structures and plot analyses to get beyond all the rationalizations of other critics who have wanted to preserve the fantasy content of Westerns from a sense of cherished nostalgia. In approaching *film noir*, I found I must resort to a similar, albeit somewhat different, set of multiple perspectives: to view *film noir* above all in terms of its themes. From that point of view, then, it becomes possible to see essential cultural unities with certain literary and cinematic works, to discern how men and women have been treated in this genre, to assess the individual contributions of directors, and, finally, to provide the reader with the critical tools necessary to perceive what it is about American *film noir* that has made it so unique in the history of the American cinema generally and what elements have indeed passed into American filmmaking as it continues to be practiced. Most of all I have long had the conviction that film, as an art form, ought not really be separated totally from world culture and confined only to itself, as if non-cinematic factors and influences were somehow irrelevant to what has appeared on the screen. In cinema history, we find often that personal events in the lives of players, screenwriters, directors, producers had inevitable, even drastic, effects on the final product, no less than marketing strategies, machinations in studio administration, and economic considerations of all kinds. Film history, to my mind, cannot be written without taking such factors into account; no less can one neglect, when writing about the thematic and narrative aspects of a film style or genre, to take into account a number of very germane cultural considerations.

I shall also mention—since, if I do not, some critic will—that some of the fictions and some of the films I have analyzed in this book are detective stories in which, in discussing the plot, I have had to reveal the identity of the culprit. Since almost the entire *raison d'être* of many detective stories is to learn who committed a crime, there are some who object to this critical practice. Yet, as in the case of *THE DETECTIVE IN HOLLYWOOD* where I dealt specifically with detective fiction and detective films, I do not believe anything very intelligent can be said about a plot when its *raison d'être* is systematically ignored or declared off limits. Fortunately, however, for those readers with such reservations the character of *films noirs* and what I define as the *roman noir* is such that the identity of the murderer is often known well beforehand; indeed, in several instances it is the commission of the crime that is the subject and not the detection of its perpetrator.

My purpose, therefore, in the first two parts of this book is to set forth what I consider the essential dramatic and literary themes in tragedy and hard-boiled fiction which were adopted, adapted, or modified in creating the attitude toward fate and the mode of verbal expression characteristic of *film noir* and the antecedents of the lighting and visual techniques associated with the filming of *films noirs*. I have had to concentrate on the specific cultural milieux and spiritual backgrounds of these various periods in order to demonstrate later what was taken over by *film noir*, what was altered, and what in *film noir* is distinctly different. Thus, the first two parts of this book comprise what I mean in its title

by “in cultural perspective” and their relevance will become increasingly apparent when *film noir* itself becomes the exclusive focus of attention. I have chosen, however, for the greater part authors whose works either influenced *films noirs*, or on whose works notable *films noirs* were based, or films which anticipated the style or thematic preoccupation of *films noirs*.

It has not been my purpose to supply a reference guide to every *film noir* that has been made, although most of the *films noirs* that are important are discussed and a comprehensive listing of all *films noirs* is to be found in the Filmography. A reader interested in plot synopses and/or cast and credit information for *films noirs* is referred to both Robert Ottoson’s book and that edited by Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward, information about which can be found in the Bibliography. I am concerned rather with the contents, cultural background and significance, and social and psychological ramifications, as well as the visual style and narrative plot structures of *films noirs*. To have attempted more in an encyclopedic fashion would have duplicated work already done and meant a book twice as long as this one is already.

PART I

LITERARY ANTECEDENTS

In literature, as in life, every son has a father, whom certainly he does not always know, or whom he might even disavow.

—Heinrich Heine,
in introductory remarks
concerning his
DER DOKTOR FAUST

1

Tragedy

THE TRAGIC VISION

A few general remarks seem to be in order. I should like to distinguish between the tragic dramas of Antiquity and Elizabethan England and what literary critics, particularly in the United States, refer to as the “tragic vision.” The idea of tragedy as it was understood and practiced by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca, and Shakespeare is related thematically to what perhaps is meant by the idea of a “tragic vision,” but it is scarcely synonymous with it.

“To the Athenian,” H.D.F. Kitto pointed out in *THE GREEKS* (1951), “the responsibility of taking his own decisions, carrying them out, and accepting the consequences, was a necessary part of the life of a free man. This is one reason why the popular art of Athens was the tragedy of Aeschylus and Sophocles and the comedy of Aristophanes, while ours is the cinema. The Athenian was accustomed to deal with things of importance: an art therefore which did not handle themes of importance would have seemed to him to be childish.”¹

The word *tragoidia*, which means “goat-song,” was derived from *tragos*, which means goat, but its exact definition remains in dispute. It may have come about because the Chorus wore goatskins or, indeed, dressed as goats; or it could be that a goat was sacrificed, or that a goat was the prize. Whatever was the case, it remains clear, in William Troy’s words in his essay, “Thoughts on Tragedy,” “that when Aristotle in the *POETICS* spoke of *mimesis* it is not imitation of life directly but of life given a pattern of meaning in the myth.”² This is the essence of the distinction Aristotle made between history and poetry, a distinction between *to ton men ta genomena legein* [the former tells what happened] and *ton de oia an genoito* [the latter means what would (always) happen]. History, in short, can only tell us of a particular event which happened in the past. The historian Aristotle cited was Herodotus and this was how Herodotus defined the function of an historian: the historian is to be concerned

with what men have done and why they have done it. Poetry, on the other hand, because it is, according to Aristotle, *kai philosophotron* [more philosophical] and *kai spoudaioteron* [more searching] shows us what a particular type of individual would *eikos* [reasonably] or *anagkaion* [necessarily] do or say in any hypothetical situation. In fact, an historian can, under certain circumstances, be a poet, an *auton poietes* [autonomous or independent maker], provided the events he describes are such as *an eikos genesthai* [would (always) reasonably happen] or which *dunata genesthai* [happen inevitably]. Aristotle believed that the “maker” is the one who so structures a series of events that what happens seems to happen both reasonably—given certain character types—and inevitably. This notion of structure combined with inevitability are the properties of poetry and not really of recorded history, although some historians *have* attempted to write history in this fashion.³

I do not think that it is possible to comprehend truly what Aristotle meant by a series of events which would happen inevitably without taking anagoge fully into account, that is to say events happen inevitably because they are ordained to happen that way by the very nature of the universe. The original Greek meaning of *anagoge* was “a leading to” or “a leading back,” or, in a word, a “referring.” Used in this literary sense, anagoge is a reference both leading up and back to the mystical organization of the universe. It is what C. G. Jung called *participation mystique*—the undifferentiated and unexamined assumptions accepted as true by a given society. “Aristotle himself,” Morris R. Cohen noted in *A PREFACE TO LOGIC* (1956), “in a famous passage in his *POETICS* clearly rejected the positivistic implications of his logic, by asserting that poetry is truer and more earnest than history (or factual investigation). This dictum, which is generally felt to contain a profound truth, cannot be justified on the Aristotelian logic which divides all propositions so sharply into the existentially true or false as to leave no room for poetry or fiction except in the realm of the false”⁴ Aristotle probably never confronted this apparent contradiction in his thought because the mystical interpretation of the universe implicit in Greek tragedy was in the area of *participation mystique* in his culture. Bertrand Russell observed in *A HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY* (1945) that Aristotle’s *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS* was not so much based on logical postulates as on what a cultured Athenian gentleman of Aristotle’s time would assume to be proper behavior. Insofar as Aristotle made a claim in the *POETICS* for the universality of poetry, he reflected the soul of an educated Athenian and for that soul poetry, as the Greek poets and playwrights created it, was universal for their culture. This, no doubt, is what H.D.F. Kitto meant when he wrote that “it is not the event, but its inner meaning, that Aeschylus is dramatizing; and if the historical events, in any particular, do not express the inner meaning clearly enough, Aeschylus alters them, thus illustrating in advance the dictum of Aristotle that poetry is more philosophical than history.”⁵

For Alfred North Whitehead in *SCIENCE AND THE MODERN WORLD* (1925), what was most significant about Greek tragedy was its sense of inevit-

ability. "Let me here remind you," he wrote, "that the essence of dramatic tragedy is not unhappiness. It resides in the solemnity of the remorseless working of things. This inevitableness of destiny can only be illustrated in terms of human life by incidents which in fact involve unhappiness. For it is only by them that the futility of escape can be made evident in drama."⁶

Two agencies which surely brought about this sense of inevitability were the Greek notions of *hybris* and *phthonos*. "The gods have complete happiness, complete power," Martin P. Nilsson remarked in *A HISTORY OF GREEK RELIGION* (1964). "The transgression of the boundary line is always called 'insolence' (*hybris*); man must not be so presumptuous as to strive to raise himself above his mortal lot . . . *Gnothe seauton* [Know thyself]. Remember that thou art man, and especially in times of happiness, for man is then most prone to forget the lot of mortal life. When bliss is at its height, disaster is close at hand."⁷ *Hybris*, therefore, is not knowing yourself, not recognizing that you are human, it is presuming that you are more than you are, more than human. This may bring about the *phthonos*, the jealousy of the gods.

I will go further into the ideas behind the words *hybris*, *phthonos*, and *ate*, as well as *miasma* and the notion of *daimon*, later on in this chapter. But, for now, it should be sufficient that the world of Greek tragedy is one that is closed, by which I mean that nothing which happens is accidental. " . . . Odysseus was neither guilty nor rash when he took a nap at an unfortunate moment, thus giving his companions a chance to slaughter the tabooed oxen," E. R. Dodds wrote in *THE GREEKS AND THE IRRATIONAL* (1951). "It was what we should call an accident; but for Homer, as for early thought in general, there is no such thing as accident—Odysseus knows that his nap was sent by the gods *eis aten*, 'to fool him.' "⁸

With the decay of the anagoge of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, tragedy in the classical sense, be it Athenian, Roman, or Elizabethan is no longer possible. Aldous Huxley in his essay, "Tragedy and the Whole Truth," perceived the tragic view as one-sided and that, as a result, "to impose the kind of arbitrary limitations, which must be imposed by anyone who wants to write a tragedy, has become more and more difficult—is now indeed, for those who are at all sensitive to contemporaneity, almost impossible."⁹

Stanley Edgar Hyman in an essay he titled "The Tragic Vision" included in *THE PROMISED END* (1963) took just the opposite position, asserting that "our tragedies . . . would be as understandable to them [the Greeks and the Elizabethans] as their Oedipus and Hamlet are to us. There seems to be something about the tragic vision, some essential affirmation of the human spirit, that remains timeless and universal however much its superficial appearance changes."¹⁰ Hyman apparently derived his definition as to what tragedy is from Herbert Weisinger's book, *TRAGEDY AND THE PARADOX OF THE FORTUNATE FALL* (1953). "Weisinger insists," Hyman summed up sympathetically, "that 'the tragic protagonist must be made to achieve his victory at the moment of his deepest despair.' Tragedy, he reminds us, is 'man's most ve-

hement protest against meaninglessness'; it gives us 'the sense of assurance, achieved through suffering, of rational order'; it proclaims that 'man is free, but he is free within the limits set for us by his condition as man.'"¹¹ I disagree that these generalizations can be applied comprehensively to Athenian tragedy; but, even accepting them for the sake of argument, I would have to question the view of tragedy with which Hyman came up. In the same essay he referred to the ODYSSEY as "perhaps the finest tragedy of all,"¹² whereas most commentators since Antiquity have not regarded it as a tragedy at all. Moreover, in another essay in the same book, "Psychoanalysis and the Climate of Tragedy," Hyman made the wholly erroneous claim that "the plots of Attic tragedy came principally from Homer"¹³ and that Ernest Hemingway was somehow capable of writing tragedy. "Hemingway is a classic example," Hyman stated. "Where THE SUN ALSO RISES and A FAREWELL TO ARMS, if not masterpieces, are authentically tragic . . . such later novels as FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS and ACROSS THE RIVER AND INTO THE TREES are merely bathetic; and if Robert Jordan or Colonel Cantwell commits *hybris*, the author seems no longer aware of it."¹⁴ To put it in Nietzschean perspective, what sense can the idea of *hybris* possibly have in a universe that is godless and amoral and without even a concept of what is human?

More perceptive, I believe, is the distinction Murray Krieger made in THE TRAGIC VISION (1966) between tragedy and the tragic vision. For Professor Krieger, "'tragedy' refers to an object's literary form, 'the tragic vision' to a subject's psychology, his view and version of reality. It is more than a difference between two extant approaches to the tragic. Rather, the second has usurped the very possibility of the first after having been born side by side with it."¹⁵ Professor Krieger is a post-Nietzschean; the tragic vision is "the atheist's existential obligation to confront nothingness and its frighteningly empty consequences. . . ."¹⁶ Tragedy, as it was written in Antiquity and the Elizabethan Age, is an evasion of the tragic vision, an attempt to account for it. In the "triumph of tragedy over the errant tragic vision it contained within it . . . it is as if the security of the older order wanted to test the profundity of its assurances, its capacity to account for the whole of human experience, and thus bred within itself the tragic vision as its *agent provocateur*. And by having the rebellion incarnate in the tragic visionary finally succumb to a higher order which absorbs but never denies the 'destructive element,' by purifying itself through the cathartic principle, tragedy is asserting the argument a fortiori for the affirmation of its humanistic and yet superhumanistic values."¹⁷

In brief, whereas for Hyman and Professor Weisinger, the tragic vision gives us "the sense of assurance, achieved through suffering, of rational order," for Professor Krieger the tragic vision is "a modern vision, which is to claim also that it is a Protestant vision and, in an obvious sense, a romantic vision. Further, in its seizing upon the particular and its denial of any totality it is an heretical vision; and in its defiance of all rational moral order it is a demoniac vision."¹⁸ Hemingway is not among the authors with whom Professor Krieger

dealt in THE TRAGIC VISION—in fact, with the exception of Herman Melville, they are all Europeans—but, had he dealt with him, Hemingway would perhaps, in at least some of his fiction, come closer to what Krieger perceived as the tragic vision than what Hyman did.

In any case, whether we conceive of anagoge in Classical and Elizabethan tragedies as an encompassing vision of a moral universe or as an evasion of what Professor Krieger defined as the tragic vision, it is plain that a confrontation with nothingness has nothing to do with the world-view they embody. I hold Professor Krieger's distinction to be a valid one: the so-called tragic vision is at best only a component of what is meant by tragedy.

GREEK TRAGEDY

I

There are thirty-two complete Greek dramas usually called tragedies. They have been read more closely and studied more intensively than probably any other plays in world drama with the exception of those of Shakespeare. In Antiquity, a tragedy was considered a *serious* drama, but the action contained in it could come before or after a final catastrophe. If the former, its conclusion would be what we might see as “happy,” although the Greek idea of “well-starred” comes closer to the feeling such an ending generates; if the latter, its conclusion would be “unhappy,” or “ill-starred.” Surely this is the perspective embodied within the maxim which Herodotus attributed to Solon and which is often rendered into English: “Call no man happy until he is dead.” Translated somewhat more literally, it would read: “Before ever he be at the very end, hold back, nay do not yet call him happy [*olbion*], still less talk of things turning out well [*eytychea*].” (I.32). If the two notions of *olbion* and *eytychea* are put together with the pervading Greek idea of the sudden reversals to which one's life is subject, it is indeed a question of one's destiny being decided by the heavens or the stars. It does seem almost two thousand years off in the future before Shakespeare could have Cassius say in JULIUS CAESAR:

Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

[Iii 139–141]

Yet, in the same play, does not Artemidorus remark:

If thou read this, O Caesar, thou mayest live;
If not, the Fates with traitors do contrive.

[IIiii 14–15]

Guided by this notion of “ill-starred” lives, the Greek dramatists so ordered the events in a tragedy that what happens conveys at the same time a sense of necessity: so it was and so it must be. I accept Professor Else’s demonstration in *ARISTOTLE’S POETICS: THE ARGUMENT* (1957) that by *hamartía* Aristotle meant *not* a flaw in character but a mistake in identity; but I also agree with Richmond Lattimore’s expansion of this definition in *STORY PATTERNS IN GREEK TRAGEDY* (1964) to include mistakes about character or what a person has done. Rather convincingly Lattimore proved that no such thing as a “tragic flaw” can be found in any existing Greek tragedy, while instances of *hamartía* defined as a misperception about a person or an event abound. Henceforth, when the term *hamartía* is used in the text of this book, this is the sense it is intended to have. As such, *hamartía* is a mistake in perception which occasions an internal dissolution, rather close to what William Troy meant when he wrote of *hamartía* that “it is not a flaw in an otherwise beautifully shaped vessel (to take Goethe’s metaphor for Hamlet) but an inner principle of dissolution within the vessel itself.”¹⁹ The dissolution is precipitated by the misperception.

There was a period in the not too distant past when literary critics actually believed that the *praxis*, or progress, of an entire tragedy could be reduced to such a simple agency as a tragic flaw in a principal character. Lattimore was much nearer the mark when he observed that “it is hard, I think impossible, to interpret a whole tragedy in terms of one moral proposition.”²⁰ This is true, I suspect, because Greek tragedy sought to encompass all of existence, nature, and reality, visible and invisible, within its van, and so, in H.D.F. Kitto’s words, “the true explanation of a Greek play explains *everything*.”²¹

Also in his book, Lattimore managed to clear up the usual misunderstandings engendered by two other words intimately associated with Greek tragedy: *nemesis* and *hybris*. *Nemesis*, in Classical Greek, is anger, a feeling, and not punishment, which is an act or an event. Concerning *hybris*, he noted that “the idea of *hybris* as pride or arrogance punished by the gods was perhaps first clearly stated by K. Lehrs in a pair of essays entitled ‘*Neid der Götter*’ [Envy of the Gods] and ‘*Veberhebung (Hybris)*’ [the German word literally means a “reversal in ascendancy”] which seem to have appeared first in 1838. See Lehrs, *POPULÄRE AUFSÄTZE* [POPULAR ESSAYS], pp. 35–70. I have not been able to trace this notion to any earlier work, but it is difficult to document a negative fact.”²² *Hybris* in Classical Greek is quite simply violence or arrogance in general and does not *necessarily* imply punishment.

In later Antiquity, as Fortuna, Sors, and Fatum came to be worshipped as absolute deities, the practice led to the denial of the value of all human endeavor. This feeling can already be detected as early as Seneca’s approbation that we should not investigate things it is neither possible nor useful to know. But it is not so in the world of Greek tragedy. However profound the tragedians’ commitment to the idea of Fate, the characters in the plays always have at least the illusion of freedom.

“The portion is the due and regular share, such as every man has, of reverses and misfortune, no less than of success and happiness,” Martin P. Nilsson defined the idea of Fate in *A HISTORY OF GREEK RELIGION*. “A man may engross more than his share. From this simple point of departure comes the expression which so surprises us in its usual translation of ‘over[ruling] Fate’ (*hyper moron, hyper aisan*). With it is involved the similar expression *hyper theon*, which is usually translated ‘contrary to the will of the gods.’ The expression has acquired this meaning because the myth, after the fashion of the folk-tale, allows men to fight with and conquer the gods. It was an example which appealed to the Homeric man’s delight in his own sense of strength, and to which Apollo himself alludes on one occasion. On the other hand this expression serves to free the gods from the responsibility for human misfortunes and to lay it upon men themselves.”²³

The Greek word for “share” or “one’s portion in life” is *moira* and it was later fashioned into a deity, Moira. Homer was rather equivocal about whether *moira* was stronger than the gods; but on a sufficient number of occasions such did indeed prove to be the case that obviously he was avoiding a confrontation with the issue. The *Erinyes*, a female avenging deity from the netherworld, declares in one of Euripides’ lost plays (Fragment 1022) that her other names are *tyche, nemesis, moira*, and *anagke*. *Tyche* may best be defined as the act of a deity beyond human control; but it is also a synonym for necessity, or *anagke*. The kind of necessity implied by *anagke* must, however, be qualified. It is a necessary consequence which follows a decision made by a human being, but which does not precede the making of that decision; Plato seemed to favor this definition in the *REPUBLIC* (10.617d-e). To the extent that any or all of these ideas are associated with the infliction of suffering on a human being as shown in Greek tragedy, the operative principle is in fact *lex talionis* [the law of retribution]. It is in this sense that R. P. Winnington-Ingram discussed it in *SOPHOCLES: AN INTERPRETATION* (1980), remarking that “*talio* is a mode of justice, with divine backing. But, whether at the divine or human level, it involves violence, cruelty, and indiscriminate suffering, of which the *Erinyes* are symbols. *Moira*, then, and the *Moirai* are used to stand for the primitive, the rigid, the intractable, the violent, the blind, the dark, aspect of divine operation.”²⁴

Greek tragedy emerged from Greek religious ritual and so many of the concepts associated with it retain their religious aspect. *Ate*, by which Agamemnon explains his having insulted Achilles in the *ILIAD*, is to be regarded as infatuation, in more modern terms mental possession by a fixed, but erroneous, idea. It was a traditional notion among the Ancient Greeks that whomever the gods wanted to bring down, they inspired such a one with a “fatal” *ate* which prompted that person to a *hamartía* which occasioned a downfall. For the Greeks, as for Christian theologians following John Calvin’s lead, foreknowledge implied predestination. As Chrysippus wrote (939–944), “*vaticinatio probat fati necessitatem*” [prophecy proves the necessity of Fate]. The validity of proph-

ecy is one of the issues at stake in Sophocles' OEDIPUS REX and its integrity is upheld when the prophecies regarding Oedipus prove themselves to have been true.

In the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles,²⁵ as opposed to those of Euripides, the means by which the gods introduce *ate* into the soul is via a *daimon*, which was written *daemon* in Latin, related to but not synonymous with the English word, demon. "This word," Professor Winnington-Ingram defined *daimon*, "(which may or may not mean 'apportioner') has a stronger suggestion of personal agency but is conceived in this association vaguely, as a divine power coexistent with a man and determining the course of his life: when it determines for good, he is *eudaimon*, but *dysdaimon* when it determines for ill."²⁶ Brutus' *dysdaimon* is said to have appeared to him in a vision prior to the battle of Philippi and Cassius is supposed to have seen his *dysdaimon* during his flight after the same battle and, again, upon his arrival in Athens. The Stoics later defined the *eudaimon* as the divine spark to be found in human beings.

"These vaguely conceived beings," E. R. Dodds wrote of the *daima*—the plural in Greek for *daimon*—in THE GREEKS AND THE IRRATIONAL, "can inspire courage at a crisis or take away a man's understanding, just as gods do in the ILIAD. But they are also credited with a wide range of what may be called loosely 'monitions.' Whenever someone has a particularly brilliant or a particularly foolish idea; when he suddenly recognizes another person's identity or sees in a flash the meaning of an omen; when he remembers what he might well have forgotten or forgets what he should have remembered, he or someone else will see in it . . . a psychic intervention by one of these anonymous supernatural beings."²⁷

It is indeed possible to distinguish the religious perspectives of the various plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides on the basis of the attitude they took, respectively, toward the *daima*. Euripides, for example, rejected the *daima* completely, Herakleitos in Fragment 119 contained in Stobaeus' ANTHOLOGY, a compilation work from the Fifth century A.D., wrote "ephe os ethos anthropoi daimon." Professor Winnington-Ingram translated this as "character is destiny." G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven in THE PRESOCRATIC PHILOSOPHERS (1957) translated it as "man's character is his *daimon*."²⁸ Hermann Diehls in DIE FRAGMENTE DER VORSOKRATIKER [FRAGMENTS OF THE PRESOCRATICS] (1903) edited by Walter Kranz translated it into German as "seine Eigenart ist dem Menschen sein Dämon" [literally: his individuality is to the human being his daimon].²⁹ If we accept Professor Winnington-Ingram's equation in this instance of *daimon* with personal destiny, the phrase might most literally be translated: "The making of a man's personal destiny yields before his character." Nietzsche, whose philosophy was inspired in many ways by his exhaustive study of the writings and fragments of what he termed the "pre-Platonic" philosophers, echoed this idea in Aphorism No.70 in JENSEITS VON GUT UND BÖSE [BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL] (1886): "Hat man Charakter, so hat man auch sein typisches Erlebnis, das immer wieder-

kommt'' [If one has a certain character, so he also has his typical experience, which recurs repeatedly].³⁰ In Euripides' plays, according to E. R. Dodds, "the daemonic world has withdrawn, leaving man alone with his passions. And this is what gives Euripides' studies of crime their peculiar poignancy: he shows us men and women nakedly confronting the mystery of evil, no longer as an alien thing assailing their reason from without, but as part of their own being—*ethos anthropo daimon*.'" ³¹ Dodds' view would seem to be amply confirmed in the trial scene in TROADES—to take but one example—when Helen would blame her misconduct on a divine agency, i.e., a *daimon*, and Hecuba retorts (Il.981–982): "Do not blame an ignorant god for your misconduct. We are not to be won over by such sophistry!"

The Greek word *aretê* is usually equated with *virtus* or *probitas* in Latin, and it might best be rendered into English as "public acknowledgment of personal excellence." This is certainly how H.D.F. Kitto intended the word to be interpreted when in THE GREEKS he came to observe that "what Agamemnon and Achilles quarrel about is not simply a girl: it is the 'prize' which is the public recognition of his *aretê*."³² The distinction between *aretê* and *hybris* would seem to be this: the one is human excellence achieved in human terms, i.e., in light of human limitation, whereas the other is violence or arrogance of a sort as may engender *phthonos*, a jealous rage, among the gods, or on the part of a particular god. *Miasma*, or pollution, is the word used to describe the impure state of a soul in need of cleansing, or *katharsis*. Homeric man could still be somewhat guilt-free in his celebration of *aretê*; but, as the years passed and the weight of guilt increased, there was a marked increase of *deisidaimonia*, a fear of the gods, a word which in a good sense can mean religious feeling and in a bad sense superstition. Therefore the ultimate religious significance of Greek drama was to explain the nature of the universe and man's place in it. In Professor Dodds' words, "the crushing sense of human ignorance and human insecurity, the dread of the divine *phthonos*, the dread of *miasma*—the accumulated burden of these things would have been unendurable without the assurance which such an omniscient counsellor [such as the Oracle at Delphi] could give, the assurance that behind the seeming chaos there was knowledge and purpose."³³ The universe portrayed by the Greek dramatists was meant to provide that same kind of assurance.

Aristotle in the POETICS regarded Sophocles' plays, and the OEDIPUS REX in particular, as paradigms for tragic drama. He distinguished between two types of tragedy, the Tragedy of Error, e.g., OEDIPUS REX, and the Tragedy of Circumstances, e.g., TROADES. For Aristotle, the Tragedy of Error has nothing necessarily to do with moral error, although it might. And, in any case, the best tragedy is that composed according to the laws of cause and effect and *not* according to right and wrong. In terms of plot, tragedy also comes in two varieties, simple and complex. In the complex variety, there will be found a *peripeteia* and an *anagnorisis*. The *peripeteia* is in effect a reversal, the tragic consequence of human effort producing exactly the opposite of its intention. In the

anagnorisis there comes the realization of the truth, a discovery of what before was not known. Such recognition may come before or after the final catastrophe.

Accordingly, in Sophocles' OEDIPUS REX the *praxis*, or progress of the play, is to discover how to cure Thebes of plague. Consistent with Sophocles' belief in the integrity of oracles, the means by which this discovery is to be made comes by way of the Oracle at Delphi: the murderer of King Laios must be found. A series of episodes, punctuated by choric songs and dances, advance the *agon*, or mental contest, of this search on the part of Oedipus. The *peripeteia* comes in the scene with the messenger and the shepherd where Oedipus learns that he himself is the culprit. The *anagnorisis*—epitomized in those three stunning words in Jean Danielou's Latin text based on Jean Cocteau's French given to Oedipus in Igor Stravinsky's opéra-oratorio, OEDIPUS REX: *lux facta est* [light has been made]—comes finally to Oedipus and the play is concluded.

Mention, however, has to be made at this point of the roles of women in Greek drama. Of course, all the roles were enacted by male players, but, as F. L. Lucas noted in TRAGEDY (1927), it was a paradox of the Athenian stage that whereas "in real life a respectable woman could hardly show her face alone in the street, . . . yet on stage woman equals or surpasses man . . ."; and for him it remained a paradox that "has never been satisfactorily explained."³⁴ Is it really such a paradox? In a way, Aristotle reflected the current Greek view of women when he wrote in Book IX of DE ANIMALIBUS HISTORIA [THE HISTORY OF ANIMALS] (608b/II.8–15) "wherefore woman is more steadfastly merciful and more given to tears than man, on the other hand she is more given to a begrudging jealousy and inclined to complain about her lot, more fond of heaping abuse and reproach, and more querulous; even while woman is more given to melancholy and despondency than man, she is more stubbornly reckless and deceitful, more easily cheated although better at remembering; while inclined toward insomnia, hesitant, on the whole woman is more difficult to move than a man, better at nurture than at entertaining." In the POETICS (XV.3.1454a), while admitting that a woman is "an inferior" no less than a slave, he did concede that she might be portrayed as being "good." The memorable women in Greek drama, all based on archetypes from the age of heroes, are such as Medea, Klytaimnestra, Antigone, and Helen. In every case, where it is shown in the *praxis* of the drama that a woman gains power, so it is also shown that a man has lost strength, has been reduced. Nor is this confined merely to Greek tragedy. When, at the end of Corneille's MÉDÉE, Médée is asked what is left to her, her response is "moi-même" [myself], whereas Jason is utterly shattered. When, at the end of Ibsen's A DOLL HOUSE (1879), Nora has won new strength and can leave Torvald, notwithstanding the prospect of an uncertain future, it is Torvald whose world has crashed irretrievably. Virgil's remark about women, "varium et mutabile semper femina" [woman is ever wavering and fickle], is almost reassuring in comparison with these Greek tragic heroines whose *hybris* makes them inflexible, or whose *ate* makes them

indomitable, or whose lust unleashes havoc among men and whole city-states, who gain power and independence even if they pay for it with their lives, and who leave the tragic heroes totally devastated. This is no paradox at all. It is instead but another, albeit highly eloquent, manifestation of the fear, even terror, men have always had of women. Greek drama revealed to men and women alike what could and supposedly did happen when women either did not know their place or refused to keep it.

II

So much for preliminary considerations. Chronologically, Aeschylus was the first among the three great Greek tragedians. Having been born in Eleusis in 525B.C., he was already familiar as a boy with the pageants associated with the Eleusinian mysteries devoted to the worship of Demeter. On one occasion his knowledge of the Eleusinian mysteries almost brought him to grief. In exhibiting a play in which he himself took a principal part, there was some mention made of the worship of Demeter. When he spoke about the goddess, the audience feared he was indeed publicly revealing the mysteries and there was an immediate uproar. In their fury, they would have murdered him on the spot if he had not fled from the stage to the orchestra where he clung to the altar of Dionysos and thus saved his life. He was charged with impiety and put on trial before the Council of the Areopagus. Defending himself on a plea of ignorance, he was acquitted, not so much perhaps on the basis of his innocence, as the valor he was known to have displayed at the battle of Marathon in 490B.C.

He went to Sicily on at least three occasions—his plays were very popular there—and the last two years of his life were spent at Gela where he died in 456B.C. Grammarians have noted the number of Sicilian words in his plays and Macrobius said of him in SATURNALIA, “Aeschylus tragicus, vir utique Siculus” [the tragedian, Aeschylus, a man thoroughly Sicilian].

The primary focus of Aeschylus’ dramas is on the justice of Providence, the unrelenting power of Fate, and the dire effects of crime and wickedness. “Aeschylus did not have to revive the world of the daemons: it is the world into which he was born,” E. R. Dodds wrote of him. “And his purpose is not to lead his fellow-countrymen back into that world, but, on the contrary, to lead them through it and out of it. This he sought to do, not like Euripides by casting doubts on its reality through intellectual and moral argument, but by showing it to be capable of a higher interpretation, and, in the EUMENIDES, by showing it transformed through Athena’s agency into the new world of rational justice.”³⁵ In THE FROGS, Aristophanes had him claim that it was the duty of the tragic playwright to make citizens braver, nobler, more generous and virtuous than he found them, and that this is best accomplished through great and heroic figures being seen on the stage who, by their examples, will inspire worthy conduct. Women such as Phaedra and Stheneboea have no place on that stage because their characters are either wicked or wanting.

Aeschylus contributed several notable technical innovations to the staging of tragic dramas, including the crane and the car, what is termed *deus ex machina* [the god in the car], whereby an actor playing a god or goddess could be seen to float through the air; the *theologeion* by means of which the gods could be shown on Olympus; and the *eccyclema* by means of which the interior of a palace could be shown. In the EUMENIDES, Aeschylus dressed the Furies in dark gowns and masks with snake-like hair and smeared with blood. They were so terrifying, it was reported, that they caused pregnant women to miscarry and boys to faint. Before and subsequently, they were never pictured this way. He was a master at engendering a feeling of ominous misgiving as a character is enveloped by Fate before calamity befalls him; but, conversely, he could often be exceedingly careless about implausibilities.

Aeschylus' characters have an idealized strength and an indomitable will. When, in the CHOEPHORE, Klytaimnestra discovers Aigisthus dead, she suffers no remorse for her deeds and meets death with no plea for mercy or lamentation. She has none of the frailties and fears of ordinary human beings. This principle, however, does not apply to the Chorus or lesser characters such as Aigisthus who is cowardly and blustering alongside the cold, cunning Klytaimnestra. Consistent with what Aristophanes had him say, women, other than Klytaimnestra, have little role in his dramas, save the vision of the haunting, spectral, even ghastly Furies in the EUMENIDES or the character of the mad and ecstatic Cassandra in the AGAMEMNON. Her agonized ravings strike such a contrast with the sober and awe-filled Chorus that it is not equalled again in the theatre until Lady Macbeth's mad scene played against the subdued comments of the doctor and the gentlewoman. Cassandra functions to lessen the sympathy possibly felt for Agamemnon and in her ravings both shows the seeds of destruction within the House of Atreus and envisions the impending murders.

"Poetry, indeed, cannot be translated," Doctor Johnson once remarked; "and, therefore, it is the poets that preserve languages; for we would not be at the trouble to learn a language, if we could have all that is written in it just as well in a translation. But as the beauties of poetry cannot be preserved in any language except that in which it was originally written, we learn the language."³⁶ Often, when Greek poetry is translated into English, the translator affects a pseudo-Elizabethan manner, as if this somehow were required. If poetry is to be translated at all, I prefer that it be translated into prose. Homer first told the story of Agamemnon and Klytaimnestra in the ODYSSEY (XXIV.191–202) and I would render it into English prose thus:

Happy son of Laertes, Odysseus, verily then along with exceeding excellence procuring a mate. So noble of mind was she, blameless Penelope, daughter of Icarius, so ready to remind herself of Odysseus, her rightful lord. Therefore that fame on her part will never perish. It is an excellence the immortals will make into a graceful legend for a song among men on earth. It was not so with the daughter of Tyndareus cowardly plotting deeds, to slaughter her rightful lord; and so hateful will be the song about her among

men that a harshly bitter reputation will be attached to the whole female sex, even to those who have done good deeds.

Klytaimnestra is provided with no motive whatsoever for her deed in the ODYSSEY, although she was later, in a poem by Pindar, and apparently it was on Pindar that Aeschylus depended. In the AGAMEMNON, Klytaimnestra is provided with a multiple motive: Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigeneia at Aulis, the fact that Agamemnon has brought back Cassandra as his concubine, and in order to conceal her own adultery with Aigisthus. Finally, she blames the guilt of the House of Atreus. Although Klytaimnestra actually commits the deed, it is made clear that it was Aigisthus who planned it. As Aeschylus conceived of the tragedy, *philos* and *aphilos*, love and hate, work together to produce nearly intolerable pain, just as they do centuries later in Catullus' poem, "*Odi et amo*" [I hate and I love]. In view of the behavior of *film noir* heroines many more centuries later yet, it must be noted that Klytaimnestra experiences definite sexual exhilaration at Cassandra's death.

There is a passing reference to Solon's maxim about no one deserving to be called "well-starred" until after death; but the main thrust of the drama is the part it plays in the trilogy of which it is the exposition: murder becomes self-perpetuating. In the AGAMEMNON, Klytaimnestra is haunted by dreams of Agamemnon's wounds; in the CHOEPHOROË she is shaken by terrifying dreams; and in the EUMENIDES she is still haunted by her dreams in the netherworld. Aeschylus so staged the murders in the CHOEPHOROË that Aigisthus is killed first, allowing for the full dramatic presentation of matricide when Orestes confronts his mother.

In GODDESSES, WHORES, WIVES, AND SLAVES: WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY (1975), Sarah B. Pomeroy suggested that women such as Klytaimnestra, Antigone, and Hecuba "adopt the characteristics of the dominant sex to achieve their goals" and she identified this as an aspect of what Alfred Adler termed *männlicher Protest* [masculine protest]. "The total impression the patient receives is the following," Adler wrote in THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY (1925): "'I am a girl, not strong enough to conquer my sexual desires; even in childhood I possessed little energy, my fancy playing with forbidden objects and I was not even able to control myself (my desires) in my brother's presence! I am going to be calumniated and maltreated; I am going to be sick, to bear children in pain, be conquered, be a slave! I must therefore from the beginning and at all times be on my guard, not succumb to my desires, not subject myself to a man, indeed mistrust all men! To do that I must myself behave like a man!'"³⁷

The traditional manner in which the EUMENIDES has been interpreted is that it represents a conflict between abstract principles: revenge and retribution, as embodied by the Furies, are in conflict with equity and justice. The latter are far preferable and this is made clear by Apollo in his defense of Orestes and by Athena in her plea for mercy and peace before she casts the deciding

vote in favor of acquittal. The final conversion of the Erinyes to benign goddesses symbolizes the spiritual meaning of the play: the emergent supremacy of mercy over retribution. Yet, at lines 1625–1645 the Chorus itself complains about the reversal of male and female roles during the three successive parts of this tragic trilogy and so Pomeroy was working well within the context of the play when she observed that “in the EUMENIDES, which was the final play of the ORESTEIA, Aeschylus restores masculine and feminine to their proper spheres. Orestes, who chose to murder his mother in vengeance for her murder of his father, is defended by Apollo and Athena. The power of the uncanny, monstrous female spirits of vengeance (formerly called ‘Erinyes’ or ‘Furies’) is tempered and subordinated to the rule of the patriarchal Olympians. Henceforth, as Eumenides, or fair-minded spirits, they will have a proper place in the affections of civilized people.”³⁸

Quintilian’s view in his *INSTITUTIO ORATORIA* [INSTRUCTION IN ORATORY] (XI.66–67) is still valid, I believe. “Aeschylus first brought tragedy into the light, sublime, highly serious, and often grandiloquent to a fault, but he was also crude in many places and inconsistent. . . . Sophocles as well as Euripides were by far more clearly illustrious in practising this art. . . .”

Sophocles was born in 497 B.C. and died in 406 B.C. He passed his boyhood at Colonus, northwest of Athens, and he celebrated its natural beauties in that play from his extreme old age, the *OEDIPUS COLONEUS*. He lived through the most eventful period of Athenian history. In his youth he led a choir in a paean at the victories at Salamis and Plataea. His manhood was passed during the Age of Pericles, the golden apogee of Athenian power and influence; and he lived on through the tragic ordeal of the Peloponnesian War, dying a few months before the disastrous defeat at Aegospotami. Yet this notwithstanding, along with his activities as a statesman, no response to the political events of his time can be detected in the stately moral dignity of his dramas. What can be detected is Sophocles’ profound sense of religious reverence—he was a priest in the cult of Alcon, companion of Asclepius—and the scholiast of his *ELEKTRA* wrote of him (1.831) that “no man was more god-fearing.” He became the foremost dramatist of the Periclean Age, winning eighteen victories at the City Dionysia. Only Astydamas with fifteen and Aeschylus with thirteen rivaled him.

He married a woman named Nicostrata and together they had a son called Iophon. Somewhat late in life, Sophocles reputedly took up with a woman by the name of Theoris and they had a son called Ariston. Ariston, in turn, had a son also called Sophocles who, according to Suidas, became a notable tragedian in his own right. One bit of gossip, probably apocryphal, reported by Athenaeus in *DEINOSOPHISTAE* [DINNER OF SOPHISTS] (XIII/para.596) is that, when old, Sophocles fell into the clutches of the courtesan Archippe. The whole purpose of this tale, originating with Hegesander, an anecdote-collector of the Third century B.C., was that when Smicrines, one of Archippe’s former lovers, was told of this connection, he quipped that she was “as the owls who perch on tombs.” It was also reported that Sophocles left her all his property. This

he could not have done under Athenian law. In any case, no episode about Sophocles has been more often repeated than that Iophon, jealous of the attentions the old man was paying to his illegitimate children, commenced a judicial inquiry, charging his father with mental incompetence and proposing to take the administration of his property out of his hands. At the inquiry, Sophocles recited to the jurymen a portion of the OEDIPUS COLONEUS which he had just written. According to Cicero in DE SENECTUTE [ON OLD AGE] (VII.22), he asked the jury “num illud carmen desipientis videretur” [might that poem then be adjudged foolish]? Another marvelous anecdote! But it also seems to have had no basis in reality. What we can rely on is that he was charming and amusing in company and, as befitted both his serious interests and social disposition, he founded a literary club at Athens.

It was Sophocles’ intention to humanize tragedy without affecting its ideal splendor. For the first time, in his plays the nature of human beings and the struggles of the passions within them became the main focus of tragedy. Yet these human beings are not common men; they are grand figures, rather after the manner of the greater-than-life heroes we find in Homer. Sophocles, almost uniquely, concentrated all the focus of a play, and thereby of the audience, on one great major character and on one great moral principle. There are no side issues to distract from this focus and the lesser characters are developed only insofar as they illuminate the major character. By this means he achieved a tremendous unity of design. The ensemble effect is to render an image of a human being approaching the grandeur of classical sculpture at its best. No event occurs, nor is any character introduced, without adequate reason. Only in PHILOCTETES did he falter and resort to the “god in the car.” The Chorus in Sophocles’ plays, instead of displaying a depth of emotion and involvement in the action as in the plays of Aeschylus, remains aloof, a mediator and balance, at once impartial and observant, between the contending forces. The Chorus represents the point of view of the average person and, therefore, in dialogue episodes is subject to all the foibles and conceits of such a person. Above all it is capable of being deceived, even when the audience is not.

A. E. Haigh reflected in his definitive book, THE TRAGIC DRAMA OF THE GREEKS (1896), that “it would appear that Sophocles shared to some extent in the ordinary Attic feeling of the Fifth century which regarded the relationship of man and wife, and the whole arrangements concerning marriage, as a matter of business, in which sentiment had very little place.”³⁹ In the ANTIGONE Ismene opposes her sister’s desire to defy Creon and to bury their brother, Polyneikes, and gives the nature of womanhood as her excuse (II.60–61):

But one must needs so often consider that we are but women by nature [*ephymen*], and so are not to dispute with men.

Pomeroy felt it was particularly significant that she used a derivation from the verb *phyo*, “implying that it is by nature (*physis*) rather than by man-made

convention that women do not attempt to rival men.”⁴⁰ I believe Pomeroy was correct and that at least on one level ANTIGONE can be read as a conflict in the roles of the sexes. “Polyneikes is buried secretly,” she continued, “and Creon, the guard, and the Chorus all suppose that only a man could have been responsible [ll.248, 319, 375]. Thereupon forced to confess to Creon that she has in fact buried her brother, Antigone refers to herself with an adjective in the masculine gender [l.464]. Creon, in turn, perceives her masculinity and refers to Antigone by a masculine pronoun and participle [ll.479, 496]. He resolves to punish her, declaring, ‘I am not a man, she is the man if she shall have this success without penalty’ [ll.484–485].”⁴¹ It should also be noted that Euripides in his ANTIGONE did not have her go to her death, as had Sophocles, but instead escape from Creon and marry Haimon.

However, on another level, in the same play Sophocles made it evident that he believed that the laws of the gods are immutable; although no one knows from whence these laws sprang, it is known that they will never die [ll.455–457]. As a consequence of the disasters which befall him, Creon informs the Chorus [ll.1113–1114] that it is best if one keeps the laws of the gods throughout his life. In OEDIPUS REX, the Chorus makes clear that if one ignores justice or surrenders to greed, such a one cannot hope to escape punishment [ll.883–892]. Yet, while Sophocles may have believed that the guilty would be punished, he was no less aware that innocence is often without protection and that the guiltless are seen to suffer undeservedly. Sophocles made no attempt to reconcile these caprices of fortune with his notion of the moral order of the universe, as St. Thomas Aquinas would later attempt to do when debating the question of predestination in the SUMMA THEOLOGICA, only to fail. In Fragment 833 Sophocles indicated that perhaps such reasons as may exist are beyond human comprehension: “But verily it will happen that no one who traverses everywhere wishing to see and to learn what is hidden by the gods will discover it.” For Sophocles nothing is more fragile than human prosperity. Even more than Aeschylus he subscribed to the maxim ascribed to Solon which was mentioned above and three references to it can be found among his surviving works, OEDIPUS REX [ll.1527–1530] with which the play concludes, the TRACHINIAE [ll.1–3] with which the play begins, and Fragment 588. So profound was this awareness of the tenuousness of good fortune that E. R. Dodds rightly concluded that “it was above all Sophocles, the last great exponent of the archaic world-view, who expressed the full tragic significance of the old religious themes in their unsoftened, unmoralized forms—the overwhelming sense of human helplessness in face of the divine mystery, and of the *ate* that waits on all human achievement—and who made these thoughts part of the cultural inheritance of Western Man.”⁴²

The great challenge for Sophocles’ heroes is not simply to endure the suffering brought about by the reversal of fortune, but rather to respond to it with greatness of soul. This is what Werner Jaeger meant when he wrote in the first volume of PAIDEIA: THE IDEALS OF GREEK CULTURE (1945) that Soph-

ocles “has no sympathy whatever for the resignation of Simonides, who concluded that man must forfeit his *aretê* when cast down by inescapable misfortune. By making his tragic characters greatest and noblest of mankind, Sophocles cries Yes to the fateful question which no mortal mind can solve. His characters are the first who, by suffering by the absolute abandonment of their earthly happiness or of their social and physical life, reach the truest greatness attainable by man.”⁴³ Professor Winnington-Ingram, moreover, was quite adamant that Sophocles’ treatment of the Oedipus legend goes far beyond questions of innocence and guilt, intelligence and blindness, greatness and weakness. Beyond these there is another dimension, one in which “*ti dei me choreyein*” [the gods call the tune].⁴⁴

The collective psyche in Antiquity was transfixed by the possibility of a sudden reversal in fortune. *Nemesis* well may wait on pride and boastfulness. Sophocles in particular made use of this fixation as the occasion for tragic irony and in play after play we watch confident self-assurance proceeding to its doom. The *hamartía* of his major characters about their own fates is nowhere more brilliantly conceived and executed than in the OEDIPUS REX where virtually Oedipus’ every utterance is steeped in Sophoclean irony. Yet, Oedipus’ doom is not shown to be the result of some flaw in his nature, having been ordained for him before his birth in the curse of Pelops; nor is it punishment for Laios’ misdeeds. It is rather due to the nature of things, part of the natural order. Aeschylus had made the Oedipus legend central in his Theban trilogy, consisting of LAIOS, OEDIPUS, and concluding with the SEPTEM CONTRA THEBAS. He probably traced Fate’s mysterious workings through three generations. Sophocles’ OEDIPUS REX was not only intended to stand by itself, but in it the emphasis was shifted. His concern was with the blindness and fallibility of human beings. Aristotle obviously endorsed this approach since in the POETICS he insisted that *unmerited* suffering is the most appropriate subject for tragedy. However, as H.D.F. Kitto remarked, “it makes nonsense of the play to interpret [it] as meaning that man is the plaything of a malignant Fate. What Sophocles means is this, that in the most complex and apparently fortuitous combination of events there is a design, though what it means we may not know.”⁴⁵ Professor Winnington-Ingram was inclined to call no less attention to the role of intellectual pride in the play, “the lavish—the almost intolerable—irony of OEDIPUS TYRANNUS is justified by this—that the most intelligent of men can be so wrong, that the man who read the riddle of the Sphinx cannot read the riddle of his appalling destiny.”⁴⁶

“ ‘What man wins more of happiness (*eudaimonia*) than just a semblance and, after the semblance, a decline?’ ” Winnington-Ingram translated the Chorus in lines 1189–1195. “ ‘I call no mortal blessed (*makarizo*), for I have before me the example of your *daimon*—wretched Oedipus.’ ” But he would expand the meaning of the *daimon*. Oedipus, if I read Professor Winnington-Ingram correctly, has two *daima*, the first the *moira* of his life contained in the prophecy that he would murder his father and co-habit with his mother; the second

which is his personal character. It is on the basis of this latter *daimon* that his act of self-blinding is to be explained, since it was not part of the prophecy. The self-blinding, interpreted in this fashion, requires “recognition that there is a given factor in human character which is no less a part of man’s destiny than those events which character may (or may not) help to mould.”⁴⁷ If Herakleitos had intended Fragment 119 to prevent one’s blaming a *daimon* from outside wholly for one’s destiny, then Oedipus’ personal *daimon*, his character, may be said to explain his last hideous yet distinctly personal act. In any case, the result is the same: the spectator learns from Oedipus’ example that a man’s fate is incomprehensible to him and that, therefore, awed by these events one can only approach life with humility, moderation, and, above all, reverence for the gods. When understanding does finally come to Oedipus, he becomes not resigned but rather enlightened as to the mystery of the natural order and how one must never dare to presume.

What little is known of Euripides’ OEDIPUS from fragments is that the catastrophe is divided into two episodes. First, when Oedipus is identified as the assailant of Laios, he is blinded by Laios’ loyal followers—thus disposing of any possibility for the blinding to be the consequence of a personal *daimon*—and, second, the revelation of the incest. The latter comes as a second blow and apparently was unknown to those who did the blinding. An even more telling contrast between Sophocles and Euripides is to be found in their respective treatments of the Elektra legend. Sophocles returned to Homer for his source. The murder of Klytaimnestra is a deed of righteous retribution commanded by Apollo. It cleanses the palace of the Atreidae of its guilt. Orestes is but the instrument of Fate. Elektra herself is somewhat repulsive to a modern spectator and may even have seemed so to a spectator in Antiquity; certainly in her unmitigated desire for revenge she is not idealized in the least and, accordingly, her character lacks that nobility so customary with Sophocles. Her indifference to her mother is devoid of any compassion or regret; she remains withall a hard and unfeeling woman.

By contrast, with both Aeschylus and Sophocles, here is the speech provided Klytaimnestra by Euripides, explaining her motives in the ELEKTRA (ll.1018–1040) to her daughter:

By Tyndareus was I given in perfect health to your father, surely not thus only to be killed, nor those to whom I have given birth. By such means as persuading me that my daughter Iphigeneia was to wed Achilles, Agamemnon took her forth from the house to that assembly of detained ships at Aulis. There she was stretched out over a funeral pyre and Agamemnon pierced her through her pale cheek. Had he stretched her out, defiled her, so that the one was lost in defense of many, or to avert the conquest of his city-state, or even to save the lives of my other children, in that case it would have been possible to pardon him. But no, he murdered my daughter on account of that lustful Helen who could not be held to her marriage-bed, that traitoress who could not be compelled to mend her ways. Albeit over what has been mentioned I would have done no wrong nor been aroused to kill my rightful lord, yet he fetched as a newly married bride

to dwell in my home that raving fanatic possessed by a god, introduced her to our marriage-bed, and even would have two such women reside together in the same house. I admit women are prone to folly. But whenever something of this sort occurs, when a rightful lord brings another into the marriage-bed, he is not to be imitated by his woman—only a rightful lord may possess such a craving! My blame in this shines bright, but of my motives men have scarcely heard.

Such a passage is entirely characteristic of this, the last of the three great Greek dramatists, while it also demonstrates the humanity and sympathy which he could breathe into his characters.

Tradition has it that Euripides was born in 480B.C at Salamis on the very day of the great naval battle between the Greeks and the Persians. The Parian Marble—perhaps a more trustworthy source—dates his birth in 485B.C. He died some time during the winter of 406–405B.C. He belonged to the wealthier class which permitted him in his maturity to devote himself to literary pursuits. Athenaeus noted that he was a collector of books. Cicero in *TUSCULANAE DISPUTATIONES* [*TUSCULANE DISPUTATIONS*] (3.29) claimed he was a follower of Anaxagoras “quem ferunt, nuntiata morte filii, dixisse, ‘Sciebam me genuisse mortalem’ ” [who said, they declared, on hearing about the death of his son, ‘I knew my begotten to be subject to death’]. Diogenes Laertius, however, in his chapter on Anaxagoras attributed this remark to Solon, although he also admitted it may have been Xenophon who said it. The remark lived on, though, since centuries later Goethe made quite a similar observation when he learned of the death of his son, August. Yet, there is no question concerning the influence exerted on Euripides’ thinking by his contact with Anaxagoras—who was his contemporary in Athens—and it is confirmed through the many notions he introduced in his dialogues that were based directly on Anaxagoras’ speculations. In particular Euripides owed him a debt for the vision of the origin of the earth out of primal chaos and his belief in the ultimate indestructibility of matter. However, what is so central a theme in his dramas, what prompted so much ridicule of him from Aristophanes, he owed not to Anaxagoras but to Empedocles: the idea of love as the *primum mobile* of all creation. In his later years Euripides also became close friends with a number of philosophers. It was in Euripides’ house in Athens that Protagoras first read his treatise about the gods which subsequently caused his expulsion. Euripides lent Socrates his copy of Herakleitos to get his opinion of it; and Socrates, although not devoted to the theatre, even shunning it, generally attended performances of Euripides’ plays.

There was, quite definitely, no absolute freedom of thought in Athens and the persecutions which accompanied the Peloponnesian War are testimony of this. In 432B.C. freethinkers were subjected to a public inquiry into their ideas and the possible ill-effects they were having on “right-thinking” Athenians. Anaxagoras seems to have been fined and banished; Diagoras fled; as did Protagoras; Socrates was put to death; and Euripides may well have been indicted. Such things have happened periodically in human history. They would happen

again in Germany in the 1930s and in the United States in the late 1940s. There is a tradition that Protagoras' books were burned in Athens. In his verse tragedy, *ALMANSOR* (1820–1821), Heinrich Heine included these prophetic lines:

Das war ein Vorspiel; dort wo man Bücher
Verbrennt, verbrennt man auch am Ende Menschen.

[It was a prelude. Where one begins by burning books, one ends up by burning human beings.]⁴⁸

Euripides was eighteen when he first started writing tragedies, but he was thirty before the archon accepted one of his offerings for performance. Although posterity, in Antiquity as today, has accorded him the highest critical recognition (and even Fortune cooperated to the extent that more of Euripides' plays have survived than those of his peers), in his own time he was often regarded with disfavor and, during his lifetime, won only four victories in the competitions. The *TROADES*, which is still one of Euripides' most frequently performed plays, came in second, and in another contest his masterpiece, the *MEDEA*, came in third after Euphorion who was first and Sophocles who was second. Suidas in his *LEXICON* sought to explain this by suggesting that Euphorion had entered plays written by his father, Aeschylus; but it would do better to remember that even Sophocles' *OEDIPUS REX* did not win instant endorsement when it was first performed in the competitions.

In Antiquity it was believed that Euripides had two wives and some of his biographers and commentators liked to gossip about how the adulterous conduct of these wives transformed Euripides into a bitter misogynist and prompted him to write the *HIPPOLYTUS*. For my part, I tend to follow Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff who, in his *DIALECTA EURIPIDEA* [*EURIPIDEAN DIALECTICS*] (1875), adduced that Euripides had only one wife, Melito, daughter of Mnesilochus, and that she, as the scholiast on the *HECUBA* said of Priam's wife, was known as well by the nick-name Choirile. Euripides had a full house. Besides Melito and their three sons—Mnesarchides, who became a merchant, Mnesilochus, who became an actor, and Euripides *minor*, who became a tragic poet—there was also Euripides' father-in-law and an assistant, Cephisophon, a musician who helped Euripides with the musical parts of his plays.

Euripides called *scholen* [leisure] (from which, via the Latin, we get the English word "scholar") the "foremost delight of men" in an autobiographical passage from the *ION*; he preferred a quiet life retired from the bustle of public affairs; and he spent much of his time in relative seclusion at Salamis. Notwithstanding, Gilbert Murray's portrait of him in *EURIPIDES AND HIS AGE* (1918) strikes me as far too romantic, describing him as an "old sad man with [a] long beard, who seldom laughed and was not easy to speak to; who sat for long hours in his seaward cave on Salamis, meditating and perhaps writing one could not tell what, except indeed that it was 'something great and high.'"⁴⁹

Athenaeus told the story of how one day Sophocles had lured a handsome boy outside the city wall to consort with him. When they had finished, the boy stole Sophocles' cape. Euripides, hearing of it, is said to have jeered that he had consorted with the same boy without having to pay him anything. Sophocles' response was that Euripides had no business talking since he was himself an adulterer and had thus made Eros out to be a thief. Addaeus, a poet of the Fourth century B.C. and a citizen of Macedonia, dismissed the rumor that Euripides died as a result of an amorous tryst, but the evidence that Euripides was indeed a sensualist is too overwhelming to give this dismissal much credence. This is not to say that Euripides was not at all the gloomy and morose man Murray claimed him to have been, only that the evidence of his plays indicates that he knew too much about the human heart to believe that he spent nearly all of his time in isolated contemplation.

Shortly before he died, Euripides accepted the invitation extended by Archelaus of Macedonia to leave Athens and repair to the Macedonian court. An elaborate state funeral was held for him after his death. Sophocles, when he learned of Euripides' demise, is said to have appeared with his actors and Chorus in the theatre dressed in the garb of mourning.

As a playwright, Euripides was a transition figure, more modern than either Aeschylus or Sophocles, pointing the way of the future to Terence and Seneca and, beyond them, to Shakespeare and the Elizabethan theatre. Because he humanized his characters, without idealizing them, he made possible the advent of the New Comedy of Menander; and with his focus on Eros and Aphrodite as motivating forces he anticipated later Romanticism. Yet, by this I do not wish to deny those telling lines of the Chorus in Sophocles' *ANTIGONE* (ll.781-782):

Eros hurls himself into battle everywhere,
Eros who causes everyone to fall under his spell. . . .

At the same time, Euripides was a naturalist and, often, a realist, although in the *MEDEA* he was not above invoking the ancient convention of the "god in the car," be it only a self-indulgence of his love for spectacle. Helen, that ideal of epic poetry, is revealed in the *TROADES* to be a mercenary courtesan attracted by Paris' wealth, manipulating his fluctuating passion by brooding over Menelaus, and finally concerned only with re-establishing herself among the Greeks. In *EURIPIDES AND HIS INFLUENCE* (1924) F. L. Lucas remarked concerning Euripides' female characters that "he made them subtle and gave them brains and therewith the knowledge of evil as well as good . . . and he was certainly a pioneer in regarding women, not as children, not as odalisques, but as adults for good or ill."⁵⁰ Pomeroy after citing the contrast between Agamemnon's speech from the *ODYSSEY* and Klytaimnestra's argument in the *ELEKTRA*, both of which were quoted above, concluded that "when I compare Euripidean to Sophoclean heroines, I prefer Euripides' Medea and Hec-

uba, for they are successful. Deianira, in Sophocles' *TRACHINIAN WOMEN*, naively mixes a potion intended to restore her husband's affection for her; instead, the potion tortures and kills him. Antigone courageously and single-mindedly defends her ideals, and is willing to die for them, but her last words dwell not upon her achievements but lament that she dies unwed. Medea and Hecuba are too strong to regret their decisions."⁵¹ Pomeroy also went on to point out that Euripides so structured his plays as to create doubt that the men for whom women sacrifice themselves are really worthy of it and that in his attacks on the double standard, in the *ELEKTRA* no less than in the *MEDEA*, he "does not advocate that women should have the same sexual freedom as men, but rather suggests that it is better for all concerned if the husband is as monogamous as the wife."⁵² Nonetheless, he also still had his stereotyped characters: the nurse-confidante, the ghost, the virgin-martyr, the villain, and the madman, which passed through Seneca into the Renaissance theatre.

In Euripides' revenge plays, as E. R. Dodds noted, "the spectators' sympathy is first enlisted for the avenger and then made to extend to the avenger's victims."⁵³ Euripides' characters might even question the existence of the gods, in the *MEDEA* and even more so in Fragment 286 from the lost *BELLEROPHON* so well wrought into English by F. L. Lucas.

Dares any say that there are Gods in Heaven?
 Nay, there are none, are none!—save for the fool
 That still must cling to tales of ancient time.
 Think for yourselves—I do not ask ye take
 My word on trust. I say men tyrannous,
 With tongues that break all oaths, and robbers' hands,
 Fill earth with massacre and sacks of cities;
 And, though they do it, prosper more than those
 Whose days are spent in peace and piety.
 I know of little cities, fearing God,
 That yet must bow to wicked greater states,
 Crushed by brute weight of spears.
 And very sure I am if one of you,
 Instead of labouring for his livelihood,
 Should try to live at ease by prayers to Gods,
 He soon would find there are none. Faith is built
 Upon mere Fortune's favours and disasters.⁵⁴

It was not for Euripides, with the hectic fever on his cheeks, to justify the ways of the gods to men, nor to teach humility before impenetrable mysteries. He was ever flexible and, therefore, inconsistent in the ways he would draw characters in one play or another. Cassandra may appear in the *TROADES* to be legitimately possessed by a god; but in the *ORESTES*, far from the god-enraptured image of Orestes projected by Aeschylus in the *CHOEPHORO*E, Euripides' Orestes is mad in far more human terms: a man of cyclothymic extremes, subject to lapses in cognizance when he is suddenly irrational, then just as suddenly neurasthenic, aware one moment of mundane reality, shrieking the

next at the terrifying spectacle of the Furies which are conceived to be clearly the product of his imagination.

The image of the protagonist in Euripides' plays differs from that in plays by Aeschylus and Sophocles in that this is no victim of external forces wrestling with the dictates of Fate or an individual *moira*. Instead the emphasis, as in Shakespeare, is on the conflict within the human soul itself. It is the human soul which serves as the battleground for contradictory, even self-destructive, impulses, contrasted with what duty requires and what society defines as virtue. For the Platonic Socrates and Aristotle after him, if a man is given a choice between two courses of action, one of which is good, the other bad, he will invariably choose the good. Not so for Euripides! In the *MEDEA* he used the word *thymos* which, in this context, means not just the soul but the very force that is the cause of the angry spirit or the irrational self which takes possession of the personality.

Medea: And I contemplate evils to the extremity of my grasp. Thymos, greatest of human evils, is stronger than my resolution! [ll.1078–1080]

The conflict was more succinctly and perhaps more familiarly formulated by Ovid who himself wrote a stage version of *MEDEA* and who, in *METAMORPHOSES* (VII.20–21), had Medea exclaim:

video meliora proboque,
deteriora sequor.

[I see and understand what is better, then I have elected to do what is worse.]

For the first time in Greek drama, Euripides introduced a kind of plot in which curiosity replaces ritual as the guiding idea and main interest. In plays such as the *ION*, the audience did *not* know how the story would come out and experienced a thrill at its unexpected resolution. And then there is the *TROADES*. Quite definitely the plot of the *TROADES* falls into that category which Aristotle defined as the Tragedy of Circumstance, but he obviously disapproved of it and thus, in the *POETICS*, he used the word *moros* [piecemeal] to describe its structure. A. E. Haigh expatiated this same view at greater length, commenting that “the lamentations of Hecuba, the ravings of Cassandra, the despair of Andromache, and the pleadings of Helen, occupy the stage in successive scenes; but there is no forward movement or advance towards a definite issue, and the general impression is monotonous and uninteresting.”⁵⁵

I do not hold with this view. The structure of this play—one horror following another, each more catastrophic than the previous one—can be very successfully staged and, when adapted to the *film noir* genre in a film such as Fritz Lang's *THE BIG HEAT* (Columbia, 1953), its total effect as an ensemble can be chilling. The play opens with a prologue—a conventional device with Euripides—in which Poseidon and Athena lament the fate of the Trojan women

and conspire about the ways in which they will destroy the Greeks on their homeward journey. It is rather evident that by using the gods in this fashion in the prologue Euripides was criticizing the sinister powers by whom all this ruin was brought about and who are planning further havoc. I cannot help but believe that this was the image Virgil saw emerging from the prologue and the subsequent action since it recurs again in his *AENEID* (II.622–623):

apparent dirae facies inimicaque Troiae
numina magna deum.

[Furies dreadful and inimical to Troy, in outward appearance the great forces divine of the gods, become visible.]

Gilbert Murray after his own fashion found a force extremely positive emerging in the Trojan women themselves as they are subjected to this series of catastrophes. “The Greek trumpet sounds through the darkness. It is the sign for the women to start for their ships; and forth they go, cheated of every palliative, cheated even of death, to the new life of slavery. But they have seen in their very nakedness that there is something in life which neither slavery nor death can touch.”⁵⁶ This enhancement of their characters, however, relies on the spectator keeping always before him the sinister presence of the gods looking down, indifferent to human anguish.

Recently, when I was a faculty adviser on a student production of the *TROADES* at Lewis & Clark College, Professor Edgar Reynolds, chair of the Theatre Department, told me that when he had staged the *TROADES*, at the end, as the women are being led off stage, he would have the spotlight again illuminate the fearsome masks of the gods as they implacably look down on the action far below them. There are no stage directions in the Greek and Roman plays. We do not know exactly how they were staged. But Euripides, with his love for the dramatic and spectacular, might well have had this sort of effect in mind. It is worth noting the incident Plutarch recorded concerning Alexander, the tyrant of Pherae. How, “once seeing a tragedian act Euripides’ *TROADES*,” Alexander, in the words of John Dryden’s translation, “left the theatre; but sending for the actor, bade him not to be concerned at his departure, but act as he had been used to do, as it was not in contempt of him that he departed, but because he was ashamed that his citizens should see him, who never pitied any man that he murdered, weep at the sufferings of Hecuba and Andromache.”⁵⁷

In Fragment 19 from the lost *AEOLUS*, Euripides wrote: “There is nothing shameful but thinking makes it so.” It is a notion that reverberated through the ages until it came to be repeated, no less eloquently, in Shakespeare’s *HAMLET*. If, indeed, Euripides in his later maturity did come to despair, he despaired not so much of human beings as of the efficacy of human reason, and in this he was clearly more closely allied to Empedocles than to the rationalist tradition of Socrates, Plato, and, after them, Aristotle. This is what Professor Dodds meant when he observed that “what chiefly preoccupied Euripides in his

later work was not so much the impotence of reason in man as the wider doubt whether any rational purpose could be seen in the ordering of human life and the governance of the world. That trend culminates in the *BACCHAE*, whose religious content is . . . the recognition of a 'Beyond' which is outside our moral categories and inaccessible to our reason."⁵⁸ What good will all our human reason do us if the basis of the natural order is actually incomprehensible to reason? No less, Euripides was equally aware that reasoning according to false premises can, and often does, result in tragic error. In Nietzsche's frame of reference, Euripides was a man capable of admitting what he *really* knows.

The *MEDEA* was produced in 431. Its references to the unpopularity of philosophers and the dangers come of introducing new truths to the public quite obviously reflect the religious persecutions going on at the time. Critics, beginning with Aristotle, have objected to the use of the "god in the car" with which it ends; others have defended this use. Seneca in his *MEDEA* (ll.1026–1027), in lines about which I will have more to say later, utilized the occasion to make an avowal of apostasy:

per alta vade spatia sublimi aethere;
testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos.

[venture through lofty heights upwards into celestial spheres; to bear witness, where thou soarest, that no gods are to be found.]

For Euripides, I believe, it was otherwise. It is possible to read the *MEDEA* on a mythic level and to conclude that a relationship which is based on murder and treachery, as is that of Jason and Medea, could only end in murder and treachery. Indeed, in the secure moral universe of Aeschylus, it could end no other way. Yet, that is not the way Euripides did end it. For him the image of Medea soaring into the heavens drawn by a chariot harnessed to dragons indicated the irrational principle triumphant in the natural order.

According to Pausanias, one tradition had it that the children of Jason and Medea were killed by an hysterical Corinthian mob. Euripides altered this. In his play, Medea herself murders her children. Much of her tragedy is produced by the mental torment of her inner struggle, her fluctuation and indecision, as she battles her possession by *thymos* in lines 1050–1063, and elsewhere:

I let go of my enemy unpunished?
I must venture this. But the bleating cowardice of
a soft, weakly, effeminate heart also exerts its seduc-
tive wiles upon me. Go into the house, children.
Whoso other than Themis [goddess of law and justice]
be present on the spot at such a sacrifice to my
sense of duty: my hand will not be led astray!
Woe! Woe!
Not upon my soul, surely not this shameful deed.
Let them be, O wretch, be sparing of those you bore!
Let them live here in good cheer.

Nay, before the dwellers in Hades' netherworld, sufferers from divine vengeance, it cannot be that I shall let my children be treated spitefully by my enemies. Since strong necessity [anagke] dictates: they will die. Seeing that it is fated, I shall slay them myself, I shall accomplish the deed.

Once the deed is done and Medea whisked off through the agency of her grandfather, Helios, we can agree with H.D.F. Kitto's observation in *GREEK TRAGEDY* (1950) that "the end of the MEDEA does not come out of the logic of the action or the law of necessity and probability, but is contrived by Euripides, deliberately, as the final revelation of his thought. When we begin to see Medea not merely as the betrayed and vindictive wife but as the impersonation of one of the blind and irrational forces in human nature, we begin to find that catharsis for which we looked in vain in the messenger-speech. It is this transformation that finally explains the 'revolting' and deepens a dramatic story into tragedy. . . . This imaginative and necessary climax is not the logical ending to the story of Medea the ill-used wife of Corinth, but it is the climax to Euripides' underlying tragic conception."⁵⁹

At the end of the MEDEA, we know for a certainty that the sentiment of the servant in the HIPPOLYTUS is wrong: the gods are not wiser than men. Nor do they serve the cause of justice. In the NICOMACHEAN ETHICS, Aristotle rejected the notion that a human being can love a god. In fact, for the first time in what survives of Classical Greek writing the word *philotheos* [love of a god] is used by Aristotle; but the word *theoydes* [fearing god] is already to be found in the ODYSSEY. I do not doubt that Aristotle would have rejected C. G. Jung's conclusion in ANTWORT AUF HIOB [ANSWER TO JOB] that "Gott kann geliebt und muss gefürchtet werden" [God can be loved and must be feared]⁶⁰; I am not so certain Euripides would have done so.

Aristotle, despite his critical posture, had to single out Euripides as the most tragic of poets. He probably recognized in Euripides' work, and a drama such as the MEDEA in particular, what it was that would be able to inspire that foremost Stoic, Chrysippus, to quote virtually all of the MEDEA in the course of his writings. Euripides conceived men and women, twenty-four centuries before the advent of existentialism, as being confronted by a universe that is fundamentally irrational.

Finally, even more than Sophocles, Euripides reduced the role played by the Chorus from what it is in Aeschylus; at times, indeed, it becomes almost an irrelevance. Yet, it re-emerges centuries hence, in those *romans noirs* in which a first-person narrator comments on the characters and the events he encounters. It is to be found no less in those *films noirs* narrated by the protagonist. But this is not its subtlest use. In Greek tragedy, the Chorus often tells us what were the feelings, opinions, and perspectives of the playwright himself. In *film noir* this role is taken over by the camera which shows us only what the direc-

tor wants us to see and thus, generally, as spectators we come to the conclusions the director wanted us to come to in the *praxis* of the film.

SENECAN TRAGEDY

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born in Roman Spain at Cordoba about 5 B.C. His father was an administrative official, a procurator, who was interested in rhetoric, debate, and public speaking. He wrote two handbooks addressing these subjects which have survived. One brother of the younger Seneca, Mela, became father of the poet, Lucan; the other, Novatus, refused to exercise jurisdiction over St. Paul when he was governor of Achaëa and this earned him a mention in the Book of Acts in the Bible. Seneca, as Virgil, suffered from asthma, but in his case this may have been complicated by tuberculosis. His illness became so severe in his younger days that only concern for his father prevented him from committing suicide. Part of his early life was spent in Egypt where his uncle by marriage was viceroy for Tiberius. The facilities for research in Egypt, especially at Alexandria, must have been considerable as Pliny reported in the sixth volume of his *NATURAL HISTORY* that Seneca's work on India contained references to 60 rivers and 118 different races. Seneca was also an enthusiastic student of speculative natural science and Pliny regarded him as an authority on geology, marine life, and meteorology. Conversely, his attention was also drawn to Oriental mysticism and Pythagoreanism before he was won completely to Stoic philosophy. This commitment to Stoicism seems at times to have been at odds with his interest in natural science.

Seneca trained for the bar and entered public life. Dio Cassius in his *ROMAN HISTORY* recorded that Seneca was such a brilliant speaker before the Senate that he aroused Caligula's jealousy and only the intercession of a woman who claimed Seneca would soon be dead of tuberculosis induced the emperor to spare his life. Understandably, Seneca retired from public life until Caligula was succeeded by Claudius, but once again, this time as a result of inspiring the jealous ire of the emperor's wife, Messalina, he ran afoul of the imperial throne, was again in jeopardy of his life, only to have his sentence commuted to banishment to the island of Corsica. The political instability of the time in which he lived no doubt confirmed Seneca's belief in the unpredictability of *rota Fortunae*; yet his bold Stoicism in a letter to his mother from this period is contradicted by another he addressed to Polybius at the imperial court evincing the most abject flattery. During his absence, his father died, and his son, and then, finally, his wife. His only real consolation throughout these eight lonely years of exile came from the warm reception accorded by friends to his poems, essays, and tragedies which he wrote while banished.

When Messalina was executed by order of the emperor, the way was free for Agrippina to marry Claudius. Some Chaldaean soothsayers predicted that her son, Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus Nero, would become emperor and kill her.

This only served to fire her ambition. She recalled Seneca to Rome, had him appointed to the office of praetor, and made him tutor to her son who was twelve. According to Tacitus, Agrippina was convinced that Seneca's growing literary reputation would enhance her son's popularity. Five years later, she poisoned Claudius and Seneca was on hand to write Nero's speeches after his assumption to the throne.

If Nero's first five years were a triumph from an administrative point of view, he was deeply indebted to his advisers, in particular, Seneca and Burrus, the latter an army officer. Most of Nero's murderous impulses were channeled by these two into what Tacitus termed *voluptatibus concessis* [permissible public diversions]. Dio Cassius went so far as to claim that Seneca and Burrus, not Nero, administered the empire. In a sense, a turn of Fortune's wheel had suddenly projected Seneca into the role of Plato's philosopher-king, but it was a situation that could not last given Nero's temperament. After the failure of an elaborate scheme to make his mother's death appear an accident, Nero had her executed.

"Non potest studium salutare fieri sine frugalitatis cura; frugalitas autem paupertas voluntaria est" [Study cannot be made salutary without diligent moderation; moderation is but voluntary poverty], Seneca would later write in Epistle XVII of his *EPISTULAE MORALES AD LUCILIUM* [MORAL EPISTLES TO LUCILIUS] and this had long been his teaching. But his life-style contradicted his philosophy. In four years, he accumulated 300 million sesterces, built great gardens around his estate, and gave lavish banquets. His enemies were quick to taunt him for his presumed hypocrisy, but as long as Agrippina kept adding to his wealth and lent him her political support these complaints came to nothing. Once she was dead, however, and Nero began to listen to other advisers, the end was near. Burrus, Tacitus believed, was murdered; Seneca, who had helped Nero assuage the public reaction to Agrippina's execution, was presently alone and surrounded by enemies. Perceiving the gravity of his position, Seneca asked Nero to be allowed to retire from public life. His request was granted. In another of those curious fluctuations of fortune to which he was subject, Dio Cassius recorded that Seneca surrendered his entire fortune to Nero, apparently of his own volition. For the next three years Seneca *did* devote himself exclusively to philosophy, composing his *EPISTULAE MORALES* while traveling in Southern Italy with his second wife, Paulina. They were singularly devoted to each other. Seneca had always claimed that he had maintained, even in the best of times, a simple diet, abstained from alcohol, slept on a hard bed, took cold baths, and ran; whether true or not, during these last years he did live on a diet of wild fruits and water. His body became emaciated. It would seem, in retrospect, that while he had once perhaps wanted wealth and power and glory, and had got them, he had also given them up. Nero had him proscribed after the Piso conspiracy, in which he had played no role, and Tacitus' account of his death in Book XV of the *ANNALS* remains one of his most moving historical portraits.

Perhaps St. Augustine was correct when in *DE CIVITATE DEI* [THE CITY OF GOD] he said of Seneca that he was a man who “quod culpabat adorabat” [worshiped what he deplored]; but then, Augustine himself was a man whose life revealed the most profound contradictions and he, too, was changed in his later years from what he had been earlier. Our chief concern with Seneca must be with how his philosophy and outlook influenced his conception of tragedy, how his techniques altered the way tragic themes were treated in his time and later, and how these attributes became ingredients in the narrative structures of many notable *films noirs*. His impact on the theatre and the Elizabethan theatre in particular was such that T. S. Eliot wrote that “no author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the Elizabethan form of tragedy than did Seneca”⁶¹; and F. L. Lucas commented in *SENECA AND ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY* (1922), “if you seek Seneca’s memorial, look round on the tragic stage of England, France, and Italy.”⁶²

Thematically, Seneca’s ten tragedies cannot be divorced from his Stoic philosophy. Zeno had been the first to codify the philosophy which came to be known by this name, due to the colonnade, or *stoa*, where he taught in Athens in the Fourth century B.C. This philosophy was expanded and deepened by others over the centuries until Seneca’s time. Essentially it taught that a man must bring his life into accord with the laws of nature and in this way he would be conforming to the divine will. Foremost in living, then, is to value least those things which can be taken away and, therefore, to be resigned to whatever Fortune may bring. A man must do without everything except the essentials—basic foods, water, practical clothing, and shelter—and he must perfect the divine spark in his soul, his *daemon*, which in Stoicism is his ability to reason. Reason alone would teach him that the body, the passions, the appetites must submit to the mind’s even-handed control. In this way a man achieves the ideal of *virtus*; he can be said to be truly happy. In *THE MANUAL* recorded by Arrian the Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, who lived at Rome during the First century A.D., said: “Remember that you are an actor in a play of such a kind as the author may choose; if short, of a short one; if long, of a long one. If he wishes you to act the part of a poor man, see that you act the part naturally; if the part of a lame man, of a magistrate, of a private person, do the same. For this is your duty: to act well the part that is given to you; but to select the part, belongs to another.”⁶³

To a degree, perhaps, because he recognized his own shortcomings, Seneca humanized the austere ideal of Stoicism from that of a man immune to emotion to a man in whom emotion in moderation was admissible, even to be expected. On one point scholars and critics have long been in agreement: Seneca created the formal divisions in drama which triumphed as the five-act play throughout Renaissance Europe. Seneca did have a penchant for violent horrors in his plays, but the worse abuses of the Elizabethan stage would probably have been no less offensive to him than they are to us. In the epistle known as the *ARS POETICA* [ART OF POETRY], Horace remarked “ne pueros coram populo Medea

trucidet” [Medea may not slaughter her boys in public]. Seneca as an exponent of the so-called Tragedy of Blood, when he composed his MEDEA, *did* have her kill both her boys on stage. In his TROADES, Astyanax is led to his death by Ulysses. Before Ulysses can throw him from the parapet, he defiantly leaps into the void. This is how the messenger describes his corpse (ll.1115–1117):

soluta cervix silicis impulsu, caput
ruptum cerebro penitus expresso—iacet
deforme corpus.

[His body lies deformed, his neck broken by the impact of the rock, the brain from the head burst into pieces, completely and visibly.]

In his verse translation of TROADES in THE TRAGEDIES OF SENECA (1907), Frank Justice Miller rendered these lines thus:

Confused and crushed upon the ragged ground.⁶⁴

In editing Miller’s translation for THE COMPLETE ROMAN DRAMA (1942), George E. Duckworth restored the original meaning to the lines in a footnote. This is, of course, one of Seneca’s fabled efforts at brutal imagery, but one need only compare it with many of the descriptions of murder and mayhem written by the “hard-boiled” school discussed in the next chapter to see how tame it is by comparison and either how squeamish those critics were who censured him or how callous we have since become to the vividness which is now customary in the description of the destruction of human life.

In GREEK DRAMA FOR EVERYMAN (1954), F. L. Lucas renewed this discussion. “Yet it must be owned,” he wrote, “that some conventions of the Greek theatre seem far from happy. Thus it is a rule that acts of violence must take place ‘off.’ This avoids Elizabethan horrors like men being flayed alive with false skins, or Gloucester’s eyes slithering about the boards. But, carried to rigid excess, it leads to a certain artificiality; and to a plethora of Messengers’ Speeches. There remains some force in the jest of the French critic Ogier (1628) that streams of messengers are more suited to a good inn than to a good tragedy. It would seem wiser to avoid atrocious plots altogether than to conduct them partly *in camera*.”⁶⁵ This was early on in his book. However, near the end of it, he quoted Sainte-Beuve on Terence: “ ‘Terence est le contraire de bien des choses, il l’est surtout de la dureté, de l’inhumanité, de la brutalité—de ce qu’on court risque, à mesure qu’on avance dans les littératures, d’ériger insensiblement en beauté et de prendre pour la marque première du talent’ ” [Terence is not one for kind regards; he is one, above all, for hardness, for inhumanity, for brutality—and, as one proceeds in the study of literature, one runs the risk of mistaking this for elegance and the mark of a first-rate talent]. Having made this citation, Lucas then followed it with the reflection that “in the age of Joyce and D. H. Lawrence, and of aesthetics celebrating the artistry

of bullfights, that passage has lost none of its force.”⁶⁶ Accordingly, I am not sure what precisely his position was with regard to violence, lest it be one of moral disapprobation; and, notwithstanding, such a posture could not stem the tide. Fascination with violence and *la dureté* [hardness] came to characterize the *romans noirs* of the BLACK MASK school in particular and have been singled out as important aspects of literary “realism” by modern critics. Further, as *film noir* developed, there was also a tendency to make physical violence more and more graphic, albeit only rarely daring to go as far as Roman Polanski’s “enhancement” of Shakespeare’s play in his film *MACBETH* (Columbia, 1971) where the rape of Macduff’s wife and the butchery of his children are shown in vivid detail.

“Seneca’s Oedipus has the traditional justification for blinding himself,” T. S. Eliot wrote in “Seneca in Elizabethan Translation” (1927); “and the blinding itself is far less offensive than that in *LEAR*. In *TITUS*, the hero cuts off his own hand in view of the audience, who can also testify to the mutilation of the hands and the tongue of Lavinia. In *THE SPANISH TRAGEDY*, Hieronymo bites off his own tongue. There is nothing like this in Seneca.”⁶⁷

I find a far more striking parallel than violence between Seneca and the American “hard-boiled” writers. In short dialogue sequences Seneca employed stichomythia, a technique of line by line interchange between two characters which, while it might occasionally obscure a character with its distracting epigrams, can often be used to significant rhetorical effect, as in the *TROADES* in the argument between Agamemnon and Pyrrus. Here it is terse, dramatic, even savage as a means of projecting character. A similar use of it can be found in the *MEDEA* (ll. 167–176) in a conversation between Medea and the nurse:

Nurse: *Moriere.* [You will die.]

Medea: *Cupio.* [I am possessed.]

Nurse: *Profuge.* [Flee.]

Medea: *Paenituit fugae.* [I repent my prior flight.]

Nurse: *Medea,* [Medea,]

Medea: *Fiam.* [May I act accordingly!]

Nurse: *Mater es.* [You are a mother.]

Medea: *Cui sim vides.* [You know who made me one.]

Nurse: *Profugere dubitas?* [Why do you hesitate to flee?]

Medea: *Fugiam, at ulciscar prius.* [I shall flee, but first may I avenge myself.]

And here is a typical dialogue scene from *JEALOUS WOMAN* (1950) by James M. Cain:

“Please continue, Mrs. Sperry.”

“I was sitting by my window, very depressed.”

“At—anything relevant to this case?”

"At my husband's talk about ending his life."

"He'd been talking that way?"

"Often."

"Yes, but lately?"

"That night."

"Did he have some reason?"

"None, none at all."⁶⁸

It is Seneca's Stoicism which in his *TROADES* provides his principal characters—Hecuba, Andromache, Polyxena—with dignity and courage in the face of annihilation. Unlike Euripides' *MEDEA*, at the end of Seneca's there are no hovering gods, no foreboding of more disaster, only resignation (ll.1165–1167):

Hecuba: Go, Danaians, go, seek refuge now in your safe homes; let the fleet's spread sails traverse tranquil seas. The girl and the boy [Polyxena and Astyanax] have been slain; the war is finished.

In Act II, Agamemnon argues with Pyrrus. The latter insists that Achilles' shade demands the death of Polyxena and for this reason the sea has been becalmed. Calchas, the soothsayer, adds that the Fates also demand the death of Hector's young son, Astyanax. Yet, here Seneca's Stoicism contradicts the whole *praxis* of his drama; he included a Chorus to close the act which repudiates the possibility of an after-life, dismissing Pluto and Cerberus (l.406) as being "*par sollicito fabula somnio*" [as the fiction of a troubled dream].

Shakespeare would never permit a philosophical commitment to undermine his instincts as a dramatist; but then Shakespeare was first and last a dramatist; Seneca was a philosopher who wrote dramas. Witness the chorus in Seneca's *OEDIPUS* (ll.980–994)

By fate we are driven: submit to fate.
Anxious cares cannot alter
The threads of the fixed spindle.
Whatever we mortals endure,
Whatever we do comes from on high
And the distaff of Lachesis which keeps
Her decrees can be rolled back by no hand.
Everything proceeds according to its transmitted
Destination and our first day apportioned our last.
Those obligations which extend from their own causes
May not be turned back even by God.
One moves a fixed course and for such a one
There is no mobility to be gained by prayer.
To many to be afraid is itself harmful, since
Many meet their own destiny while fleeing the Fates.

This passage reminds us of the Duke's speech in *MEASURE FOR MEASURE* (III.i.8–13):

a breath thou art,
 Servile to all the skyey influences
 That dost this habitation, where thou keep'st
 Hourly afflict: merely, thou art death's fool;
 For him thou labour'st by thus flight to shun
 And yet runn'st toward him still.

The difference, it would seem, is that in Shakespeare this is the Duke's philosophy. For Seneca, it was otherwise. As Moses Hadas noted in *A HISTORY OF LATIN LITERATURE* (1952), "it has been held, indeed, that Seneca's main object in writing the plays was to propagate his doctrine, and that he deliberately arranged the plays . . . in order to present a systematic course, each play in its proper order illustrating some Stoic principle." Seneca's plays are prescriptive: they present an idealized image of how one is to die "correctly." Again, in Professor Hadas' words, "the plays on Hercules (a Stoic hero) are the framework; *TROADES* and *PHOENISSAE* center upon the problems of life, death, and destiny; *MEDEA* and *PHAEDRA* provide exemplars for a treatise on the passions; and *AGAMEMNON*, *OEDIPUS*, and *THYESTES* deal with free will, sin, and retribution."⁶⁹ To an extent, Aeschylus' plays might also be viewed as prescriptions: they were written to demonstrate that justice rules the natural order; as Sophocles sought in his plays to show that the driving forces behind the natural order are ultimately a mystery that can be known and understood only imperfectly by human beings; and as Euripides, in his later plays, prescribed an irrational and irreducible impulse at play within the natural order.

Quintilian thought Seneca's style decadent, whatever its rhetorical forcefulness, and advised that he be read only by those whose standard of excellence had been formed on more severe and mature models. "Many things, as I have said," he wrote in *INSTITUTIO ORATORIA* (X.1.131), "were commendable, even admirable in him, albeit one must needs be moderately and diligently selective. How I wish he could have been that selective himself! Such a natural ability deserved to be more finely tuned—since what he did attempt he accomplished."

The drama as a literary form is indebted to him for going beyond Euripides in the exploration of conscience and in increasing the introspection of his characters. There is that memorable passage from the Chorus in *THYESTES* (ll.401–403):

illi mors gravis incubat
 qui, notus nimis omnibus,
 ignotus maritur sibi.

[Death rests heavily on him who, well known by everyone, dies not knowing himself.]

For Seneca the Delphic invocation, *gnothē seauton* [know thyself], was more than generic; it could also be individual. Surely this idea, if not indeed this very

passage, was what E. F. Watling had in mind when, in his Introduction to his translations in *SENECA: FOUR TRAGEDIES AND OCTAVIA* (1966), he spoke of how “Seneca decorates his plays with mythological garnishing, his characters apostrophize the gods and his Choruses muse upon Fate, but what really interests him, and what brings life to his otherwise frigid reproductions of Greek masterpieces, is the exploration of the human conscience, of man’s need to know and justify his own motives. This attitude of introspection was the link which Seneca provided between the fatalistic superhumanity of the ancient, and the humanism of the modern drama, and which made possible the fusion of classical uniformity with romantic multiformity in the Elizabethan theatre.”⁷⁰

SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

If Roman drama, and the tragedies of Seneca in particular, are a finely sculpted monument on how best to die, Elizabethan drama is a paean to the bounty of life. As the most illustrious of the Elizabethan playwrights, I am certain that William Shakespeare is rather more familiar to the average reader of English than any of the other playwrights I have been discussing; yet, I should mention, that out of the forty or more books I have read about him, his life, and his plays over the years, his true personality and personal beliefs remain far more obscure than any of these others. It is this circumstance, perhaps, which has prompted scholars and critics to attempt upon occasion to prove that he was a Roman Catholic, or an Anglican, or an atheist, or even a nascent existentialist. Walter Kaufmann, in his book *FROM SHAKESPEARE TO EXISTENTIALISM* (1960), quoted all of sonnet XCIV which begins with these lines:

They that have the power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone. . . .

For Kaufmann, this sonnet “celebrates Shakespeare’s un-Christian ideal, which was also the ideal of Nietzsche, who expressed it, not quite three centuries later, in the chapter ‘On Those Who Are Sublime’ in *ZARATHUSTRA*.”⁷¹ Whereas, for me, I tend to find all such efforts to attribute a specific ideal to Shakespeare an experiment in futility. The guiding idea of this sonnet was no doubt derived from Seneca’s *TROADES* in a line given to Agamemnon (1.334):

Minimum decet libere cui multum licet.

[It is befitting that he who can freely do the most do the least.]

John W. Cunliffe in *THE INFLUENCE OF SENECA ON ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY* (1893) wrote what still remains the definitive book on this subject. In *KING LEAR*, for example, we have, according to Professor Cunliffe, “Seneca’s hopeless fatalism, not only in the catastrophe, but repeatedly brought

forward in the course of the play.”⁷² Hence, such lines as Gloucester’s (IVi.37–38):

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport.

or those of Edgar (Vii.9–11):

What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all.

But Shakespeare was not really a Stoic that I can see. At times, as in another passage in *LEAR* which got itself written right into the dialogue of Orson Welles’ *film noir*, *THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI* (Columbia, 1948), Shakespeare has a character, Albany, speak as if he were out of a play by Aeschylus (IVii.46–49):

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offenses,
It will come.
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.

The Play King in *HAMLET* is not quite sure whether the *primum mobile* of the natural order is Eros or Fortuna (IIIii.209–213):

Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.
This world is not for aye, nor ’tis not strange
That even our loves should with our fortunes change;
For ’tis a question left us yet to prove,
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.

However, when Macbeth asks (IIIi.78–81):

Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No. This my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

his words only echo Hercules’ agony in Seneca’s *HERCULES FURENS* (II.1323–1329):

What Tanäis or what Nile or what violent Tigris in
the Persian stream, or what savage Rhine; or, if you
will, what turbulent Tagus thronging with Spanish
wealth, will be able to cleanse this hand? Let ice-
cold Lake Maeotis pour its northern sea water onto me,

indeed let the whole ocean run over my hands, the shameful deed will still cling.

T. S. Eliot was wont to write literary criticism from the perspective of a Christian apologist. In his Introduction to the re-issue edition of Seneca's TENNE TRAGEDIES in Elizabethan translation, he quoted the lines with which the MEDEA concludes and added in a footnote: "Here the translator seems to have hit on the sense: 'Bear witness, grace of God is none in place of thy repayre.' A modern translator (Professor Miller, editing the Loeb translation text) gives 'bear witness, where thou ridest, that there are no gods.' It seems to me more effective if we take the meaning to be that there are no gods *where (ever) Medea is*, instead of a mere outburst of atheism. But the old Farnaby edition observes 'testimonium contra deorum justitiam, vel argumento nullos esse in caelo deos' [a testimony against the justice of the gods, or rather a demonstration that there are no gods in heaven]." ⁷³ In view of the fact that, as a Stoic, Seneca did not believe in the gods, I cannot imagine why Eliot would have preferred him not to have denied their existence, except that it offended his sensibility; and, of course, while terming these lines a "verbal *coup de théâtre*" and saying he could "think of no other play which reserves such a shock for the last word," his religious bias was such that he regarded Seneca as an inferior philosopher compared to Aquinas and, therefore, concluded that it is part of Shakespeare's "special eminence to have expressed an inferior philosophy in the greatest poetry. It is certainly one cause of the terror and awe with which he inspires us." ⁷⁴ Just how it is that an inferior philosophy, no matter how great the poetry, can inspire terror and awe he made no effort to explain. Could it have been that Eliot's belief in Christianity was a bulwark he erected to protect himself precisely from the fatalism to be found in Seneca invariably and in Shakespeare occasionally?

I cannot be certain. But I do agree with his observation, in which the French word *bovarysme* may be regarded as the equivalent of the Greek *hamartía*, that no "writer has ever exposed this *bovarysme*, the human will to see things as they are not, more clearly than Shakespeare." ⁷⁵ Yet, even here, perhaps the superlative is misplaced; surely Sophocles exploited the tragic theme of resistance to the truth as artfully and poetically as did Shakespeare.

Finally, I disagree totally with Eliot in his essay "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" (1927) that, because the Elizabethan period was one "of dissolution and chaos," so "any emotional attitude which seems to give a man something firm, even if it be only the attitude of 'I am myself alone,' is eagerly taken up." ⁷⁶ Rather, I think E.M.W. Tillyard came much closer to the actuality when he wrote in THE ELIZABETHAN WORLD PICTURE (1943) that "all the violence of Elizabethan drama has nothing to do with a dissolution of moral standards: on the contrary, it can afford to indulge itself just because those standards were so powerful." ⁷⁷ If there is one consistency in the world-view in Shakespeare's plays, it is that there *is* a natural order and that man may not

violate its laws with impunity. This is why Lennox is able, in *MACBETH*, to detect that something untoward has occurred (IIiii.59–66):

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
And prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion and confused events
New hatch'd to the woeful time: the obscure bird
Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
Was feverous and did shake.

Whatever can be attested as to Seneca's influence on Shakespeare as a source for ideas or notions to be translated into poetry, the fact remains that Shakespeare never wrote a *MEDEA*; in his tragedies, the natural order may be disrupted for a time by human villainy, but by the conclusion the natural order has been restored. As Professor Tillyard pointed out, "to us *chaos* means hardly more than confusion on a large scale; to an Elizabethan it meant the cosmic anarchy before creation and the wholesale dissolution that would result if the pressure of Providence relaxed and allowed the law of Nature to cease functioning."⁷²

G. Wilson Knight in *THE WHEEL OF FIRE* (1930) noted about *MACBETH* that "darkness permeates the play. The greater part of the action takes place in the murk of night."⁷³ This certainly makes *MACBETH* a ready source to be turned into a motion picture in the *noir* film style; but Shakespeare's contribution to the narrative structure of paradigmatic *films noirs* extends far beyond atmosphere, indeed it is an essential ingredient in all exemplary *films noirs* from *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* (Paramount, 1944) to *BODY HEAT* (Warner's, 1981): namely, the five-act dramatic structure. Having inherited the structure of the five-act tragedy from Seneca, Shakespeare in writing all of his tragedies refined it with extraordinary precision into five distinct parts in the overall *praxis*: (1) Situation; (2) Conflict; (3) Crisis; (4) Reversal; (5) Catastrophe.⁷⁴ In his finest tragic dramas, such as *MACBETH*, the Catastrophe is accompanied by *anagnorisis*, or recognition. No less in *MACBETH*, the Reversal—which actually extends over slightly into the beginning of Act V—is Aristotle's classic *peripeteia*: both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth discover that all of their human efforts have led to results exactly opposite from those they intended. A medieval maxim has it: "Homo est utriusque naturae vinculum" [Man is the link between the extremes of nature]. His animal nature unites him with the animal world; but his reason allies him with the divine. For this reason, when Macbeth murders King Duncan, he must flee from his reason. "Reason was supposed to be God's gift to man, which, if obeyed, could reveal to him nature and nature's order, in the individual soul, in society, even in the cosmos," Francis Fergusson wrote in *SHAKESPEARE: THE PATTERN IN HIS CARPET* (1971). "Macbeth is therefore trying to violate his own nature,

the basis of human society, and the divine order in the stars. He cannot succeed; his reason will be with him however fast he travels. At this moment in the play he senses the fact that this unwinnable race is all he has to look forward to.”⁸¹ This is Macbeth’s recognition. These five parts of Shakespearean tragedy do not correspond to the five acts themselves in most cases, but they are always present as divisions of the narrative and dramatic structure.

Gilbert Murray in his essay comparing Hamlet and Orestes as tragic heroes observed that “both heroes also tend—if I may use such an expression—to bully any woman they are left alone with. . . . Hamlet bullies Ophelia cruelly and ‘speaks daggers’ to the Queen. He never meets any other woman. Orestes is very surly to Iphigeneia; draws his sword on Elektra in one play, and takes her for a devil in another; holds his dagger at the throat of Hermione till she faints; denounces, threatens, and kills Klytaimnestra, and tries to kill Helen. There are not many tragic heroes with such an extreme anti-feminist record.”⁸²

Misogyny is quite evident in Greek tragedy; such, however, is not really the case with Shakespeare. Attitudes toward woman are as various as are characters who project them. In TWELFTH NIGHT, Viola says (Ilii.30–32):

How easy is it for the proper-false
In women’s waxen hearts to set their forms!
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we!

but then, the Duke can tell her (Iiv.30–35):

let still the woman take
An elder than herself: so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband’s heart:
For, boy, however do we praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women’s are.

I suspect that for Shakespeare the attitudes that men have toward women, just as those women have toward men, were often but manifestations of *hamartía*. In TROILUS AND CRESSIDA Shakespeare was intent, on a very high level, to satirize the illusions by which men live and by which they die. It is one of his most persistent themes and here he revealed in love—Troilus’ adolescent romantic illusion about Cressida—and in war—the collective romantic illusions about honor and women as property which have inspired ten years of war between the Greeks and the Trojans. Diomedes says of Helen (IVii.68–74):

She’s bitter to her country: hear me, Paris:
For every false drop in her bawdy veins
A Grecian’s life hath sunk; for every scruple
Of her contaminated carrion weight,

A Trojan hath been slain: since she could speak,
 She hath not given so many good words breath
 As for her Greeks and Trojans suffer'd death.

And to this is joined Troilus' disillusionment in Cressida—only for him, as for many men, the actions of a single woman by irrational inductive reasoning can be made to condemn all women, even a man's own mother, a sentiment which Homer had Agamemnon voice in the netherworld. Troilus sees Cressida with Diomedes, but he prefers not to admit it (VII.125–135):

Troilus: Was Cressid here?

Ulysses: I cannot conjure, Trojan.

Troilus: She was not, sure.

Ulysses: Most sure she was.

Troilus: Why, my negation hath no taste of madness.

Ulysses: Nor mine, my lord: Cressid was here but now.

Troilus: Let it not be believed for womanhood!

Think, we had mothers; do not give advantage
 To stubborn critics, apt, without a theme,
 For depravation, to square the general sex
 By Cressid's rule: rather think this not Cressid.

Ulysses: What hath she done, prince, that can soil our mothers?

Troilus: Nothing at all, unless this were she.

F. L. Lucas in *LITERATURE AND PSYCHOLOGY* (1951) recalled these lines from Edna St. Vincent Millay's XXXII sonnet:

That April should be shattered by a gust,
 That August should be levelled by a rain,
 I can endure; and that the lifted dust
 Of man should settle to the earth again;
 But that a dream can die, will be a thrust
 Between my ribs for ever of hot pain.

Lucas saw not only that Othello was the victim of a shattered ideal of womanhood, but Hamlet as well. "The advantage," he wrote, "of this view—that Hamlet is the victim of a too close mother-love, lacerated by the loss *both* of her *and* of faith in her—seems to me that it credits Shakespeare with no special knowledge beyond what his own keen eyes and ears could have gathered."⁸³ I cannot but agree with this conclusion, that Hamlet not only lost his mother to his uncle, but that "she has also destroyed his faith in her, in other women, in humanity, in life itself."⁸⁴

Shakespeare could and did perceive this kind of disillusionment of men in

women and he depicted the misogyny and violence to which it could lead; but I do not believe that he was himself a victim to it, any more than he believed what the Duke told Viola about women marrying older men since we know that he married a woman eight years his senior. Indeed, the tremendous difference between the heroines in most *films noirs* and the heroines in Shakespeare's plays is that in the latter men are usually victims of their own illusions and fantasies: in *films noirs* the women are shown to be quite as nightmarish as ever they were imagined by men to be.

I have only one last point to make. In a way it goes back to that line I quoted from Shakespeare's JULIUS CAESAR near the beginning of this chapter:

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

The stress is on responsibility. "If one were to make a broad distinction between Fate as it appears in ancient Greek and modern European tragedy," Martin Mueller wrote in *CHILDREN OF OEDIPUS AND OTHER ESSAYS ON THE IMITATION OF GREEK TRAGEDY, 1550-1800* (1980), "one could point to the fact that the inquiry of Oedipus, in keeping with the strongly cognitive cast of the fifth-century mind, establishes his identity and the cause of his misery rather than the responsibility for his deeds. But in European tragedy a concern with Fate is most likely to develop in the context of the search for responsibility."⁸⁵ No less is this true in *film noir*. No matter what events occur and are attributed to the workings of a blind or malicious Fate, the narrative structure is still inevitably concerned with the question of, if not the search for, responsibility. This is the teleological orientation I mentioned in the General Introduction and in this regard *films noirs* are more closely allied with the theatre of Euripides, Shakespeare, and modern European tragedy than with that practiced by Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Seneca. Even in such a recent *film noir* as *TAXI DRIVER* (Columbia, 1976), whatever its debt to Elizabethan carnage in the litter of corpses in its final act, or however ironically the attribution of personal responsibility is treated, the quest for it is nonetheless pervasive.

Hostages of Fate

Because for some the idea of a *roman noir* may be considered the equivalent of what in English is called the penny dreadful and in German *der Schauerroman*, I should like to make it clear at the outset that I am using the term in this book in a much broader context. I intend it to encompass that literary trend which for subject matter concentrates on the dark, nightmarish side of life, that goes beyond the dreaming and nostalgia of the Romantic movement on the one hand and the strictly controlled moderation and respect for proportion true of the Classical spirit on the other. This is not to say, however, that the *roman noir* in its multitude of manifestations has not at various times drawn sustenance from both Classicism and Romanticism. “Toutes les femmes qu’il a eu,” Gustave Flaubert confessed to the Goncourts, embodying the essence of Romanticism, “n’ont jamais été que les matelas d’une autre femme rêvée.”¹ Whereas, for Voltaire, the essence of Classicism is not to dream at all: “Je vais droit au fait—c’est ma devise.”²

In *ANATOMY OF CRITICISM: FOUR ESSAYS* (1957), Northrup Frye commented that “a critic may spend a thesis, a book, or even a life work on something he candidly admits to be third rate, simply because it is connected with something else that he thinks sufficiently important for his pains.”³ I must concede that none of the fiction I intend to discuss in this chapter—with the possible exception of that of Kay Boyle—is to be compared critically with those works with which I was preoccupied in the previous chapter; but it is necessary to survey this fiction—both the products of what is called the BLACK MASK school and other varieties of the *roman noir*—to grasp the contributions it made to *film noir*.

Detective fiction has among its precursors Gothic fiction which began with Horace Walpole’s *CASTLE OF OTRANTO* (1764) wherein all the action is set against the backdrop of a medieval castle. It was so popular it created its own vogue and was followed notably by Ann Radcliffe’s *THE ROMANCE OF THE*

FOREST (1791), THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO (1794), and THE ITALIAN (1797). Between these last two books, Matthew Gregory Lewis published his well-known Gothic novel, THE MONK (1796). Mrs. Radcliffe introduced in her fiction the convention of the “explained supernatural” whereby at the end of the story all of the supposedly supernatural events are shown to have had natural origins and causes. Mary Shelley with FRANKENSTEIN (1818) combined science fiction with a Gothic setting but, keeping within the convention, explained all the amazing effects in the novel as the consequence of advanced science. Beyond this grounding in material reality, according to Bertrand Evans in GOTHIC DRAMA FROM WALPOLE TO SHELLEY (1947), Gothic fiction readily standardized all its essential ingredients in these works, “the atmosphere of mystery, the spiral staircase, the grated windows, the secret panel, the trapdoor, the antique tapestries, the haunted chamber, the subterranean passage, the gallery, the vault, the turret, the castle itself, the convent, the cavern, the midnight bell, the ancient scroll, the fluttering candle flame, the clank of chains, the gloomy tyrant, the persecuted maiden, the insipid hero, the emaciated ‘unknown’ locked in the dank dungeon.”⁴

“Until the Gothic had been discovered, the serious American novel could not begin,” Leslie Fiedler asserted in LOVE AND DEATH IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL (1966); “and as long as that novel lasts, the Gothic cannot die.”⁵ I should not want to have to defend this sweeping claim with regard to American fiction in this century, but it does seem to have more than a little relevance for the Nineteenth century, particularly when it comes to such authors as Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe. And it was Poe who, pioneering in the field of the story of crime, created the detective story. “For Poe, to whom the tick of a watch could be ominous, the cardiac rhythm marks the expiring flow of time itself,” Harry Levin wrote in THE POWER OF BLACKNESS (1958). “As a professed materialist, he prefers to dwell upon the psychology of crime rather than upon the ethics of guilt. The psychological twist that makes his criminals more effectual than his lovers is hinted at in an embittered sentence from his correspondence: ‘It was my crime to have no one on earth who cared for me or loved me.’ Crime, in the absence of love, becomes a test of values; and murder, the transgression of ultimate law, becomes a moral equivalent for original sin. Hence it has been argued by a German philosopher, Max Bense, that the murder mystery is a *Mordepik*, the epic of our time.”⁶

It was Poe’s concern—I might almost say his obsession—with the psychology of committing a crime, and his disinterest in “the ethics of guilt,” which distinguished his fiction from that, say, of Fyodor Dostoyevsky; but it also tended to set the limitations of the detective story genre which he invented: the stress is almost invariably on the criminal’s violation of the social contract. The concern is not so much on why there is a corpse, a point I stressed in the General Introduction, but on who broke the law. The perpetrator must be discovered and removed, i.e., punished. For Howard Haycraft in MURDER FOR PLEASURE: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE DETECTIVE STORY (1941), Poe wrote only three genuine detective stories: “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,”

“The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” and “The Purloined Letter.” Neither “The Gold Bug” nor “Thou Art the Man” qualify as bona-fide detective stories because important evidence is withheld from the reader until the end of the story.

Haycraft, as the majority of those who have written about the history of the detective story, believed that detective fiction as a distinct genre had to await the invention of the official police detectives before it could appear in its familiar form. There is no doubt much truth in this consideration. François Eugène Vidocq had been a thief and a galley convict before he offered to join forces with the French government and established the Sûreté. After eighteen years’ service, he published a record of his adventures in four volumes titled *LES MÉMOIRES DE VIDOCQ* (1828). Poe was familiar with this source and in the first of his detective stories, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” which appeared in 1841, Dupin, Poe’s detective, tells the narrator that “ ‘Vidocq, for example, was a good guesser, and a persevering man. But, without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole. Thus there is such a thing as being too profound.’ ”⁷ Dupin also observes that “ ‘the Parisian police, so much extolled for their *acumen*, are cunning but no more.’ ”⁸ Citing this passage, Haycraft found it “a virtual ad hoc rendering of the quotation from Seneca which Poe later chose as the motto of ‘The Purloined Letter’ (*Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio*)” and felt that it “only shows how emphatic at all times was the distinction in his mind between amateur and professional, between Dupin and Vidocq.”⁹

I would render Seneca’s Latin thus: “Nothing is more odious to the wise man than great cunning.” It should also be noted that Poe italicized *acumen*, calling attention to its Latin origin. No less he glutted his style with gallicisms such as *outré* and *bizarre* which Charles Baudelaire, his French translator, excised, substituting more elegant and appropriate turns of phrase. It is therefore somewhat ironic that later writers in the genre of detective fiction, while carefully preserving Poe’s penchant for a rational and geometric plot, not only maintained his distinction between amateur and professional but even such words as *outré* and *bizarre* became irritating commonplaces in their prose style. What Poe created, in fact, was what is now termed the “classical” detective story in which the Gothic was played down and, in time, was eliminated altogether. Willard Huntington Wright who wrote the Philo Vance stories under the pseudonym S. S. Van Dine remarked in the Introduction to his anthology, *THE GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES* (1927), that “unusualness, *bizarrierie*, fantasy, or strangeness in subject-matter is rarely desirable. . . . The task confronting the writer of detective fiction is . . . the working of familiar materials into a difficult riddle. The skill of a detective story’s craftsmanship is revealed in the way these materials are fitted together, the subtlety with which the clues are presented, and the legitimate manner in which the final solution is withheld.”¹⁰

What happened to the Gothic elements and the Romanticism that was re-

jected out of hand by the authors of classical detective stories? They were combined with a concern for the milieu that produced a corpse and resurfaced in the most surprising place of all: in the so-called “hard-boiled” detective story which came to life first in the pages of *BLACK MASK* magazine. In *BLACK MASK*, the prototype of the professional private eye may have been Carroll John Daly’s Race Williams, but by 1926 Dashiell Hammett’s stories had become models for what has subsequently been called the *BLACK MASK* school. When compared with detective stories of the classical variety, hard-boiled detective fiction might seem more “realistic,” but this perspective is misleading. Ellery Queen, in an Introduction to a Hammett story collection, was convinced that Hammett’s detective stories combine “extreme romanticism of plot with extreme realism of characterization. His stories are the stuff of dreams; his characters are the flesh-and-blood of reality. The stories are flamboyant extravaganzas, but the characters in those stories are authentic human beings who talk, think, and act like real people. Their speech is tough, earthy, two syllabled; their desires, moods, frustrations are laid bare with probing frankness.”¹¹

I agree with the sentiment concerning “extreme romanticism of plot,” but not with that about the “realism of characterization.” Albert Camus in his critique of hard-boiled writing in *THE REBEL* (1956), translated by Anthony Bower, doubtless intended what he had to say to refer as much to “main-stream” authors such as Ernest Hemingway as to any from the *BLACK MASK* school, but it surely can be applied to all those writers who emerged from the pages of *BLACK MASK* to a position of relative prominence and the kind of fiction they wrote. “. . . Its technique,” Camus observed, “consists in describing men by their outside appearances, in their most casual actions, of reproducing without comment, everything they say down to their repetitions, and finally by acting as if men were entirely defined by their automatism. . . . This type of novel, purged of interior life, in which men seem to be observed behind a pane of glass, logically ends, with its emphasis on the pathological, by giving itself as its unique subject supposedly average man. In this way it is possible to explain the extraordinary number of ‘innocents’ who appear in this universe. The simpleton is the ideal subject for such an enterprise since he can only be defined—and completely defined—by his behavior. He is the symbol of the despairing world in which wretched automatons live in a machine-ridden universe, which American novelists have presented as a heart-rending but sterile protest.”¹²

HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE FICTION

DASHIELL HAMMETT

Hammett’s so-called “realistic” characters, as subsequently characters in the fiction of the *BLACK MASK* school generally, resolve themselves in the end

into simplified, objectified human motives and not characters in the fuller human sense at all. They are embodiments of varying attitudes toward life and, central among them, is that of the detective himself. I cannot here be concerned with Dashiell Hammett's biography; I dealt with that subject in *THE DETECTIVE IN HOLLYWOOD*. But I must stress that Hammett, in creating his various detectives, sought to articulate for himself a persona with which to face the world and that that persona was perhaps most successfully and effectively projected in the personality of Sam Spade as he appears in *THE MALTESE FALCON*.

Yet, before writing more about Hammett's characters and the personae of his detectives, it ought to be noted that in Hammett's fictional world corruption—moral, social, political, and economic corruption—is virtually universal. Nor was Hammett alone in this perception. In his essay on "Huckleberry Finn" in *THE LIBERAL IMAGINATION* (1950), Lionel Trilling felt that the majority of important Nineteenth-century American writers tended to blame the Civil War. "We cannot," he wrote, "disregard the testimony of men so diverse as Henry Adams, Walt Whitman, William Dean Howells, and Mark Twain himself, to mention but a few of the many who were in agreement on this point. All spoke of something that had gone out of American life after the war, some simplicity, some innocence, some peace. None of them was under any illusion about the amount of ordinary human wickedness that existed in the old days, and Mark Twain certainly was not. The difference was in the public attitude, in the things that were now accepted and made respectable in the national ideal. It was, they all felt, connected with new emotions about money. As Mark Twain said, where formerly 'the people had desired money,' now they 'fall down and worship it.' The new gospel was, 'Get money. Get it quickly. Get it in abundance. Get it in prodigious abundance. Get it dishonestly if you can, honestly if you must.'"¹³

In a somewhat autobiographical strain, Hammett once wrote, "I drank a lot in those days, partly because I was still confused by the fact that people's feelings and talk and actions didn't have much to do with one another. . . ."¹⁴ This perplexity is not so far removed from that moment in Mark Twain's "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" when one of the characters is troubled. "At first his conscience was sore on account of the lie he had told Mary—if it was a lie. After much reflection—suppose it *was* a lie? What then? Was it such a great matter? Aren't we always *acting* lies? Then why not tell them?"¹⁵

Hammett's somewhat brief career as an author of detective fiction was inextricably bound up with *BLACK MASK* magazine. It was founded in 1920 by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan as a money-making pulp to subsidize their efforts on behalf of *THE SMART SET* to which they were deeply committed. After less than six months, they sold it for \$12,500 to Eugene Crowe and Eltinge Warner, owners and publishers of *THE SMART SET*. The new owners appointed Francis M. Osborne to edit *BLACK MASK*. He was succeeded by George Sutton, Jr., who edited the magazine from October 1922 to March 1924 with his associate editor, Harry North, who was with *BLACK MASK*

from October 1922 to September 1925. Hammett began submitting fiction to *BLACK MASK* in 1922. In 1923, still writing under the pseudonym Peter Collinson, Hammett submitted the first two of his stories featuring the nameless operative working for the Continental Detective Agency, “Arson Plus” which was published in the 1 October 1923 issue and “Slippery Fingers” which was published in the 15 October 1923 issue. The latter issue also carried an Op story, titled “Crooked Souls,” which Hammett did sign with his own name. As he commented in a letter to the editor, “I didn’t deliberately keep him nameless, but he got through ‘Slippery Fingers’ and ‘Arson Plus’ without needing one, so I suppose I may well let him run along that way. I’m not sure he’s entitled to a name, anyhow. He’s more or less of a type: the private detective who oftenest is successful. . . .”¹⁶ Frequently, Hammett would emphasize his personal experience as a private detective in order to claim that this gave a special verisimilitude to his fiction. When it came to the Op’s motivation, Hammett remarked that “I see in him a little man going forward day after day through mud and blood and death and deceit—as callous and brutal and cynical as necessary—towards a dim goal, with nothing to push or pull him towards it except he’s been hired to reach it.”¹⁷ Hammett’s achievement in these early stories, according to A. Alvarez, was “to have evolved a prose in which the most grotesque or shocking details are handled as though they were matters of routine, part of the job.”¹⁸

One of Hammett’s pervasive themes, alongside the vision of a corrupt society, was the way in which women customarily use sexual temptation as a method of catching a man off guard. This theme is central to the non-Op story, “The Man Who Killed Dan Odams,” which appeared in the 15 January 1924 issue, as well as in the Op stories, “The Girl With the Silver Eyes” from the June 1924 issue, “The Whosis Kid” from the March 1925 issue, “The Gutting of Couffignal” from the December 1925 issue, the two Op novels, both of which ran serially in *BLACK MASK* before book publication, *RED HARVEST* (1929) and *THE DAIN CURSE* (1929), and *THE MALTESE FALCON*. In fact, when the Op turns down the Princess Zhukovski in “The Gutting of Couffignal” it is only a rehearsal for the scene where Sam Spade tells Brigid O’Shaughnessy his reasons for sending her over. After telling the princess why he must turn down her money bribe—he likes being a detective, likes the work: “‘You can’t weigh that against any sum of money,’ ”¹⁹—he shoots her in the calf of her left leg. “I had never shot a woman before,” the Op reflects. “I felt queer about it. ‘You ought to have known I’d do it!’ My voice sounded harsh and savage and like a stranger’s in my ears. ‘Didn’t I steal a crutch from a cripple?’ ”²⁰ Nor, in retrospect, was this practice of rehearsing themes unusual for Hammett. He did so often in his short stories, each time further refining and perfecting how a particular theme was handled.

“Nightmare Town,” a long short story which appeared in *ARGOSY ALL-STORY* in the 27 December 1924 issue, was a rehearsal for *RED HARVEST*.

The protagonist, Steve Threefall, arrives in Izzard, a town in the desert. He is plunged into an immediate awareness of widespread corruption, but it is not until the end of the story that he learns that the entire town is a fake, a front for a bootlegging operation. Almost at once, Steve is put on trial for disturbing the peace and his fine is every last cent he has: "That, he knew, was the way of justice everywhere with the stranger. . . ." ²¹ He finds a friend in Kamp, who turns out to be an undercover agent and is killed. In a poker game it is observed that "not one of the six—except Steve, and perhaps Kamp—would have hesitated to favor himself at the expense of honesty had the opportunity come to him; but where knowledge of trickery is evenly distributed honesty not infrequently prevails." ²² In a fight, Steve is able to defend himself admirably with a weighted stick for "behind his stick that had become a living part of him, Steve Threefall knew happiness—that rare happiness which only the expert ever finds—the joy in doing a thing that he can do supremely well. Blows he took—blows that shook him, staggered him—but he scarcely noticed them. His whole consciousness was in his right arm and the stick it spun." ²³

It was the same kind of physical exhilaration in battle that the Op would experience in a later story, "The Big Knockover," which appeared in the February 1927 issue of *BLACK MASK*. "It was a swell bag of nails," the Op remarks in that story. "Swing right, swing left, kick, swing right, swing left, kick. Don't hesitate, don't look for targets. God will see that there's always a mug there for your gun or blackjack to sock, a belly for your foot. A bottle came through and found my forehead. My hat saved me some, but the crack didn't do me any good. I swayed and broke a nose where I should have smashed a skull." ²⁴

But to return to "Nightmare Town." Larry Ormsby, a gangster, remarks " 'that a man is moved to protect what he *thinks* belongs to him,' " to which Steve responds, " 'Maybe you're right . . . but I've never had enough experience with property to know how I'd feel about being deprived of it.' " ²⁵ Steve is gripped by what is nearly akin to existentialist *Angst*—a combination of dread and nausea—as he witnesses the butchery that begins to happen. "He had the sensation of being caught in a monstrous net—a net without beginning or end, and whose meshes were slimy with blood. Nausea—spiritual and physical—gripped him, held him impotent." ²⁶ The bootleggers begin to prey upon each other, driven into a frenzy by their greed. " 'God, there never was a bigger game!' " Ormsby tells Steve. " 'It couldn't flop—unless we spoiled it for ourselves. And that's what we've done. It was too big for us! There was too much money in it—it went to our heads! At first we played square with the syndicate. We made booze and shipped it out—shipped it in carload lots, in trucks, did everything but pipe it out, and we made money for the syndicate and for ourselves. Then we got the real idea—the big one! We kept on making the hooch, but we got the big idea of going for our own profit.' " ²⁷ It is Ormsby who sounds the death knell for Izzard and its inhabitants. " 'The game had blown

up! It was too rich for us. Everybody is trying to slit everybody else's throat.' ''²⁸ The notion that criminals, as humans in general inspired by greed, will destroy each other in violence is another one of Hammett's pervasive themes.

In "The Scorched Face," an Op story published in the May 1925 issue of *BLACK MASK*, the Op is hired to trace two young women who are missing. There is a cop named Pat Reddy who is married to a wealthy woman but works hard at his police job anyway. They join forces on the case and, compiling a list of criminal activities in the city in the past year, the feeling of universal corruption is made to seem almost comic. "Its size would have embarrassed the Chamber of Commerce. It looked like a hunk of the telephone book. Things happened in a city in a year. The section devoted to strayed wives and daughters was the largest; suicides next; and even the smallest division—murders—wasn't any too short."'²⁹ The scam is a phony religious cult which gets women into a compromising situation, takes photographs of them, then blackmails them, with many of the women as a result committing suicide or vanishing. As in *Hadleyburg*, the only morality which exists is the pretense of upright behavior and, at bottom, that is only another lie. The Op who is not above arranging a murder when he feels it is necessary—and in *RED HARVEST* he feels quite a number of them are necessary—is also not above a cover-up. He persuades Pat to join him in covering up for one of the girls whom he has been tracing and who shoots the leader of the phony religious cult. The Op offers him credit for the bust. "My idea," he reflects, "was that if Pat took the credit, he couldn't very well ease himself out afterward, no matter what happened. Pat's a right guy, and I'd trust him anywhere—but you can trust a man just as easily if you have him sewed up."'³⁰ Ironically, Pat is a double winner for going along with the Op. "The sixth photograph in the stack," the Op says of the evidence that Pat lets him destroy, "had been of his wife—the coffee importer's reckless, hot-eyed daughter."'³¹

I think it is interesting to note that it is wives and daughters and girlfriends who wander in the Op stories. When Hammett did include an anecdote about a wandering male—in the Flitcraft story in *THE MALTESE FALCON*—Flitcraft had a profound psychological reason for what he did. Women, to the contrary, usually do not; usually they are covering up for some sexual indiscretion or destructive passion.

In 1927 Captain Joseph T. Shaw bought a financial interest in *BLACK MASK* and became its editor. In the Introduction to his anthology *THE HARD-BOILED OMNIBUS: EARLY STORIES FROM BLACK MASK* (1946), Shaw himself tended to take much of the credit for having developed the hard-boiled detective story, claiming that "we meditated on the possibility of creating a new type of detective story differing from . . . the deductive type, the cross-word puzzle sort, lacking—deliberately—all other human emotional values."'³² Shaw further claimed that he went through back numbers of the magazine and decided Dashiell Hammett's stories came closest to what he had in mind. "The formula or pattern" which Shaw wanted "emphasizes character and the prob-

lems inherent in human behavior over crime solution. In other words, in this new pattern, character conflict is the main theme; the ensuing crime, or its threat, is incidental.”³³ It is also probably worth mentioning that Richard Layman in *SHADOW MAN: THE LIFE OF DASHIELL HAMMETT* (1981), while noting the discrepancies in this claim, was willing to credit Shaw with being “as important as he claims to have been in the development of the hard-boiled detective story, because he was a promoter. By August 1929 he had increased circulation to 92,000 copies per issue. His editorial judgment was often questionable, and he seems to have done little by way of offering helpful editorial advice to his authors; but he took an active interest in the careers of his best authors and used contacts he had established in the New York publishing world to get his elite group of *BLACK MASK* writers book publication and even publication in other magazines. Moreover, he raised the rates he paid for good stories. By the end of the 1920s, Shaw was paying as much as six cents a word for stories (that is \$720 for a twelve-thousand-word story), though his normal rate was two cents a word.”³⁴

Shaw’s encouragement, financial and otherwise, decided Hammett to concentrate his full time at writing. He also began writing longer fictions. Two long Op short stories, “The Big Knockover” and “\$106,000 Blood Money,” the latter running in the May 1927 issue of *BLACK MASK*, were actually parts of the same story and were combined in 1943 into a single story titled *BLOOD MONEY*. By the end of 1927 *BLACK MASK* began running the first of four installments of what became *RED HARVEST* and in November 1928, the first of four installments of what became *THE DAIN CURSE*. Usually, *BLOOD MONEY* is not counted as being among Hammett’s five novels and, of those that are, *THE DAIN CURSE* is surely the weakest. It is a poorly structured story with far too many characters and a wholly improbable plot, but it does illustrate, rather nicely, how committed Hammett was to Gothic plot ingredients.

In “Part One: The Dains,” Mrs. Leggett, née Alice Dain, is blamed for the murder of her sister, Lily Dane, the first Mrs. Leggett, although by the end of the novel it is not made quite clear if she did this murder herself or manipulated Lily’s daughter and her stepdaughter, Gabrielle, to do it. She did, however, murder two blackmailers, Upton and Ruppert, and her husband, Leggett. Fitzstephan, an unsuccessful novelist who is insane and is actually behind most of the twelve murders in the novel (down from the twenty-five murders in *RED HARVEST*), calls Alice Leggett “a serene sane soul” in describing her to the Op whom he has known for a number of years, but once the Op exposes her he observes about her that “the housewife—Fitzstephan’s serene sane soul—was suddenly gone. This was a blonde woman whose body was rounded, not with the plumpness of contented, well-cared-for middle age, but with the cushioned, soft-sheathed muscles of the hunting cats, whether in jungle or alley.”³⁵ She tries to make a getaway and, in the struggle with the Op and Fitzstephan, the gun she is holding plugs her in the throat. Before she attempts her escape,

she tells Gabrielle: “ ‘ . . . You’re cursed with the same black soul and rotten blood that she [Lily] and I and all the Dains have had. . . . ’ ”³⁶

The Op dismisses this curse as “ ‘ words in an angry woman’s mouth. ’ ”³⁷ But it is very real to Gabrielle who is addicted to morphine which does not help her mental condition. Fitzstephan is in love with Gabrielle but she rejects him; so he proceeds to murder all of those who are close to her. “Part Two: The Temple” deals with Gabrielle’s adventures in the Temple of the Holy Grail, a fake religion secretly set up by Fitzstephan and operated by the Haldorns. The tone of much of the narration borders on the comic because the events are so preposterous. Eric Collinson is Gabrielle’s fiancé. The Op is sent to watch over Gabrielle while she is supposedly recuperating at the Temple. He is drugged. When he comes to, he finds that Gabrielle has left her room. Collinson is at the front door.

Eric Collinson was there, wild-eyed, white-faced, and frantic.

“Where’s Gaby?” he gasped.

“God damn you,” I said and hit him in the face with the gun.

He drooped, bending forward, stopped himself with hands on the vestibule’s opposite walls, hung there a moment, and slowly pulled himself upright again. Blood leaked from a corner of his mouth.

“Where’s Gaby?” he repeated doggedly.³⁸

Peter Wolfe remarked in his book, *BEAMS FALLING: THE ART OF DASHIELL HAMMETT* (1980), that “the religious coloring that seeps through Part Two of *THE DAIN CURSE* hearkens back to the convents and monasteries used by Gothic writers 250 years earlier. The corpse that slides in and out of view, the dark corridors, staircases, and rooms, the strange noises, and the unworldly apparition of the mechanical ghost [the] Op fights in Chapter 11 refer just as pointedly to Gothic romance. Like an Ann Radcliffe or a ‘Monk’ Lewis novel, *THE DAIN CURSE* asks us to suspend rational disbelief in order to savor the marvelous.”³⁹ However, *THE DAIN CURSE* does not break faith with the materialism indigenous to the *Weltanschauung* of detective fiction: all of the mysterious phenomena have a natural, albeit exotic and far-fetched, explanation. Hammett apparently had an abiding interest in tales of terror and the supernatural since he edited a collection of them titled *CREEPS BY NIGHT* (1931). In his Introduction to it, Hammett commented that “the effectiveness of the sort of stories that we are here concerned with depends on the reader’s believing that certain things cannot happen and on the writer’s making him feel—if not actually believe—that they can but should not happen.”⁴⁰ Elsewhere in his fiction, Hammett experimented with combining the Gothic and seemingly supernatural with the narrative structures of detective fiction, but perhaps nowhere more so than in *THE DAIN CURSE*.

In the third part of this novel, “Quesada,” the Op undertakes to help Gabrielle cure herself of her morphine addiction. A Mexican servant removes some

packets of morphine from the Op's pocket while he is ostensibly sleeping. He says nothing about it at the time. Later the next day, Gabrielle confesses to the Op that she has had the packets ever since the Mexican servant slipped them to her, but she did not use them. The Op tells her that he knew she had them. " 'You knew?' " she remarks with emotion. " 'You trusted me that much—to go away and leave me with them?' " The Op, true to his persona, comments to the reader: "Nobody but an idiot would have confessed that for two days the folded papers had held powdered sugar instead of the original morphine."⁴¹ Ultimately, to be effective, the Op dare trust no one and leave nothing to chance.

Fitzstephan has his right arm and his right leg blown off, indeed he also loses an eye, and ear, half of his face in a bomb explosion; notwithstanding, he survives and is put on trial. In his defense he claims that he plotted so many murders because "he looked on Gabrielle . . . as his property, bought with the deaths he had caused. Each death had increased her price, her value to him."⁴² In short, he pleads innocence by virtue of insanity. After a year in an asylum, he is released, a battered wreck. In a reversal of Edna Ferber's code wherein men are hopeless dreamers and women practical realists, in Hammett's fiction men are capable of being realists through great effort, women are romantic dreamers. Aaronia Haldorn, an extremely attractive woman whose husband was killed by the Op, had been Fitzstephan's mistress, but he had thrown her over in his pursuit of Gabrielle and even tried to have her killed. In a typical example—for Hammett—of female romanticism Aaronia carries Fitzstephan off to an island in Puget Sound. And yet is this ending really so very different from the conclusion of Charlotte Brontë's *JANE EYRE* (1847)? "Healthy sexuality is absent from Hammett's work . . .,"⁴³ Richard Layman pointed out, although he also argued that it can be found in *THE THIN MAN* (1934) where, actually, it is avoided almost entirely. For me, the matter is far more thoroughgoing. The great object lesson in all of Hammett's fiction is that one must never be a "sap"—to use Sam Spade's graphic term—for either sex or money if one is to survive with his personality intact and uncorrupted.

Lillian Hellman, with whom Hammett lived on and off for thirty years, told a revealing anecdote about him in the Introduction to her collection of his short fiction, *THE BIG KNOCKOVER* (1966). "I think Hammett was the only person I ever met who really didn't care about money, made no complaints and had no regrets when it was gone," she wrote. He had long wanted a crossbow. It was expensive and, when he did buy it, it meant going without other things. On the day he got it—he was living with Hellman at the time—some friends arrived with a ten-year-old boy. Hammett spent the afternoon with the boy playing with the crossbow. When it came time to leave, Hammett put the crossbow into the car with the boy and hurried into the house, despite protestations. Hellman remonstrated with him afterwards, considering how much he had originally wanted the crossbow for himself. " 'The kid wanted it more,' " Hammett responded. " 'Things belong to people who want them most.' "⁴⁴

Some critics—Peter Wolfe among them—presume that Hammett's Marxist

leanings hold the key to his view of American society. I do not. Nor, do I believe, would anyone well versed in Marxist thought. In “Zigzags of Treachery,” an Op story which appeared in the 1 March 1924 issue of *BLACK MASK*, Hammett had the Op reflect: “I’m not what you’d call a brilliant thinker—such results as I get are usually the fruits of patience, industry, and unimaginative plugging, helped out now and then, maybe, by a little luck—but I do have my flashes of intelligence.”⁴⁵ I think what appealed to Hammett about Marxism was its disapproval of capitalistic society and, on the most superficial level, its seeming attitude about money and the accumulation of money.

“If this book had been written with the help of an outline or notes or even a clearly defined plot-idea in my head I might now be able to say how it came to be written and why it took the shape it did,” Hammett wrote in his Introduction to the Modern Library edition of *THE MALTESE FALCON*, “but all I can remember about its invention is that somewhere I had read of the peculiar rental agreement between Charles V and the Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem, that in a short story called ‘The Whosis Kid’ I had failed to make the most of a situation I liked, that in another called ‘The Gutting of Couffignol’ I had been equally unfortunate with an equally promising denouement, and that I thought I might have better luck with these two failures if I combined them with the Maltese lease in a longer story.”⁴⁶ After citing this passage, Richard Layman felt constrained to add that “Hammett failed to mention that Brigid O’Shaughnessy, the villainess of *THE MALTESE FALCON*, was the epitome of the beautiful, dangerous woman he had been developing in his stories since spring, 1924.”⁴⁷

In a way, the novel is a repudiation of the familiar Gothic theme of a damsel in distress. Brigid is no Gabrielle. “‘How bad a hole are you actually in?’” Spade asks her. “‘As bad,’” she tells him, “‘as could be.’”

“Physical danger?”

“I’m not heroic. I don’t think there’s anything worse than death.”

“Then it’s that?”

“It’s that as surely as we’re sitting here”—she shivered—“unless you help me.”⁴⁸

It is not too long before Spade begins to penetrate behind her façade and the miasma of lies which surrounds her and colors everything she says. When Brigid again pleads with him to trust her, Spade is moved to tell her: “‘You told me that this afternoon in the same words, same tone. It’s a speech you’ve practiced.’”⁴⁹

There is a stage-bound quality to virtually every scene in the novel. The objective style, keeping the reader outside of the characters, intensifies the impression of set speeches, of pretending, of play-acting. Robert I. Edenbaum has, in my opinion, in his essay, “The Poetics of the Private-Eye: The Novels of Dashiell Hammett,” understood what Hammett was about in his fiction better than anyone else I have read. His perception of *THE MALTESE FALCON*

is that in it Hammett was “less concerned with the intricacies of the detective story plot than with the combat between a villain (ess) who is a woman of sentiment, and who thrives on the sentiment of others, and a hero who has none and survives because he has none.”⁵⁰ Edenbaum also felt, however, that he had to qualify the word “combat,” “for there can be only unequal combat when one antagonist holds all the cards and the other is always a victim; when the one manipulates and the other is deceived; when the actions of the one are unpredictable and the responses of the other stock. These terms would seem to describe the villain and his victim in Gothic fiction from *THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO* to *THE LIME TWIG*. But Hammett, in *THE MALTESE FALCON*, reverses the roles. Brigid O’Shaughnessy, the murderer of Sam Spade’s partner Miles Archer, is the manipulated, the deceived, the predictable, finally, in a very real sense, the victim.”⁵¹

I agree with Edenbaum—albeit changing his terminology just slightly—that Spade lives according to the vision of the Flitcraft story, as one who *really* knows. The story is a parable illustrating what Martin Luther meant by the school for character. Spade has overcome—or, rather, overcomes by the end of the story—the temptations of a close relationship with a woman and excessive, obsessional avarice. He is enabled to do so, in part, because he has overcome his fear of death and, therefore, the threat of death is meaningless to him. He warns Gutman that no amount of persuasion can be effective unless it carries the threat of death and, if one is immune to this threat, he is incapable of being intimidated. Gutman values objects—in particular the Maltese falcon—above people, and, therefore, he can agree to let Spade have Wilmer as a fall guy; he can inflict injury on his daughter in order to make the lie she is to tell Spade more credible to him. Spade, no less than Brigid, Cairo, Wilmer, Gutman, is breathing heavily as the falcon is unwrapped, but, when it proves a fake, he is released from his greed, whereas the others are still victims to their obsessions and passions. Spade’s repudiation of sentimentality, sentiment, romance, and romanticism leaves him isolated from women and from money. He turns over the thousand dollar bill he conned from Gutman to the police when he turns over Brigid to them. “ ‘You had Thursby hooked and you knew it,’ ” he tells Brigid. “ ‘He was a sucker for women. His record shows that—the only falls he took were over women. And once a chump, always a chump.’ ”⁵² Spade will not let her do it to him, will not let her make him play the sap for her, will not, he says, because everything inside of him wants to and, because, she had counted on that with him as she had with all the others.

It is possible to complain that this premise for living is as ultimately unsatisfying and futile as obsessive greed. But Spade would not argue that. It is the way he must live and the way he wants to live. I attach little significance to Effie Perine’s momentary rejection of Spade at the end of the novel, preferring to cherish for yet a while longer her romantic illusions. Hammett went on to include Spade and Effie in three short stories after publication of *THE MALTESE FALCON*. They were weak stories—two were, in fact, rewrites of earlier sto-

ries—but they did show Spade and Effie as friends and appealed to Erle Stanley Gardner—another major BLACK MASK contributor—who created an even more familiar professional friendship between Perry Mason and Della Street. Professional friendship was the one option open to Spade, as perhaps to Hammett, when marital commitment or romantic commitment to a woman were really avenues that had to be closed in order to retain one's sense of integrity.

THE GLASS KEY (1931) was also serialized in BLACK MASK. In it, Hammett tried to write a novel in which the characters are motivated by more human emotions, such as loyalty and love. He failed, because his objective style reduced everything to mechanical pretense. By the time he wrote THE THIN MAN, he was finished and he knew it. He could not shake himself free from his earlier vision, but it also proved enervating. John G. Cawelti may well have been right when he wrote in ADVENTURE, MYSTERY, AND ROMANCE: FORMULA STORIES AS ART AND POPULAR CULTURE (1976) that Hammett's "stories are essentially about the discovery that the comforting pieties of the past—belief in a benevolent universe, in progress, in romantic love—are illusions and that man is alone in a meaningless universe."⁵³ If he was not to be another Flitcraft, somehow forget the vision of a meaningless universe and the character he felt one had to develop in order to cope with it successfully, there was nothing left but steadfast retreat, waiting for the end. It is perhaps for this reason that, in the final analysis, Hammett's attitude toward life as reflected in the way he lived his life should prove even more interesting than any of the stories he wrote. Certainly this is the overwhelming impression one receives reading the best biography to appear about him so far: William F. Nolan's HAMMETT: A LIFE AT THE EDGE (1983).

THE BLACK MASK SCHOOL

Very little has been written about the many BLACK MASK writers other than Raymond Chandler who followed in the Hammett tradition. Philip Durham wrote an essay titled "The BLACK MASK School" for a collection of critical essays, yet all but three paragraphs of it is devoted to Hammett and Chandler. This, to me, seems unfair. However, Durham did come to a very cogent conclusion about this group when he observed that, as a general rule, the heroes of the BLACK MASK writers "were violent, but their violence was not merely that of sensationalism. It was rather a kind of meaningful violence, sometimes symbolic of a special ethical code or attitude, sometimes an explicit description and implicit criticism of a corrupt society."⁵⁴ Perhaps what is most important to keep in mind about Hammett and Chandler—and Chandler will be discussed in the next sub-section—is that this view was not unique to them, but a view common to the entire BLACK MASK school.

Norbert Davis' "Red Goose" was published in BLACK MASK in February 1934. It features Davis' detective, Ben Shaley, a man who is "bonily tall" with "a thin, tanned face with bitterly heavy lines in it. He looked calm; but

he looked like he was being calm on purpose—as though he was consciously holding himself in. He had an air of hard-boiled confidence.”⁵⁵ This might well have been a physical description of Hammett during the years when Davis knew him.

In this story Shaley is a Los Angeles shamus hired by a Pasadena museum to retrieve a painting stolen while on exhibition. A woman named Marjorie Smith contacts Shaley and offers to sell him back the painting. When Shaley meets her, Marjorie smiles and curtsies and speaks to him shyly. Shaley feels “something was wrong with all this” because Marjorie does not seem to fit in with the tough hoodlums he knows were involved with the heist. When Marjorie produces a bottle of acid and threatens to throw it in Shaley’s face, suddenly “the picture wasn’t out of focus any more. Marjorie Smith fitted right in.”⁵⁶ Marjorie has double-crossed Carter, the man who engineered the heist, and has taken up with a young artist. Carter and his hired thug, Gorjon, walk into her apartment while Shaley is there:

He [Carter] picked her up by the front of her dress and slapped her in the face—quick, sharp slaps that rocked her head back and forth.

“Hey!” said Shaley.

Gorjon pushed his automatic into Shaley’s neck. “I wouldn’t poke my head out, boy.”

Carter said: “Well?” and stopped slapping Marjorie Smith.

She spat at him. He hit her in the mouth with his fist and knocked her back on the couch.

“Rap that boob on the nut,” he said calmly to Gorjon, “and take her shoes off. We’ll have to get rough with her.”⁵⁷

Eventually Shaley subdues Gorjon and Marjorie gets Gorjon’s .45 automatic with which she shoots Carter. When Carter, after being slammed “in a limp pile” by the bullet, gets on his feet again, “Marjorie Smith shot him again, deliberately, in the back. Carter collapsed weakly and slid down the stairs, bumping soddenly on each step.”⁵⁸ Marjorie and her boyfriend, the young artist, sell the painting back to the museum and make a clean getaway.

“Red Goose” is a story from the first year that Davis was writing professionally. In the ’Forties, he began his Max Latin series for *DIME DETECTIVE*. Latin is a private detective who owns Guterrez’ Restaurant and has his office in a rear booth. Latin is a detective with a police record, i.e., “a lot of arrests . . . no convictions,” as Davis described him in “Don’t Give Your Right Name,” a short story published in *DIME DETECTIVE* in December 1941.⁵⁹ Guterrez discovers a body in the alley behind the restaurant and Latin goes out to investigate. He finds that outside “the darkness was like a living thing, a heavy menacing weight that pressed coldly against his face. The mouth of the alley, half-a-block away, was a narrow high rectangle with the street lights feeble and yellow beyond it.”⁶⁰ Caleb Drew hires Latin for a thousand dollars to help garner some publicity for his fiancée, a high-priced professional mistress named Lily Trace. After a time, Latin calls on Teresa Mayan, Drew’s

secretary, and recognizes her as the woman who earlier that evening was in Guitierrez' Restaurant with a drunk and who talked to the murdered man who turns out to have been a private detective. Teresa does not want to talk. Latin "took one cat-like step toward her and hit her. His fist didn't travel more than six inches, and it landed with a sharp smack on the hinge of her jaw just below her ear."⁶¹ Teresa is the kind of woman who likes having photographs taken of herself in the nude. "She was evidently quite proud of her anatomy."⁶² When she comes to, she poisons Latin's drink while he is searching her room and locks him in the apartment. Quite definitely a homicidal female, Teresa then breaks in on Lily Trace and gives her a beating. In the meantime Latin discovers the drunk who was with Teresa at the restaurant; he is dead, poisoned, in her apartment. She killed the detective and then the drunk, who was her live-in boyfriend, at the behest of Caleb Drew who wanted the live-in boyfriend's money. Only Teresa had not figured on why Drew wanted the money. She thought it would be for them,; but, no, it was so that Drew could afford Lily. Drew drowns Teresa in his bathtub before he is apprehended. But it does not matter: whether Teresa or Lily, women remain the *prima mobilia* of all that happens in the story.

Raoul Whitfield's GREEN ICE (1930) is not a particularly well-made story, although there is a lot of action in it, much of it hectic and some of it misdirected. There is an interesting sub-theme about the industrial and human pollution of Eastern cities long before this became so commonplace and there is the obvious influence of Hammett's RED HARVEST insofar as there are ten corpses scattered throughout the text and the novel ends with a virtual blood-bath. The protagonist, Mal Ourney, because he got Dot Ellis drunk and she killed a man while driving her car, takes a two-year manslaughter rap for her. Dot is killed. Now that Ourney is out of stir and independent because of a fortuitous inheritance, he devises a plan to go after the big boys, the crime breeders, one of whom murdered Dot. At one point, Lentz, the head of the New York City detective bureau, tells Ourney: " 'I haven't got anything on you, Ourney. . . . Garren did for the Ellis woman. Red choked up and got a guy he hated—Wirt Donner. Cherulli had it coming and was mobbed out. Donelly here had to let go at Garren. That's a lot of killing—but it's all right. None of it was important.' " ⁶³ The significance of the crime breeders is that they are humans exploiting other humans and the only way justice can be done is by killing them or causing them to kill each other.

Whitfield's DEATH IN A BOWL (1930) appeared later the same year, dedicated: "To the three virgins of Hollywood, sympathetically—." ⁶⁴ The attitude throughout is that women clearly are not to be trusted. Ben Jardinn is the protagonist, a Hollywood private eye with an office on Ivor Street, off Hollywood Boulevard, but Whitfield, unlike Raymond Chandler, was incapable of evoking strong impressions of Los Angeles. Jardinn tells Cohn, his assistant: " 'None of them on the level. You can't trust a woman.' " ⁶⁵ Cohn obviously does not take the tip since he is seduced to murder by a woman. " 'You don't make too

much in here,' ” Jardinn tells Cohn. “ ‘Maybe she was after you all the time, like a lot of women. They’ve got to have things. You saw a chance to pick up a lot of money, Cohn. You took it.’ ”⁶⁶

Under the pseudonym Ramon Decolta, Whitfield also wrote for *BLACK MASK* a series of stories set in the Philippine Islands featuring a Spanish detective, Jo Gar. In most respects he was an analogue of the hard-boiled American private eye. In “China Man,” a story from the March 1932 issue, Gar’s office is described. “Several times he had thought of moving into more desirable quarters, but there was something about his tiny, hot office in the old building that he liked. His fees were not big; he accepted almost any case that was interesting, and many of his clients were not rich.”⁶⁷ This story ends with a shoot-out between Gar and the murderer simply because the evidence may be insufficient to bring about a legal conviction.

Frederick Nebel was a *BLACK MASK* writer until the mid ’Thirties, when he branched out, writing for slick magazines. He included Raoul Whitfield and Dashiell Hammett among his close friends. Robert J. Randisi remarked in his Introduction to the Gregg Press re-issue edition of *SIX DEADLY DAMES*—six stories from *BLACK MASK* which were published together in an original Avon paperback in 1950—that “Nebel’s work is not unlike Hammett’s.”⁶⁸ Randisi found most of their similarities to lie with their detective creations. In terms of milieu, however, Nebel never approached Hammett’s bleakness nor his sense of the omnipresence of moral corruption; although he did share Hammett’s misogyny and his passion for violence.

Dick Donahue is Nebel’s detective in *SIX DEADLY DAMES*, stories that were actually part of an ongoing series in *BLACK MASK*. In fact, the first two stories, “The Red Hots” and “Get a Load of This,” are interconnected insofar as they concern pursuit after some diamonds—rather after the fashion of the pursuit of the Maltese falcon—and there is an interim, bridging story between these two which was not included. In “The Red Hots,” Donahue, who works for the Interstate Agency, is supposed to see a man named Crosby who has just returned from Europe. He finds his corpse instead. Crosby was used as the means of smuggling precious diamonds into the United States. Donahue meets Irene at Crosby’s apartment and traces her. He is hiding in her bathroom when Alfred, one of Irene’s associates, arrives and wants to learn what happened to the diamonds. Alfred “leaned over a bit and slapped her face. She cried ‘Ow!’ and she meant it. Alfred slammed the pistol against her ribs and she screeched. He stood up, took two more steps, turned on a radio. A jazz band boomed into the room. He returned to the divan and struck the girl again—with the gun. He planted a knee on her stomach and went on striking her. He did not look mad, merely interested in his work.”⁶⁹

Donahue lets this go on for a time before he intervenes. Consistent with the conventions of pulp detective fiction, after this severe pistol beating Irene is not injured sufficiently to be laid up in a hospital, much less interrupt her own private pursuit of the diamonds. The pay-off for Donahue’s stopping Alfred is that

Irene brains Donahue with a bookend; then she and Alfred vanish. By the end of the story, Alfred and a tough mug named Babe are out of the way and Donahue discovers Irene tied to a bed with suitcase straps. He believes her story: that she was in love with Crosby.

In "Get a Load of This," Donahue has occasion to sum up what happened in the interim story. " 'A guy name[d] Alfred Poore and a jane named Irene Saffarrans brought the diamonds over here from France. . . . Coming over, the jane planted it on an artist named Crosby. They were afraid of the Customs. Crosby got knifed to death by a guy named Babe Delaney, who made Poore and the Saffarrans jane let him in on the racket. He'd found things out. Poore gunned for Delaney and I got Poore and they sent him to the Big House. Nobody concerned got the ice. It turned out that the ice had been planted in one of Crosby's hats, and when he got home Crosby gave his janitor, a guy named Adler, some old clothes—among them the hat. The Saffarrans jane got clear after Poore went up, and she hooked up with a guy named Bruhard. Bruhard bumped off Adler in Grove Street, got the hat but not the diamond[s]. Adler had got the hat cleaned. Bonalino worked in the hat-cleaning store, and when he took the lining out he found the ice. He hocked it here. Bruhard got gunned out in Forty-Second Street, the jane got ten years. Nobody concerned got the real ice.' " ⁷⁰

Donahue is narrating this tale of woe to Friedman, a hockshop owner who has the ice. He tells Donahue nothing and gets bumped off. Donahue is rather gruff to a woman who follows him. She is Clio, Irene's sister, and she is out to kill him. Clio gets plugged instead. Donahue has a few words of wisdom upon her passing: " 'Broads! They trick us, cheat us, and try to murder us . . . and when they get it in the neck, we—get a touch of heart. . . . ' " ⁷¹ The diamonds are retrieved. The greed they inspired costs an extraordinary number of lives, among the guilty and innocent alike.

Donahue encounters a hit woman in "Death's Not Enough." The first he knows of her is when he hears "footsteps clicking from the direction of Sixth Avenue: woman's high heels by the sound of them. He saw a woman wrapped in a dark fur coat pass beneath a street light." ⁷² The image of the menacing woman in the night recurs frequently in BLACK MASK stories. Later, Donahue is in an apartment with the hit woman, who is named Beryl, and she throws a fit. "The woman beat her temples with her fists and cried: 'Oh,—! . . . ' She threw herself violently on to the divan, picked up a pillow, punched it, threw it down again, clawed at her hair and rose." ⁷³ When Beryl is fatally wounded, Donahue is in the room with her. "Age had crept upon her. She looked haggard and vicious and dissipated. She was no longer the superb actress she had been earlier in the morning. Donahue, who had seen crime in its many strata, looked upon a gunwoman for the first time. . . . Green-eyed, the woman clutched at her breast. 'Say, let's have a gun. Let me blow those cops apart when they break in. Give me a break—before—I go.' " ⁷⁴

In the story, "Save Your Tears," a champion prizefighter, Harrigan, does

not throw a fight when he is supposed to and his manager, Giles Consadine, is murdered. Token Moore is the champ's girlfriend. Two thugs break into her apartment, looking for the champ. The tall one works her over. "He held her up with his left hand. With his right he slapped her face. She choked and groaned and he backed her up, slapping her hard, first on one cheek, then on the other. Meanwhile he wore a hard tight smile. . . . The hard flat of his hand whanged against her face. Furious, but coldly so, he pitched her to the bed. As she tried to crawl off, he walked around the foot of the bed, waited a second, then struck her full in the face. She toppled back to the other side of the bed, fell to the floor, groaned weakly."⁷⁵ When Donahue gets a chance to talk to the champ, Harrigan confesses how much he depends on Token. This is his *hamartía*: "'I was supposed to lay down in the twelfth! But I seen my girl down there with Consadine and I went nuts. . . . I was scared he was framing me and trying to get Token. I went nuts. I was afraid if I wasn't champ she wouldn't like me any more.'" "⁷⁶ Even if a reader might feel sorry for Token while she is being beaten, Donahue certainly feels no such sympathy for her. "'She and Consadine *had* been two-timing on the kid. When Consadine was knocked off, she skimmed out because she couldn't take it. . . . With Consadine dead, she thought of Danny [the champ] again—and his dough. . . . She probably had a vision of herself standing heroically by Danny during the trial—getting her mug in the papers, getting nice sobby write-ups, and getting—if he was freed—her hooks into his dough.'" "⁷⁷ Donahue turns to Token, who is overwhelmed by "chagrin, humiliation, self-pity." "'Dumb as the kid is,'" Donahue tells her, "'he fooled you. . . . He'll have a hard time of it for a while, but he'll grow older, forget; and after a while you'll be just another day wasted away.'" "⁷⁸ Learning how to live without women is part of growing up.

Nebel's other major series in *BLACK MASK* was that which featured Captain Steve MacBride of the Richmond City police and Kennedy of the *FREE PRESS*. "Take It and Like It," a story from the June 1934 issue, shifts the emphasis from the police, who in the Donahue stories are only too ready to shoot, to maim, to work over a suspect, to the city bureaucracy. Rube Wilson, the Assistant District Attorney, hates Kennedy and so he tries to frame him for murder. "'You're sore,'" MacBride unloads on Wilson. "'You're lousy sore. You can't take it. You're a dirty stink in the D.A.'s office because you brought a bad stink up out of the gutter with you. Six years ago you framed a woman with a guy in the Bedford Hotel. The woman's husband was your client. How do I know? Well, the guy you paid to help frame the woman was and is a stool pigeon of mine. We have an understanding: he gives me tips and I give him immunity. Think it over, Rube. And stop blowing off your mouth. And take the air. I hate your guts.'" "⁷⁹ The murderer beat the victim, a woman, to death; Kennedy and an associate beat the truth out of the culprit.

In "Winter Kill," a story from the November 1935 issue, a ne'er-do-well heir kidnaps himself to extort money from his wealthy father and is murdered by the relatively poor son-in-law because no money came with the ne'er-do-

well's sister when he married her, or afterward. No less than the Donahue stories, the MacBride/Kennedy series also blend the fantastic and improbable with fast-paced action and laconic dialogue. The Donahue stories are set in New York City, for the most part, the MacBride/Kennedy stories in a fictitious city: but in both series the reader becomes acutely aware of the time-frame in which each story is set and the descriptions, while brief, are effective in providing an indelible sense of milieu. This is equally true of Hammett's fiction and that of most other BLACK MASK writers, in contrast to Erle Stanley Gardner who was almost always deliberately vague about the time-frames of his stories so as to keep them "current." In this, Gardner may well have been mistaken; his tremendous popularity while he was alive did not manage long to survive him. The world-view of the best BLACK MASK stories is inevitably that of the late 'Twenties and early 'Thirties, a semi-dark, hard-bitten world of ambition, greed, speakeasies, and violence. These stories are even praised by critics for their "realistic" details of big-city life in that era. I would make no such claim for them. Of Nebel specifically, I would say that whatever his enthusiasm for violence his stories are not so peopled with corpses as are those of many of his peers; and by way of censure, too much pleasure is taken in his fiction by images of women being brutalized.

"Fred Nebel was the one who urged me to write my first book," George Harmon Coxe wrote to Herbert Ruhm when Ruhm was editing his anthology, *THE HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE: STORIES FROM BLACK MASK MAGAZINE 1920-1951* (1977). "I'd been writing pulps since 1931 with increasing success. I think my first for BLACK MASK was in 1933 and Fred said something like, 'You can't keep writing pulps forever; you ought to try a book.' So I did. . . . It was turned down by Little, Brown and Farrar & Rinehart and accepted by Knopf because an editor and the assistant to Alfred were fans of mine in BLACK MASK. . . . So it was not just truck drivers and short-order cooks who read the magazine."⁸⁰

The novel in question was *MURDER WITH PICTURES* (1935). Kent Murdock, a photographer for the *BOSTON COURIER*, is the detective in it. Nate Girard, a former bootlegger, is acquitted of a murder charge, in large measure through the efforts of his skillful attorney, Mark Redfield. Murdock is separated from his wife, Hestor, but she refuses to give him a divorce, even though at the moment she is dating Nate Girard. "And into marriage she had brought a magnificent body," the reader is told about her, "a well-sexed nature, and nothing at all of the give-and-take attitude. To her it was a physical, sexual thing; that and nothing more."⁸¹ Hestor, while taking a bath, reflects to herself on her situation and feels she had tried too hard with Murdock. "She could not tune him to her pitch. The thought of the quick cooling of his ardor—what little he had—infuriated her. . . ."⁸² Then she thinks about Nate. "And Girard had money. He was older; he would probably demand but little and she could find other outlets, given money and leisure, for any surplus of desire. Her experience with Murdock would help her with Girard. She would know how to

handle him now. She'd know when to hold back.'"⁸³ Murdock meets Joyce Archer at the celebration party Redfield throws for Girard and he falls in love with her. When Redfield is murdered, Murdock sets out to solve the murder in order to get a reward which he hopes will be enough to buy him his freedom from Hestor. By the end, a petty gangster who is killed is tagged with the murder, the police proud of themselves and their fine work. Murdock, however, knows Girard really did it and his price for silence is that Girard go away with Hestor and that he guarantee that Hestor will let him divorce her. Girard agrees. Joyce, overjoyed and willing to marry Murdock, demonstrates what kind of wife *she* will be when she tells Murdock: " 'Your work is yours alone. It doesn't make any difference what it is, does it, so long as it's your job? If you like it, and you are good at it—and you are—you'll come home happy. That's what matters. Be happy in your work and save the rest of yourself for me.' "⁸⁴

THE BAROTIQUE MYSTERY (1936) was Coxe's second detective novel, with Murdock now married to Joyce. Obviously this format was inspired by Hammett's THE THIN MAN, but Joyce's personality remains obscure and she and Kent do not have the kind of engaging married life Nick and Nora Charles do. THE BAROTIQUE MYSTERY is set in the Caribbean. It is a region that Coxe also used in what is the best novel of his which I have read, ASSIGNMENT IN GUIANA (1942), but the second Murdock novel is inferior to the first, in part because the characters are so dull and predictable and the plot needlessly convoluted. The story comes to this: a man kills his brother and is observed committing the crime by a successful kidnapper and his female companion. The female companion then convinces the murderer to kill the successful kidnapper so she can get at his money and she kills the murderer to secure her own safety. What perhaps alone is notable is the gender of *primum mobile* and her motive: money and the freedom from men which it will buy. Murdock, of course, foils her scheme.

Coxe's series character in BLACK MASK was also a photo/news journalist, Flashgun Casey, who works for the EXPRESS. In "Murder Mixup," a story from the May 1936 issue, an engraver of plates used to manufacture counterfeit ten dollar bills is found murdered. Casey is a heavy drinker. After he gets into a fight with several mugs only to be sapped down, he goes to a saloon, tries ordering a pint, and settles for fourteen small glasses and a pint so he will be buying it by the drink and keeping everybody happy. With this kind of prelude, it is written of Casey that "his breath filled the room as though a bottle of whiskey had been dropped on the floor."⁸⁵ Casey at one point has to get into a suspect's hotel room and fishes "a thin strip of celluloid from a vest pocket."⁸⁶ This was standard BLACK MASK procedure and neither the police nor anyone else ever seems to object to it. Rose Nielson in this story is a sympathetic female character, in love with an ex-bootlegger yet an essentially honest man; her only folly is her concern for her weak and crooked brother who is bumped off among the litter of corpses dropped in the course of the story.

In "Once Around the Clock," a story from the May 1941 issue, Alma Sin-

clair, a bad woman, is murdered. She used to be the moll of a racketeer named Phinney who was rubbed out and Lew Bronson, Alma's piano accompanist, who was in love with her thought she did it and so took the fall. He was sent up for manslaughter and after two and a half years is out again, drinking heavily. While Lew was in prison, Alma took up with George Avery, attorney for Phinney and officer of Phinney's Laundry Workers Cooperative Union. Lew is therefore suspected of Alma's murder, but Casey does not believe him guilty, nor does Edith Roberts, a waitress for whom Lew once found a job and who loves him. Casey breaks into another hotel room with his celluloid, gets sapped again, and in a narrow confrontation—typical of Coxe's *BLACK MASK* stories—exposes the murderer while waiting for the law to arrive at the last minute. Alma was bumped by Avery to keep her mouth shut about his embezzling activities within the union, but the more interesting characterization is that of Lew Bronson, the "fall guy." Avery has a gun on Bronson and Casey and sends a mug to finish off Edith who has been worked over *in camera*. Casey observes that Bronson, "knowing that there was nothing left for him but death . . . was going to try again to keep her [Edith] safe. His number was up, he must know it. He must know also that should he reach Avery in time, Casey would be left to telephone Edith Roberts and warn her. Casey's hands were wet now and his mouth was dry. And this was the man he'd called a louse, for no reason except that Bronson had loved a woman once, blindly and with little hope of reward. This was the man who had stood trial for a murder he did not commit and who, all his life, had been kicked around and double-crossed with never a complaint. But courage was in him now. Casey saw it in his eyes and on his thin white face."⁸⁷ Both Casey and Bronson get out of the predicament alive, leaving Bronson free to marry Edith. You will never find this kind of sentimentality in Hammett, nor in most of the other *BLACK MASK* writers. Yet, for me, although Coxe may have lacked Hammett's elemental hardness, he more than compensated for it by his greater concern for his characters and, therefore, by implication, for the human condition. Coxe is the exception to what Philip Durham had pointed out, that "among the writers of the hard-boiled genre, there had been an ever-growing awareness of the attitude of negation toward life, a feeling of indifference about humanity which appears to have reached a kind of peak in the early Depression years. Humanity was still in evidence around the country, but so were rocks."⁸⁸

Herbert Ruhm went on to note in his Introduction to *THE HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE* that when Captain Shaw left *BLACK MASK* in 1936 "after an editorial dispute, writers like Lester Dent felt that his departure had kept them from becoming fine writers. Dent had published 'reams of saleable crap,' as he put it, including over two hundred Doc Savage novels in the pulp magazine of that name, but only two stories that he cared about and these in *BLACK MASK*. . . . When you 'went into the *BLACK MASK* offices,' he recalled, 'and talked with Shaw, you felt you were doing fiction that was powerful, you had feelings of stature.' "⁸⁹

These two stories featured a private detective named Oscar Sail who lives in Miami and more or less resides on his house-sailboat, the *Sail*—clearly an adumbration of John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee. Dent subsequently claimed that there was a certain savagery of words which writing for BLACK MASK brought out in his prose, but truly the savagery was scarcely confined to the words. In "Sail," the first of the stories, from the October 1936 issue, a Greek who has been worked over by a man and a woman to make him tell the location of a sunken yacht with priceless jewels on board gets the upper hand. Sail tries to prevent the Greek, Andopolis, from hitting the man, named Blick, but he is not in time. Sail "woke up nights for quite a while hearing the sound Andopolis' chair leg and Blick's head made. Andopolis hopped around, still quite blind, and made for Sail. He had his chair leg raised. Hair, blood, and brains stuck to the chair leg. Sail got out of the way."⁹⁰

The paradigm for these stories would appear to have been THE MALTESE FALCON. In "Angelfish," the second story, from the December 1936 issue, the obsessive quest again involves a source of wealth. Nan Moberly hires Sail to help her keep secret aerial photographs of a fabulously rich oil field. The heavies—they are all literally overweight—tie up Nan in a bed. Seeing her thus, Sail provides her with a little of his philosophy of life. " 'It's things like this that women get when they try to wear pants. Women doctors! Women lawyers! Women this and women that! Scheme and connive and finagle, and they think because they don't get hurt that they're good. They don't stop and think that men don't like to push them around. By God, there's too much chivalry in this world!' "⁹¹

Amid all the misogyny, violence, hectic action true of the fiction of the writers of the BLACK MASK school, it is also true that, as Hammett, they had to varying degrees a social conscience. However, it must equally be stressed that it was a *stylized* social conscience. It was a basic premise that violence was indigenous; but, while it might be a symptom of social corruption, it was also a solution. Evil-doers could and must be killed. Only in Hammett's last novel—which was *not* published in BLACK MASK—and in the novels of George Harmon Coxe was the human relationship between a man and a woman a viable alternative to the stark loneliness and atmosphere of distrust in which the typical BLACK MASK protagonist was condemned to live. In the dark world of BLACK MASK, all a man really had was Nietzsche's dictum: "Werdet hart!" [Become hard!] Beyond this, there was nothing.

I found an almost complete run of BLACK MASK magazines at the Archives of the University of California at Los Angeles. Going through them one by one, I was struck by how the covers in the 1930s, when they pictured women, usually showed them as imperiled victims. By the 1940s this changed. The women shown on the covers often hold two .45s, sometimes blazing away, and in one case a woman holds a Thompson submachine gun. Another cover shows a high, spiked heel stamping down on a man's hand; and yet another reveals a woman sitting atop a metal garbage can out of which a man's helpless arm is seen to

dangle. Yet, by this time, most of the writers who had first conjured these images in their fiction no longer wrote for the magazine: many of them had in fact become screenwriters.

RAYMOND CHANDLER

In an early BLACK MASK story, narrated in the first person, Raymond Chandler's detective remarks: "I had my mouth open and a blank expression on my face, like a farm boy at a Latin lesson."⁹² In any other BLACK MASK writer, this would pass perhaps as a wisecrack and nothing more; but not in Chandler's case. John Houseman, who got to know Chandler when they were both working at Paramount, once told me that in his opinion Chandler's classical education in the English Public School system was the most important thing one could know about him. I tend to agree. Chandler himself occasionally remarked about it. "I am not only literate but intellectual, much as I dislike the term" he wrote to his British publisher, Hamish Hamilton. "It would seem that a classical education might be rather a poor basis for writing novels in a hard-boiled vernacular. I happen to think otherwise. A classical education saves you from being fooled by pretentiousness, which is what most current fiction is too full of."⁹³ His advanced Latin exercises included translating Cicero into English and then translating him back into Latin. In 1907, in a special civil service examination, Chandler was examined in mathematics, English, German, Greek, English history, and French. He placed third among the six hundred candidates and first in the examinations in the classics. When, in the early 'Thirties, Chandler set out to write hard-boiled fiction, he chose a BLACK MASK story by Erle Stanley Gardner and, in a variation of what he had done with Cicero, he wrote a detailed synopsis of the story and then rewrote it, and then rewrote parts of it again. Finally, he felt ready to go it by himself. He wrote a story he titled "Blackmailers Don't Shoot" and submitted it to Captain Shaw at BLACK MASK.

It had taken Chandler five months to write it. Shaw was impressed by it. He sent it on to another of the regular BLACK MASK writers, W. T. Ballard, appending to it a note commenting that its author was either a genius or crazy. Shaw published it in the December 1933 issue. It possessed many ingredients which were to become commonplaces in Chandler's short fiction: a nightclub setting, a handsome, romantic gangster, a vicious gunman, assorted thugs, and a *femme fatale* who is *primum mobile* for much that happens. Mallory was the detective whose activity is described in the third person. The central issue of the story is some phony letters used as part of a publicity stunt by a fading movie star, Rhonda Farr. When Mallory confronted her with the fact that four men got killed because of this stunt, "Rhonda Farr looked at him mildly. 'Two crooks, a double-crossing policeman, make three of them. I should lose my sleep over that trash! Of course, I'm sorry about Landrey.' " Mallory tells her: " 'It's nice of you to be sorry about Landrey.' " "⁹⁴ Landrey is the handsome,

romantic gangster. The story also illustrates Chandler's ambivalent attitude toward the police. Two of the cops are out-and-out crooks; the *soi-disant* "honest" cops are more than willing to cover things up in the most convenient fashion. "The coroner don't give a damn about that trash," Police Chief Cathcart says to Mallory. "If the D.A. wants to get funny, I can tell him about a few cases his office didn't clean up so good." ⁹⁵

There is too much plot in the story, so much that it almost becomes confusing. Chandler's next story, however, "Smart-Aleck Kill," published in the July 1934 issue has even more plot. Mallory is back, this time acting as a bodyguard for a film director. The director is being blackmailed. When he is murdered, Mallory goes after the killer. Once the murderer is apprehended and in police custody, he asks to stop off a moment at his home. He is accommodated. Police Chief Cathcart has an office bottle and over a drink with Mallory he explains what happened next. The man's wife, who was jealous because of her husband's adultery, "never said a damn word. Brought a little gun around from behind her and fed him three slugs. One, two, three. Win, place, show. Just like that. Then she turned the gun around in her hand as nice as you could think and handed it to the boys . . ." ⁹⁶ Mrs. Sutro would be only the first in a long and terrifying line of homicidal females who haunt the pages of all that Chandler wrote. In fact, female murderers outnumber male murderers by a wide margin. Not only is this contrary to reality—since the turn of the century approximately one out of every ten murders committed in the United States has been committed by a female—but even the means of their murders is pure fantasy. Whereas in real crimes, women will most often use poison or a familiar utensil, such as a kitchen knife, in Chandler's fiction they are usually two-gunned hard babies, or they might sap a man down until his skull is flattened, or, in one case, use a hot iron on his feet.

"Finger man" Chandler's third story published in *BLACK MASK* in the October 1934 issue, was reputedly the first story that he wrote with which he felt at home. It is set in a fictitious city named San Angelo and, as "Killer in the Rain," Chandler's next story published in the January 1935 issue, it is narrated in the first person by a nameless detective. The model, quite obviously, was Hammett's Continental Op. In "Finger Man," the nameless detective, as the Op, is fast with his gun—" . . . the big man was already sagging. My bullet had drilled through his neck" ⁹⁷—and he is as hard-boiled. When the girl in the story shows the detective how the gangsters branded her "just for a sample of what I'd get" the detective responds: "Okey, sister. That's nasty medicine. But we've got some law here now. . . ." ⁹⁸ The girl in "Finger Man" is more or less a victim and compelled to be deceitful. The same cannot be said for Agnes, the blonde in "Killer in the Rain" who works for Steiner in his pornography business and who joins up with Joe Marty after Steiner is killed. When the nameless detective meets her at Marty's apartment, he notices how "nerve tension made her face old and ugly." ⁹⁹ When Carmen Dravec, the wild daughter of the detective's client, rushes into Marty's apartment with a

gun, ready to kill him, the blonde attacks the detective, sinking her teeth into his hand. Then “the blonde took her teeth out of my hand and spat my own blood at me. Then she threw herself at my leg and tried to bite that. I cracked her lightly on the head with the barrel of the gun and tried to stand up. She rolled down my legs and wrapped her arms around my ankles. . . . The blonde was strong with the madness of fear. . . . Then I hit the blonde on the side of the head again, much harder, and she rolled off my feet.”¹⁰⁰ By the end of the story, the callousness which had once characterized the attitude of the police has become the attitude of the detective. “ ‘I didn’t care a lot about trash like Steiner or Joe Marty and his girl friend, and still don’t,’ ” he tells the police.¹⁰¹

For his next two stories, “Nevada Gas,” published in *BLACK MASK* in June 1935, and “Spanish Blood,” published in November 1935, Chandler switched back to third person narration and dispensed with a private eye altogether. “Nevada Gas” probably has the strongest opening of any story Chandler ever wrote. Hugo Candless steps into what he believes to be the backseat of his own car, only to find that it is not, that the tonneau is sealed and he cannot get out—and then the cyanide gas is turned on. The protagonist is Johnny De Ruse, a gambler, who admits when he finds his girlfriend with another man that he is “ ‘not soft, baby—just a bit sentimental. . . . I like games of chance, including women. But when I lose I don’t get sore and I don’t chisel. I just move on to the next table.’ ”¹⁰² Candless’ wife is in on his murder. When she pulls a gun on De Ruse, “her face was convulsed, her lips were drawn back over thin wolfish teeth that shimmered.”¹⁰³ The protagonist in “Spanish Blood” is a police lieutenant who has long been best friends with the murdered man and his wife. He is pulled off the investigation by party bosses, but promises Belle Marr, the murdered man’s widow, that he will stay on the case anyway. Belle speaks in a “low, husky voice.”¹⁰⁴ There is a blonde in the story—Belle has red-brown hair—but the blonde is a red herring, a junkie who goes gunhappy at the end and shoots down the party bosses. She did not kill Marr. Belle did. Sam Delaguerra, the protagonist, knows that Belle did it; but he agrees to go along with the departmental frame masterminded by the police commissioner because Marr would have wanted it that way. “ ‘It’s my first frame-up,’ ” he tells Belle. “ ‘I hope it will be my last.’ ”¹⁰⁵

“Guns at Cyrano’s” was published in *BLACK MASK* in January 1936. In it Chandler introduced Ted Carmady. The story is written in the third person and Carmady is the son of a deceased political boss who lives well off the money he has inherited. He claims to have once been a private dick. At the beginning of the story, he meets Jean Adrian, sapped down in the doorway of her suite in the hotel Carmady owns. “She had a deep soft voice.”¹⁰⁶ She is the girlfriend of a fighter who is being supposedly threatened to throw a fight and who is backed financially by a nightclub owner, Cyrano. When she guns a “red hot”—i.e., a hired killer—brandishing a .45, the fighter gets noble and tries to cover for her. In a rare, sentimental moment at the end of the story, Carmady sug-

gests to Jean that “ ‘it would be so much more fun to run away together.’ ”¹⁰⁷

Obviously this did not happen, since Ted Carmady was transformed in the next four stories Chandler wrote for *BLACK MASK* into his first-person private detective narrator. However, between the appearance of the first of these stories, “The Man Who Liked Dogs,” in the March 1936 issue and the second, “Goldfish” in the June 1936 issue, Chandler published “Noon Street Nemesis” in the 30 May 1936 issue of *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY*. “Noon Street Nemesis” introduced blacks into the metaphor of corruption: there are basically two kinds, those who are docile but secretive and those who are dangerous. In all cases, however, they comprise an alien race. Pete Anglich is the protagonist, an undercover man with the narcotics division. The story is perhaps memorable only for one *noir* scene. “She was pressed against a wall, motionless. A little beyond her, dim yellow light came from the stairway of a walk-up apartment house. Beyond that a small parking lot with billboards across most of its front. Faint light from somewhere touched her hat, her shabby polo coat with the turned-up collar, one side of her face. . . . He [Pete] stiffened at the sharp sound of running steps, clicking high heels.”¹⁰⁸ This story well illustrates just how many of the scenes in Chandler’s early fiction are set at night. Also, while the dialogue is in the vernacular, the descriptive passages tend toward the grace and elegance of Latin prose, even to the omission of a copula. “I’m an intellectual snob,” Chandler once remarked, “who happens to have a fondness for the American vernacular, largely because I grew up on Latin and Greek. As a result, when I use slang, solecisms, colloquialisms, snide talk or any kind of off-beat language, I do it deliberately. The literary use of slang is a study in itself. I’ve found that there are only two kinds that are any good: slang that established itself in the language, and slang that you make up yourself. Everything else is apt to be passé before it gets into print.”¹⁰⁹

Captain Shaw liked “The Man Who Liked Dogs” so much among Chandler’s *BLACK MASK* fiction, that it was this story he chose for inclusion in his *THE HARD-BOILED OMNIBUS*. The local chief of police is a crook and some of his picked men are crooks. With the assistance of a crooked doctor who runs a phony clinic, criminals on the lam are provided with protection—for a price. Even the veterinary in the story is a crook. Yet none of them cuts quite the figure that Diana Saint does, sister of armed bank robber, Farmer Saint. “Diana Saint came in with a brace of automatics in her hands. A tall, handsome woman, neat and dark, with a rakish black hat, and two gloved hands holding guns.”¹¹⁰ For me, however, “Goldfish” is a much better story; although I cannot agree with Frank MacShane’s definition of “feminist” when, in *THE LIFE OF RAYMOND CHANDLER* (1976), he remarked that “Chandler is enough of a feminist to allow some of his women to be crooks, and no one is tougher than Carol Donovan in ‘Goldfish.’ ”¹¹¹ It is established already on the first page that Carmady, as a detective, is down on his luck since his blue serge suit shines. Carmady is even identified as the nameless detective from “Finger Man.” “ ‘Right as rain, toots,’ ” Carol tells Carmady as she enters a

room, holding a gun. “ ‘I’m a lady that wants her own way.’ ”¹¹² Even her partner must say of her: “ ‘I’ve seen hard women, but she’s the bluing on armor plate.’ ”¹¹³ At the end, she is shot down by a woman who is a bit faster on the draw. “ ‘Then she was a huddled thing on the floor at my feet,’ ” Carmady observes, “ ‘small, deadly, extinct, with redness coming out from under her, and the tall quiet woman behind her with the smoking Colt held in both hands.’ ”¹¹⁴

Years later, Chandler remarked that it became his objective to exceed Hammett in the kind of detective fiction he was writing: “ ‘I thought that perhaps I could go a bit further, be a bit more humane, get a bit more interested in people than in violent death.’ ”¹¹⁵ This new humanity became manifest in the next Ted Carmady story, “ ‘The Curtain,’ ” published in *BLACK MASK* in September 1936. In “ ‘The Man Who Liked Dogs’ ” Carmady was capable of rather incredible shooting, as when he shot a shotgun out of Farmer Saint’s hands; in “ ‘The Curtain,’ ” similarly, he is able to shoot a thug from under his arm. What is different is that Carmady turns down the offer of a thousand dollar fee General Winslow promises him to find Dud O’Mara. “ ‘He’s an old, old man, crippled, half buried already,’ ” he tells Mrs. O’Mara about her father. “ ‘One thin thread of interest held him to life. The thread snapped and nobody gives a damn. He tries to act as if he didn’t give a damn himself. I don’t call that a mood. I call that a pretty swell display of intestinal fortitude.’ ”¹¹⁶ Yet, by the end, the humanity has become sentimentality. Mrs. O’Mara’s young son is a homicidal lunatic. Instead of exposing him Carmady informs Mrs. O’Mara that she must send him away to be cured because “ ‘it would kill the general out of hand to know his blood was in that.’ ”¹¹⁷

The same kind of sentimentality is to be found in “ ‘Try the Girl’ ” the last story Chandler submitted to *BLACK MASK*. It appeared in the January 1937 issue. Steve Skalla is a giant who does not know his own strength. Carmady encounters him in the Negro section of Los Angeles. He has just gotten out of stir and is looking for his old girlfriend, Beulah. Carmady is able to run her down. Beulah is now singing on the radio and carrying on an affair with a station executive. Skalla finds out where she lives and kills the executive. When the executive’s jealous wife shows up, she dives for a gun. “ ‘She laughed just before she shot him. She shot him four times, in the lower belly, then the hammer clicked.’ ”¹¹⁸ Carmady tries to help Skalla. “ ‘His flat black eyes had something in them that was more than mere pain, something he wanted me to do. Part of the time he was trying to tell me what it was, and part of the time he was holding his belly in one piece and saying again: ‘Leave her alone. Maybe she loved the guy.’ ”¹¹⁹ When Beulah returns, her heart goes out to Skalla. “ ‘She was holding one of his huge, limp fingers . . . ,’ ” Carmady remarks at the end of the story, informing the reader that Skalla died of his wounds but doing so with an image perhaps half-intentionally sexual.¹²⁰

Chandler quit writing for *BLACK MASK* after Captain Shaw left. He switched to *DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE*. His first person detective narrator had the same office Carmady had, only now he was called John Dalmás; and the stories

which featured him were the best short fiction Chandler was to write: "Mandarin's Jade," "Red Wind," "Bay City Blues," "The Lady in the Lake," and "Trouble is My Business." The only one of these stories about which I have a comment here is "Mandarin's Jade." In it, a blonde, Mrs. Prendergast, a woman from the streets who has married a wealthy man, hires a thug, Moose Magoon, to kill her gigolo, Lindley Paul; Paul is beaten to a pulp with a sap. She conspires to have Dalmás killed. When he exposes her, the reader is told that "her eyes held a warm bitterness like poisoned honey."¹²¹ Her husband, a tall and capable as well as a wealthy man, will protect her. "The blonde laughed crazily and the laugh turned into a screech and then into a yell. The next thing she was rolling on the floor screaming and kicking her legs around. The tall man went over to her quickly and bent down and hit her in the face with his open hand. You could have heard that smack a mile. When he straightened up again his face was a dusky red and the blonde was lying there sobbing."¹²²

FAREWELL, MY LOVELY (1940), Chandler's second Philip Marlowe novel, and in the opinion of many his best, was made up in large part of a mixture and adroit fusion of the plots of "The Man Who Liked Dogs," "Try the Girl," "Mandarin's Jade," and "Trouble is My Business." The Beulah character from "Try the Girl" was combined with the murderous blonde from "Mandarin's Jade." In the novel, it is the blonde who saps her former gigolo to death; it is the blonde who guns her former lover, a gigantic ex-con now named Moose Malloy, and who ratted on him in the first place, leading to his imprisonment. The blonde is openly sexual. "She fell softly across my lap and I bent down over her face and began to browse on it," Marlowe describes their first encounter. ". . . When I got to her mouth it was half open and burning and her tongue was a darting snake between her teeth."¹²³ The good girl in the story, Ann Riordan, has to demand of the passive Marlowe: "'I'd like to be kissed, damn you!'"¹²⁴ The blonde in this novel, no less than her prototype in the short story, could have been gotten off because of her wealthy husband's money; but no, she goes into hiding, shoots a cop when he would expose her (rather than offer him a bribe), and kills herself. Marlowe's sentimental explanation for this turn of events is perhaps the most disappointing element in the novel: the blonde did it because she did not want to hurt her husband! A better reason for her suicide is that Chandler did not want her to live.

Chandler published a selection of his early short stories in an anthology he titled THE SIMPLE ART OF MURDER (1950). In attempting to account for the peculiar power of BLACK MASK fiction, in his Introduction Chandler surmised that "possibly it was the smell of fear which these stories managed to generate. Their characters lived in a world gone wrong, a world in which, long before the atom bomb, civilization had created the machinery for its own destruction, and was learning to use it with all the moronic delight of a gangster trying out his first machine gun. The law was something to be manipulated for profit and power. The streets were dark with something more than night."¹²⁵

In his remarkable book, HEINRICH HEINE: A MODERN BIOGRAPHY

(1979), Jeffrey L. Sammons made the point that in both his poetry and his prose Heine was more concerned with images than with linear narration. Professor Sammons also noted just how Heine used his famous *Stimmungsbrechung*, a sardonic breach of mood in which the tone “shifts back and forth from the emotional to the conversational, from the delicate to the blunt, the setting from the realm of the imagination to the banal scenes of modern society. It is all true in Heine’s poetry: the feeling and the frustration, the hope and the delusion, the desirability of the beloved and her dimwitted cruelty. But there is no mediation between these contraries in the situation. The resolution is the poetry itself. Thus the poetry and what it is doing for the poet are ultimately the subject of the poetry rather than the beloved or the love story. The poet recovers his shaken dignity through the creative achievement.”¹²⁶

In Chandler’s detective novels—to vary Professor Sammons’ phraseology somewhat—there is no mediation between the detective’s feelings of compassion and humanity and the frustration he must feel living in a wholly corrupt world. Desirable women, usually blondes, are to be avoided because they are also almost invariably corrupt. The “good girls,” such as Anne Riordan, are to be avoided because they would cause the detective to forsake his profession and his profession which provides him with his first person narratives comprises all the meaning he can find in life. The detective retains his dignity by means of his achievement: persisting in his quest until it is resolved.

Even Heine’s romantic antinomy between sensuality and asceticism can be found reflected in the world of Chandler’s detective. “He is a man in whom the liveliest hopes have died,” Russell Davies wrote in “Omnes Me Impune Lacesunt” [Everyone Provokes Me with Impunity]; “but he maintains himself in the face of a world which has let him down. For this he claims our admiration. But it is self-pity that allies him intimately to Chandler. You can see it in the studied dullness of his ordered life: the bottle in the desk, the (admittedly good) coffee in the morning, the trivial round of ‘missing persons’ business. It’s a complete metaphor for the writer’s life—but a writer in retreat from the sensuality of the world outside.”¹²⁷ For Davies, Chandler’s Marlowe is no less disillusioned with men than he is with women. But another essay in the same book—THE WORLD OF RAYMOND CHANDLER (1977)—“Marlowe, Men and Women” by Michael Mason contradicts this view, and rightly I believe. “The general effect,” according to Mason, “is that Chandler’s world is morally skewed in a way that makes nonsense of the author’s claim, which he liked to imply if not actually state, that the Marlowe novels are edifyingly clear-sighted about good and evil. Their moral scheme is in truth pathologically harsh on women and pathologically lenient toward men. For just as the novels are full of homicidal females—gunning men down, beating their brains out, and pushing them out of windows—they are correspondingly devoid of bad males. There is scarcely a dislikeable man to be found, and even the initially dislikeable, especially among the police, often turn out to be less unpleasant than they seemed.”¹²⁸ On these grounds, as well as others, Mason concluded that “Marlowe’s honor is most clearly a disguise for homosexual feeling.”¹²⁹

Chandler frequently claimed that he was writing “realistic” detective fiction, but, as Philip Durham put it in *DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS A MAN MUST GO: RAYMOND CHANDLER’S KNIGHT* (1963), “Chandler was actually writing romantic fiction, [although] by simulating reality through a hard-boiled attitude he could stay within an American literary tradition. The action and violence more or less covered up the fact that everything came out all right in the end.”¹³⁰

In some notes on the mystery story, reprinted in *THE NOTEBOOKS OF RAYMOND CHANDLER* (1976), Chandler himself suggested that “in any kind of literary or other projection the part is greater than the whole. The scene before the eyes dominates the thought of the audience; the normal individual makes no attempt to reconcile it with the pattern of the story. He is swayed by what is in the actual scene. When you have finished the book, it may, not necessarily will, fall into focus as a whole and be remembered by its merit so considered; but for the time of reading, the chapter is the dominating factor. The vision of the emotional imagination is very short but also very intense.”¹³¹ Perhaps this tells us in its way why Chandler’s stories and novels sparkle in their individual scenes, although in the final analysis the plots as a whole appear confused and unsatisfying. More than any other *BLACK MASK* writer he was concerned with the vivid scene and with his characters who, as Aristophanes and Plautus before him, and Heine, too, he could lampoon, ridicule, flay, satirize, at the same time as over the years he increasingly sentimentalized his detective. He wrote out of a well of loneliness and he wrote well only when he was intensely lonely; his imagination conjured a world in which “the streets were dark with something more than night.” In Raymond Chandler all of the strains of Nineteenth century romanticism, its notions of romance and the heroic knight, its Gothic horrors, its obsession with the pathological and with death, decay, and decadence were combined with Baudelaire’s revulsion toward women who “s’aimant sans dégoût,” an image which reverberates in Keats’ vision of “la belle dame sans merci”; and he placed them in the mid Twentieth century, set them in the heart of Los Angeles, and from them, with them, out of them, he sought to raise the detective story to the level of art.¹³² He objected to Hammett’s style which, he felt, “had no overtones, left no echo, evoked no image beyond a distant hill.”¹³³ He tried to write in a style which imparted all of these things, in which the image dominated, even obscured, the linear narrative. In all of this, it would seem, he succeeded to a degree denied all the others in the *BLACK MASK* school.

OTHER VARIETIES OF *ROMANS NOIRS*

ERIC AMBLER

According to Vincent and Nan Buranelli in *SPY/COUNTERSPY: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ESPIONAGE* (1982), “the spy is one of the classical figures of the human experience, known to every age, community, and culture

from prehistoric times to our own because his or her talents meet a special need. At any given moment, past or present, somebody, somewhere, wants to know vital secrets of a real or potential enemy, and one way to make the discovery is through the art and science of espionage.”¹ The Buranellis’ book is devoted principally to facts and factual accounts having to do with this long history of espionage and one of the most interesting cases, surely, which they record is that of Colonel Alfred Redl, the director of Austrian espionage prior to World War I. An even more detailed account of his life and activities can be found in a book never translated into English, *DER FALL DES GENERALSTAB-CHEFS REDL [THE CASE OF GENERAL CHIEF OF STAFF REDL]* (1924) by Egon Erwin Kisch.

Redl entered the Department of Military Intelligence in Vienna in 1900 and he soon became noted for a number of innovations which he introduced in the science of counter-espionage, in particular the use of fingerprints, hidden cameras to photograph suspects when they were off guard, and the use of bright lights to confuse prisoners during intense interrogations. Kisch records, among many such incidents, how Redl exposed a Polish spy, Major von Wienskowsky. While the major’s house was being searched, his six-year-old daughter was in the nursery with her German governess. Redl befriended the child by chatting with her in Polish, asking her to do simple sums and behaving surprised and delighted when she would give the correct answer. Finally, he asked her if she was clever enough to show him where her father hid his private letters. The child took him at once to her father’s desk and pointed to the left-hand side where a secret compartment was found.

It was due to successes of this sort that Colonel Redl was selected to head up the Intelligence Bureau. However, he was at the same time a double-agent for Russia. Redl’s motive was purely monetary, as the Buranellis disclosed. Redl was a closet homosexual and he needed the money to finance his “sybaritic” sexual extravagances.² Neither Kisch nor Theodor Reik who gave a brief account of the case in his book, *THE UNKNOWN MURDERER* (1936), were aware apparently of Redl’s double personal life although they knew of his double professional life. Reik’s interest in the case was psychoanalytic and had to do chiefly with Redl’s apprehension. Two payments to him of cash sent by the Russians were intercepted. On 24 May 1913, he called at the post office box he had rented under an assumed name to pick up these payments and his car was followed afterwards to a well-known hotel. Redl himself had not been seen by the agents who had staked out the box, only his car. The car, however, was searched and a penknife case of light gray cloth was discovered in it: obviously the suspect had used a penknife to open the envelopes containing the money. “The case,” Reik recorded, “was given to the hotel porter with orders to find out who had lost it. At that moment Redl came downstairs and put the key of his room on the table.

“Have you lost the case of your knife, sir?” asked the porter.

“Yes,” answered the colonel, putting the case in his pocket, “where did I—?”

He stopped in the middle of the sentence. He noticed the stranger sitting at the same table reading some letters; he knew he was lost.³

Redl was given a gentleman's way out. Later that day he shot himself to death in his hotel room.

Reik recounted this incident in order to illustrate what Sigmund Freud in his book *ZUR PSYCHOPATHOLOGIE DES ALLTAGSLEBENS* [PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF EVERYDAY LIFE] (1904) had termed *eine Fehlleistung*, literally a "failed achievement." The term has been translated into English as the Latin word, *parapraxis*. Freud's position was that such parapraxes, "if the procedure of psychoanalytic investigation is employed with them, are well-motivated [*wohlmotiviert*] and determined through motives unknown to consciousness."⁴ I would have preferred had Reik delved more in a phenomenological sense into the kind of psychology which must characterize such a psyche so consistently split between constantly alternating loyalties. It is that personality Eric Ambler, in his Introduction to his collection of spy stories, *TO CATCH A SPY* (1965), described as belonging to the spy. He felt a spy must "have considerable strength of character. Spying is lonely and depressing work. The spy's friendships can only be warily professional. His appetites and weaknesses, even the small ones, must be rigidly self-controlled. He must be capable of living for long periods under exceptional nervous strain without cracking."⁵ Admittedly, in Redl's case, his appetites were not controlled and, on a conscious no less than unconscious level, this may have proved his undoing.

Ambler in his Introduction is in agreement with the Buranellis about the antiquity of professional spying, but he also observed that "it is impossible to find any spy story of note written before the Twentieth century."⁶ In trying to adduce why this is so, Ambler suggested that literary recognition of the spy had to await cultural acceptance of spying as a necessary, even interesting, if not wholly admirable, occupation. I would go one step further and say that the spy—and espionage fiction in general—is one of the most representative expressions of Twentieth-century consciousness for the simple reason that, both as an art and as a science, it embodies those nihilistic tendencies which are so marked in the modern world.

In order to make a spy a suitable hero it was the tendency in early espionage fiction, i.e., spy fiction before Ambler, to apply what Julian Symons in *MORTAL CONSEQUENCES: A HISTORY FROM THE DETECTIVE STORY TO THE CRIME NOVEL* (1973) called an "adumbration of the double standard by which They are viewed as spies pursuing evil ends, while We are agents countering their wicked designs with good ones of our own."⁷ For such early writers of espionage fiction as John Buchan, E. Phillips Oppenheim, and Sapper (H. C. McNeile who wrote the Bulldog Drummond stories), "in fact, for all spy writers before Ambler," as Symons pointed out, "the moral problem involved in spying was thus easily solved." What changed all this were the Ashenden stories by W. Somerset Maugham, written in the 1920s. Maugham had actually been employed in espionage for the British during World War I,

in Switzerland and Russia, and his fiction embodies not only a realistic tone in which murder is an essential policy but in which violence and eroticism are combined amid a morally neutral frame of reference. It was this morally neutral attitude which, Symons felt, “provided the ground on which Ambler and, much later, John Le Carré worked”⁸ and the coolness with regard to killing displayed by R., Ashenden’s control in the stories, was eventually to inspire the world-view of James Bond in Ian Fleming’s fiction. Ambler’s pre-war espionage novels—two of which were adapted for the screen as memorable examples of *film gris* and one of which, *BACKGROUND TO DANGER* (1937), formed the basis for a notable thriller—actually diagnosed the sickness and decadence of Western civilization as the products of nihilism. Providence, art, and science have all been replaced by the blood logic of the jungle, precisely what Nietzsche foresaw would be the consequence of nihilism. In an effort to account for the success of such a man as Dimitrios, Charles Latimer, the protagonist in *A COFFIN FOR DIMITRIOS* (1939), concludes that “it was useless to try to explain him in terms of Good and Evil. They were no more than baroque abstractions. Good Business and Bad Business were the elements of the new theology. Dimitrios was not evil. He was logical and consistent; as logical and consistent in the European jungle as the poison gas called Lewisite and the shattered bodies of children killed in the bombardment of an open town. The logic of Michael Angelo’s *DAVID*, Beethoven’s quartets, and Einstein’s physics had been replaced by that of the *STOCK EXCHANGE YEAR BOOK* and Hitler’s *MEIN KAMPF*.”⁹

Ronald Ambrosetti in his essay, “The World of Eric Ambler: From Detective to Spy,” contained in the anthology, *DIMENSIONS OF DETECTIVE FICTION* (1976), found that Ambler’s pre-war espionage novels incorporate a formula and that it “bears a certain resemblance to the undercurrent ethos of Greek tragedy: the gods will not tolerate a man who is too happy or inordinately comfortable in his position in life. Ambler’s protagonists are such men, and they are grimly reminded through tragic circumstances that human happiness is too easily subject to chance and fate. In this sense, the Ambler *ingenu* is chastened and recovers from the harrowing experiences as a wiser man.”¹⁰ This is certainly true, provided we make a few changes in perspective. Instead of the gods in *BACKGROUND TO DANGER* it is big business men who monitor and control the world of other men. “. . . The Big Business man,” Ambler’s protagonist, Kenton, comes to realize “was only one player in the game of international politics, but he was the player who made all the rules.”¹¹

The plot of *BACKGROUND TO DANGER* concerns Romanian oil which is coveted by Pan-Eurasian Petroleum with offices in London. A man named Sachs has photographs of frontier fortifications on the Romanian border with the Soviet Union which, if made public, will cause a realignment of Romanian government policy. Sachs gives the photographs to Kenton who, once Sachs is murdered, is framed for having done it. Zaleshoff, an American who is a spy for the Soviet Union, and his sister, Tamara, are after the photographs. So is

Colonel Robinson, an international spy working for Pan-Eurasian. In due course Kenton joins forces with Zareschhoff and they go to Czechoslovakia after Colonel Robinson who has managed to get the photographs away from Kenton. It is perhaps important to note that in this early novel Kenton is not completely alone; he is able to count on Zaleschhoff's assistance—at least within certain prescribed limits.

EPITAPH FOR A SPY (1952) followed and was published in Great Britain in 1938, although the American edition did not appear until almost fifteen years later. "I wrote EPITAPH FOR A SPY in 1937," Ambler remarked in a Footnote for the American edition, "and it was a mild attempt at realism. The central character is a stateless person (fairly unusual then), there are no professional devils, and the only Britisher in the story is anything but stalwart. I still like bits of it."¹² The stateless protagonist is Josef Vadassy, a teacher of languages in Paris, a Hungarian born in Budapest traveling under a Yugoslavian passport. Virtually all of the action is set at the Hotel de la Réserve at St. Gatiens in the south of France. The two most interesting characters are Warren Skelton, an American tourist, living with Mary Skelton who is posing as Warren's sister but who, in reality, is his wife. In an amusing scene, Skelton undertakes to explain to Herr Vogel, a Gestapo agent posing as a Swiss, the difference between the two political parties in the United States. " 'Il y a . . . deux parties seulement,' " he says, " 'les Républicaines et les Démocrates. Ces sont du droit—tous les deux. Mais les Républicaines sont plus au droit que les Démocrates. Ça c'est la différence' " ¹³ Ambler's persistent image of a civilization in decline intrudes upon Vadassy's inner consciousness when he thinks about what is happening simultaneously in Paris. "There you could listen to the rustle of leaves unconscious of the pains of humanity in labor," he reflects, "of a civilization hastening to destruction. There, away from the brassy sea and blood-red earth, you could contemplate the Twentieth-century tragedy unmoved; unmoved except by pity for mankind fighting to save itself from the primeval ooze that welled from its own subconscious being."¹⁴ Here, certainly, is a compelling juxtaposition of imagery in which Homer's "oivopa ponton" [wine-red sea] has become brassy and the earth blood-red; while the view of civilization in a state of spiritual decay seems to have been derived from Oswald Spengler. In DER UNTERGANG DES ABENDLANDES: UMRISSE EINER MORPHOLOGIE DER WELTGESCHICHTE [THE DECLINE OF THE WEST: OUTLINES OF A MORPHOLOGY OF WORLD HISTORY] (1923), Spengler saw civilization as the final, atrophied stage of a culture. "The decline of the West, viewed in this way," he wrote, "means nothing less than the problem of civilization. One of the basic questions of all higher history is presented here. How is civilization grasped but as an organic and logical consequence, as the perpetuation and termination [*Ausgang*] of a culture?" ¹⁵

It is a convention of the classical detective story that, when a murder occurs in what seems to be a model community, for a time, everyone becomes suspect; but, by the end, the culprit is exposed, the *status quo* is restored, the com-

munity is cleansed. If the hard-boiled detective story demolished this perspective, in a way so did Ambler. In *EPITAPH FOR A SPY*, there is a spy at the Hotel de la Réserve. By the end, he is identified and expelled. Vadassy is free to return to Paris and permitted to keep his position and his French residence. His ordeal has been finite. But the reality of the world in which he lives, and which he was forced to contemplate for the time he spent in St. Gatien, is a world where no one can be trusted, where he is alone and friends are shown to be enemies and enemies, friends. To the extent that everyone is decadent, everyone is guilty.

Zaleshoff and Tamara return in *CAUSE FOR ALARM* (1939). It is narrated by Nick Marlow, an English engineer sent as a representative of the Spartacus Machine Tool Company of Wolverhampton to Italy. The firm is selling the Italians machines with which to manufacture bullet shells. General Vargas, a Gestapo agent, is spying on Italian defenses despite the alliance which exists between Italy and Germany. Zaleshoff and Marlow have an argument in which Zaleshoff attempts to demonstrate to Marlow that he cannot exclude himself morally from what he is doing. “ ‘Industry has no other end or purpose than the satisfaction of the business man engaged in it,’ ” Zaleshoff tells Marlow. “ ‘It may be demand for high explosives to slaughter civilians with or one for chemical fertilizers, it may be shells or it may be saucepans, it may be for jute machinery for an Indian sweat-shop or it may be for prams, it’s all one.’ ” “ ‘Are you speaking as an American or a Russian?’ ” Marlow asks Zaleshoff. “ ‘What difference does it make?’ ” Zaleshoff responds. “ ‘Isn’t it common-sense to replace an old, bad system with a better one?’ ”¹⁶

The implication is not so much that socialism holds an answer as that Zaleshoff has allied himself with the Soviet Union because he is seeking an alternative to the decadent civilization all around him and the morally neutral men, the business men, who make all the rules. “Imperialism is pure civilization,” Spengler observed.¹⁷ No doubt Ambler, unlike Zaleshoff, was aware of Spengler’s conviction that “though present-day socialism, still little developed, opposes expansion, it will one day become its most distinguished proponent with the vehemence of Destiny.”¹⁸ Marlow is not alone and is not abandoned because of Zaleshoff’s friendship. As in *BACKGROUND TO DANGER*, human friendship is the solitary hold-out against universal decay.

A COFFIN FOR DIMITRIOS is frequently cited as Ambler’s masterpiece among these early novels. The first sentences in the book read: “A Frenchman named Chamfort, who should have known better, once said that chance was a nickname for Providence. It is one of those convenient, question-begging aphorisms coined to discredit the unpleasant truth that chance plays an important, if not predominant, part in human affairs.”¹⁹ Charles Latimer is both a lecturer in political economy at a minor English university and the author of detective stories—the latter written purely for money. While he is in Turkey, Colonel Haki of the Turkish secret police introduces him to the dossier on Dimitrios Makropoulos who was an international criminal but who is now presum-

ably dead. Latimer becomes taken with the idea of reconstructing Dimitrios' past life, a quest which brings him to several places on the continent, narrated with the captivation of social history deduced from purely archeological remnants. Of course at the end he finds himself hunted by Dimitrios who is very much alive. "The situation in which a person, imagining fondly that he is in charge of his own destiny, is, in fact, the sport of circumstances beyond his control, is always fascinating," Ambler remarked in the course of the novel. "It is the essential element in most good theatre from the OEDIPUS of Sophocles to EAST LYNNE." ²⁰

JOURNEY INTO FEAR (1940) was the last espionage novel Ambler wrote before the war broke out and, in fact, his last fiction for nearly a decade. An Englishman named Graham has been sent to Turkey on behalf of his firm which, in accordance with the terms of the Anglo-Turkish Treaty, intends to arm the Turkish navy. When an attempt is made on Graham's life, Colonel Haki of the Turkish secret police wants him to leave the country in a clandestine fashion aboard an Italian freighter which also transports passengers. Haki is convinced that Graham will be safe, but it is not very long before he comes to learn that the man who tried to assassinate him in Turkey is on board ship. Many of the passengers are suspected by Graham of being something else than what they pretend to be and *en route* Graham, who is a bored married man, finds himself attracted to a dancer known as Mademoiselle Josette who is traveling with her husband and dancing partner, José. Apparently, José does not object to her frequent peccadilloes. In an argument with a Frenchman also on board, a man named Mathis, Mathis points out to Graham the irony of a capitalistic war. When, during the First World War, the Germans captured an iron works, the French artillery and bombers " 'could have blown those furnaces to pieces in a week. But our artillery remained silent; an airman who dropped one bomb on the Briey area was court-martialed. Why? . . . I will tell you why, Monsieur. Because there were orders that Briey was not to be touched. Whose orders? Nobody knew. The orders came from someone at the top. The Ministry of War said that it was the generals. The generals said that it was the Ministry of War. We did not find out the facts until after the war. The orders had been issued by Monsieur de Wendel of the Comité des Forges who owned the Briey mines and blast furnaces. We were fighting for our lives, but our lives were less important than that the property of Monsieur de Wendel should be preserved to make fat profits. No, it is not good for those who fight to know too much.' " ²¹ I suppose some readers may have shared Mathis' sense of outrage when JOURNEY INTO FEAR was first published; but today most people seem to accept the existence of neutron bombs—which destroy only civilians, not buildings and factories—with equanimity.

Mr. Kuvetli, the Turkish agent aboard charged with protecting Graham, warns him concerning Graham's interest in Josette Gallindo, the dancer: " 'No woman is trustworthy.' " ²² After Graham escapes from those who are determined to kill him, he meets Josette on a train bound for Paris. They had planned a tryst

together, should Graham be able, and now Josette tells Graham he must settle the arrangements with José. José's price for Graham to amuse himself with Josette is two thousand francs a week. " 'Chéri,' " José says in words characteristic of a Montmartre prostitute, " 'avant que je t'aime t'oublieras pas mon petit cadeau.' " ²³ When Graham turns down the proposition, Josette slips the diamanté bracelet she is wearing over her knuckles, fully prepared to beat José for having flubbed the negotiations.

"Ambler gave more to the genre in his early efforts," Ronald Ambrosetti concluded, "than what he extracted in his later work." ²⁴ There is some truth in this observation, but only some. The world of Europe was changed, perhaps irretrievably, by World War II, when socialism became, as Spengler predicted, the "most distinguished" proponent of expansion. Instead of a precarious balance of power, there was only the Iron Curtain and what a new generation of political pundits called the "balance of deterence." As Madame Deltchev explains to the protagonist in Ambler's *JUDGMENT ON DELTCHEV* (1951), " 'you will see walls round most of our old houses. In Bulgaria and in Greece, in Yugoslavia, in all the countries of Europe that have lived under Turkish rule it is the same. To put a wall round your house then was not only to put up a barrier against the casual violence of foreign soldiers, it was in a way to deny their existence. Then our people lived behind their walls in small worlds of illusion that did not include the Ottoman Empire. . . . Now that we are again inside our walls, the habits of our parents and our childhood return quietly like long-lost pets.' " ²⁵ It may well be a world still in decline, but it has ceased all motion save in the terrible advance of the technology of total destruction, what Hitler had envisioned with the word *Vernichtung*, a world poised for a war it hopes will never come and yet for which it prepares ineluctably. In such a world there is no place for a protagonist to escape to because there is no escape; there is only the small world of personal illusion amid the "blocs" of East and West.

CORNELL WOOLRICH

"I was only trying to cheat death," Woolrich had written on a fragment of paper discovered among his effects after his death. "I was only trying to surmount for a little while the darkness that all my life I surely knew was going to come rolling in on me some day and obliterate me. I was only trying to stay alive a little brief while longer, after I was already gone. To stay in the light, to be with the living a little while past my time." ²⁶

Francis M. Nevins, Jr., who edited and introduced an anthology of Woolrich's short fiction as well as wrote the Introductions to two re-issues of Woolrich novels, has called him "the Poe of the Twentieth century and the poet of its shadows." ²⁷ In his Introduction to *NIGHTWEBS: A COLLECTION OF STORIES BY CORNELL WOOLRICH* (1971), Nevins remarked that "Woolrich . . . was endowed with the ability to take his decades alone and wretched in his personal hell and to shape them into a body of work that theologians

must read to understand despair, philosophers to comprehend pessimism, social historians to grasp the Depression, and those concerned with the heart of man to experience through him what it means to be utterly alone.”²⁸

This is indeed high praise when it is reflected that Woolrich was completely devoid of what, by way of contrast, was Edgar Allan Poe’s genius for a well-made plot. Upon occasion, Woolrich was not above borrowing wholesale plot ingredients of other writers. To take but two examples from writers discussed later in this chapter, Woolrich’s story, “The Death of Me,” which appeared in the 7 December 1935 issue of *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY*, utilizes a theme characteristic of James M. Cain: the man who successfully commits one crime only to be tagged for one he did not commit; or “Dead on Her Feet,” which appeared in the December 1935 issue of *DIME DETECTIVE*, and uses the identical setting of a marathon dance contest that Horace McCoy employed in what remains his most famous short novel, published earlier that same year. Yet, however second-hand his plots, or fraught with implausibilities, they were merely opportunities for Woolrich to give voice to his dark vision of human existence dominated by sometimes malignant, but always impersonal, forces bent on the destruction of the weak and the innocent. Woolrich did have his characteristic locations: the run-down hotel, the tawdry dance hall, the cheap movie palace, the seedy precinct station, the low-life bar; just as he had his characteristic structures: the clock race, the loss of love and the corrosion of trust, above all the sensation of being trapped by forces beyond one’s control. Surrounding everything there is the Depression which functions, in Nevins’ words, “not so much as brute social fact but rather as a part of his own malignant universe.”²⁹

In an unpublished autobiography which Woolrich proposed titling *THE BLUES OF A LIFETIME*, he recalled how once when a youth he had first come to realize that he would have to die. “I had that trapped feeling,” he wrote, “like some sort of a poor insect that you’ve put inside a downturned glass, and it tries to climb up the sides, and it can’t, and it can’t, and it can’t.”³⁰ Woolrich was hopelessly attached to his mother and, except for a brief period after the stock market crash, he lived with her in hotel apartments in New York City until she died. During his brief period of independence, Woolrich married, but it did not work out. He had been a homosexual before the marriage. It was his custom to go out in the middle of the night in a sailor outfit he kept in a locked suitcase and solicit partners on the waterfront. Nevins, in his Introduction to the re-issue of *MANHATTAN LOVE SONG* (1932), one of Woolrich’s society novels written before he turned his full attention to suspense fiction, insisted that “Woolrich’s homosexuality is crucially interconnected with his work. It shows us that the contempt with which he portrays homosexuals, in *MANHATTAN LOVE SONG* and elsewhere, is at bottom contempt for himself.”³¹ It also explains, at least in part, the intense misogyny which can be found throughout much of his fiction.

In “Dead on Her Feet,” the investigating police officer suspects, if he does not actually know, that the young man who had been dancing with the young

woman who is murdered did not kill her. This is insufficient, however, to prevent him from tormenting the young man into madness in his search for the real culprit. “If a Woolrich protagonist is in love,” Nevins observed in his Introduction to the re-issue of *RENDEVOUS IN BLACK* (1948), “the beloved is likely to vanish in such a way that the protagonist not only can’t find her but can’t convince anyone that she ever existed. Or, in another classic Woolrich situation, the protagonist comes to after a blackout (caused by amnesia, drugs, hypnosis, or whatever) and little by little becomes convinced that he committed a murder or other crime while out of himself. The police are rarely sympathetic, for they are the earthly counterparts of the malignant powers that delight in savaging us, and their primary function is to torment the helpless. All we can do about this nightmare world is to create, if we can, a few islands of love and trust to help us forget. But love dies while the lovers go on living, and Woolrich is a master at portraying the corrosion of a relationship between two people.”³²

THE BRIDE WORE BLACK (1940) was Woolrich’s first suspense novel. To an extent it was a reworking of material previously published in short story form. The balcony murder sequence with which it opens was derived from “I’m Dangerous Tonight” which appeared in the November 1937 issue of *ALL-AMERICAN FICTION* and the climax with which it concludes came from “Borrowed Crime” which appeared in the July 1939 issue of *BLACK MASK*. It was first brought to the screen by François Truffaut under the title *LA MARIÉE ÉTAIT EN NOIR* (French, 1967).

The technique of the novel is that of delayed revelation so that, if the plot were to be related in a linear fashion, much that would be told first is learned only later by the reader, indeed much of it only in the last chapter. Julie Killeen (née Bennett) after her church wedding to Nick Killeen leaves the chapel with her new husband only for him seemingly to be run down and killed by a car which swerves at them, momentarily out of control and probably driven by a man who is drunk. There are five men in the car. The novel is divided into five *tableaux*, each one of which begins showing Julie’s preparations (although she is nameless until the end) to introduce herself into the circle of her intended victim (one of the five men in what she believes to have been the “death car,” although, again, this is not known by the reader, only that she intends to kill the victim). The first victim, Ken Bliss, is pushed from a penthouse balcony to his death. Prior to his execution, he is seen in conversation with a male friend named Corey. Corey sees Julie at the party being held in the penthouse and even tries to come on to her, albeit he is coldly rebuffed. Julie is a blonde in this first *tableau*. In the second, where she is stalking a man named Mitchell, an older man down on his luck living in a cheap hotel, she is a redhead. Woolrich made a deliberate attempt to evoke the image of Venus, the Cyprian, as envisioned by Botticelli: “She had a dark velvet wrap around her, lighter on the inside, and she seemed to rise out of its folds like a—like a nymph out of a sea shell.”³³

In an essay, "Seelenprobleme der Gegenwart" [Contemporary Psychic Problems] (1950), C. G. Jung provided the following explanation of his concept of the *anima*. "Every man," he wrote, "carries at all times the image of a woman within him, not the image of *this* specific woman, but rather of *a* specific woman. This image is at bottom an unconscious, engraved, inherited [*Erbmasse*] collectivity descended from primordial times with the living organism, a type, an archetype so to speak, derived from all the ancestral experiences concerning feminine nature, a precipitate of impressions about women, a psychically transmitted system of adjustment. . . ." ³⁴ In further defining this concept in the glossary of Jung's *ERINNERUNGEN, TRÄUME, GEDANKEN* [MEMORIES, DREAMS, REFLECTIONS] (1962), which she selected and edited, Aniela Jaffé added the remark that "all archetypal manifestations, including the animus and anima, have a negative and a positive, a primitive and a differentiating aspect." ³⁵ Finally, Marie-Louise von Franz, in *C. G. JUNG: HIS MYTH IN OUR TIME* (1975), commented that "Jung called these contrasexual personifications of the unconscious personality the *anima* (in men) and the *animus* (in women). In a man the *anima* finds expression principally in the form of specific positive or negative moods or feeling tones, of erotic fantasies, of impulses, inclinations, and of emotional incentives for life . . . these contrasexual personality components form a bridge in relations with the opposite sex (mostly by way of projections). . . ." ³⁶

When Mitchell is alone with Julie in his room, as she is preparing to poison him, he tells her, " 'You're just like I always dreamed of someone being, almost as though you came out of my own head.' " " 'The really clever woman is all things to all men,' " Julie responds. " 'Like the chameleon, she takes her coloring from his ideal of her. It is her job to find out what that is.' " ³⁷ Julie, however, is definitely a negative embodiment of the *anima*; she is woman as *erinys*, as nemesis, as death. Indeed, there are no positive embodiments of the *anima* in this novel. When Mitchell's girlfriend arrives at his door with some soup for him, Julie gives "the slow-thinking lummoX a push that started her involuntarily down the corridor" and tells her that " 'your friend is dead in there and I killed him. I'm only trying to save you from becoming involved yourself, you fool. I have nothing against—other women.' " ³⁸ Ironically, it is this very sentiment which ultimately proves Julie's undoing.

Moran is the next victim. Julie sends a bogus telegram to his wife indicating that her mother is desperately ill. Margaret Moran meets Moran at the bus terminal where he is to take charge of their small son, Cookie. "She wound her arms about his neck with unexpected tightness; as though she were still not one hundred per cent maternal." ³⁹ Given Woolrich's ambivalence toward his mother, this becomes a significant observation about a woman. That night Julie shows up at the Moran home, pretending to be little Cookie's kindergarten teacher. In a rather contrived sequence, she even manages to convince Cookie, who certainly knows better, that this is her identity. She prepares dinner, does the dishes, makes orange juice for the next morning, and plays hide-and-seek with Cookie.

Hiding at one point in a compartment in the kitchen, she claims to have lost a ring and asks Moran to help her search for it. When he crawls in the compartment looking for the ring, she slams the door and seals it up with putty. Cookie helps her, thinking it is all great fun. Children, in their presumed innocence, can be menacing. The real kindergarten teacher is arrested on the basis of much circumstantial evidence, including Cookie's testimony. " 'You can't possibly know what goes through you, when you're in your room, secure and contented and at peace with the world one minute, and the next someone suddenly comes for you to take you away,' " she tells Wanger of the city police when he comes to arrest her. " 'Oh, I can't stand it!' " she continues. " 'I'm frightened of the whole world tonight!' " ⁴⁰ Julie, once she finds out about this arrest, telephones Wanger and proves to him that she—without revealing her identity—actually murdered Moran. Wanger comes to realize that these apparently unconnected murders are somehow all crimes perpetrated by the same person. This is a very important discovery for him to make. Julie may be a malignant force in the world, but she is also corporeal and therefore capable of being apprehended and stopped. The individual might be wantonly destroyed but human institutions, most of all human reason, prove impregnable. Of course, this is not always the case in a Woolrich story, but it is much of the time.

Fergusson is next. He is a painter. Julie, with her hair dyed black, is hired by him to model as Diana for a painting. Perhaps it would be well to remember, especially in this context, that the netherworld manifestation of Diana was Hecate. Julie's Diana belongs to the *diis inferiis*. She must hold a bow and arrow poised and ready to fire. The first time the arrow narrowly misses Fergusson. He dismisses the incident as an accident. At a party at Fergusson's studio, Corey shows up again. Julie appears familiar to him but he cannot place her. Julie accompanies him to his apartment, but his recollection does not improve: he tries to seduce her. She wards him off by holding his own gun on him, walks out of his apartment, and leaves the gun outside the door. The Freudian symbolism in this action is perhaps too obvious to warrant comment. Later that night, Julie returns to Fergusson's studio so he can complete the painting: this time the arrow does not miss. Corey suddenly recalls where he saw her before and summons the police. Wanger takes the gun to headquarters to have it examined for fingerprints, but, again by one of those preposterous Woolrichian coincidences, a ballistic test is run on it by accident and it turns out to have been the gun used to kill Nick Killeen. Wanger poses as Julie's last victim. He has found out the link between four of the men: they were members of a poker club and Mitchell was a bartender who used to go with them on madcap drives through deserted city streets in the early hours after a night of drinking.

Wanger foils Julie's death trap. Neither he nor she are who they appear to be in the final *tableau*. Wanger demonstrates to Julie that she was wrong. Corey had been her husband's silent partner in a racket and it was he who killed Nick, not the automobile. She has murdered innocent men. Julie shows little emotion,

much less remorse, when Wanger has told her the truth. A personal, vindictive *dysdaimon* has been working through Julie. The *lex talionis* was only a misleading appearance for the ineluctable *moirai* operative for Nick, Bliss, Mitchell, Moran, Fergusson, Julie herself, and even for Corey. In this dark melodrama Wanger enacts the role of the Greek Chorus becoming aware of the powerful forces at work upon the destinies of these characters. The milieu is distinctly American, but the world-view is that of Greek tragedy.

THE BRIDE WORE BLACK became the first in what turned out to be Woolrich's "Black Series." It was followed by THE BLACK CURTAIN (1941) in which the protagonist, Frank Townsend, recovers from a three-year period of amnesia—the cause of this recovery is a falling beam which hits him in the head, surely a deliberate reference to the Flitcraft story in THE MALTESE FALCON—and he sets out to discover what happened during those three years. He finds himself charged with a murder he does not remember having committed and yet cannot deny having committed it. This novel was adapted for the screen as the melodrama STREET OF CHANCE (Paramount, 1942) directed by Jack Hively.

Nevins has pointed out that "Woolrich's lack of control over emotions is a crucial element in his work, not only because it intensifies the fragility and momentariness of love but also because it tears away the comfortable belief, evident in some of the greatest works of the human imagination such as OEDIPUS REX, that nobility in the face of nothingness is possible."⁴¹ Based on what I have said about Greek tragedy, I can scarcely be expected to agree that "nobility in the face of nothingness" is a Sophoclean theme; indeed, Professor Krieger would have us believe that avoiding nothingness is rather a Sophoclean theme. But the recognition of nothingness is true, surely, of Woolrich's fiction; and more: as the "Black Series" continued, increasingly any hope for nobility was shattered by the experience of nothingness. This becomes rather evident in BLACK ALIBI (1942) in which a killer jaguar terrifies a South American city while the police have to hunt for a human killer who is stalking his victims in the jaguar's shadow. It was made into a thriller, THE LEOPARD MAN (RKO, 1943) directed by Jacques Tourneur.

THE BLACK ANGEL (1943) features the efforts of a young wife's race against the clock to prove the innocence of her husband who has been sentenced to be executed for the murder of his girlfriend. It was made into a *film gris* of the same title, BLACK ANGEL (Universal, 1946) directed by Roy William Neill. This plot is actually only a variation on PHANTOM LADY (1942) which Woolrich had published the previous year under the pseudonym William Irish. PHANTOM LADY was expanded from a short story titled "Those Who Kill" that had first appeared in the 4 March 1939 issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. Before basing the novel on this story, Woolrich had first expanded the story into a short novel called PHANTOM ALIBI which ran for four months in 1942 in FLYNN'S DETECTIVE, the successor to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. The novel was brought to the screen as the melodrama, PHAN-

TOM LADY (Universal, 1944) directed by Robert Siodmak. I shall have more to say about the novel presently, whereas these films, of course, will be discussed in a later chapter. THE BLACK PATH OF FEAR (1944) was again a variation on these same materials, telling of a man who runs away with a gangster's wife to Havana only for them to be followed by the gangster who murders the woman and frames the protagonist, abandoning him to the forces of justice in a foreign country. It was turned into THE CHASE (United Artists, 1946) directed by Arthur Ripley.

The darkest and most expressly misogynistic of all the "Black Series" was the last entry in it, RENDEVOUS IN BLACK (1948). It is a reworking of the plot of THE BRIDE WORE BLACK, only this time with a male murderer. The technique is again that of delayed revelation so that much of the plot is inverted. Johnny Marr and his fiancée are very much in love. One night, while Johnny is waiting for Dorothy in front of a drugstore, she does not show up. Five men, flying overhead in a chartered plane and drinking, have killed her by accident, having let a liquor bottle fall out of the plane which hits Dorothy. Johnny sets out to avenge her death. Each of the five men will lose the woman he most loves.

Jeanette Garrison is first. She dies of tetanus poisoning. Johnny sends her husband a condolence card telling Garrison that now he knows how it feels. The card suggests to the police investigator that her death may not have been accidental.

Next, Hugh Strickland's mistress threatens to expose him to his wife if he does not come up with the fifteen hundred dollars he owes her for the previous month and the fifteen hundred dollars for this month. She gives him until nine o'clock that night to come to her with the money. Hugh goes to her apartment, discovers her in bed, presumably sleeping. He takes off his belt and begins to whip her nearly naked body. To his horror he discovers that he has been whipping a corpse. Hugh hurries home to his wife, Florence, and confesses that Esther, his mistress, is dead, but that he did not kill her. Florence blames herself at first: "'I shouldn't have gotten so involved in my war work.'" ⁴² But Hugh is a fool when it comes to women. Florence proceeds to destroy the evidence which might save Hugh from conviction while preserving that which will surely incriminate him. Only when the police are leading Hugh away does he realize that Florence's "fixed, unholy smirk of ultimate vindication" is "the ghost smile of an exquisite revenge." ⁴³

Buck Paige is in the Armed Services. His wife, Sharon, is involved in war work. One of the recurrent themes in this novel is that war work has brought out the worst qualities in women, a theme running throughout many of the war-time and post-war *films noirs*. Johnny, under an alias, seeks out Sharon and begins to court her. In time she falls in love with him. As she expresses her passion for Johnny, Woolrich provides an image right off the lurid covers of the war-time BLACK MASK magazines: ". . . on the ground her foot, unnoticed, shifting with her eagerness for his caresses, was now planted full and

firmly on the fallen letter, grinding it into the dirt. 'My own . . . wife:' peered out, crushed, from under her heel.''⁴⁴ Buck, in a jealous fit, goes AWOL to find Sharon. He finds Sharon's corpse and Johnny's note: "You can have her back now, Soldier. Don't say I never gave you anything."'⁴⁵ Buck shoots himself, holding her corpse in his arms.

Johnny seduces the fourth man's daughter and kills her. The fifth victim is a young blind woman, the only female victim who is not somehow fickle or hard. The police, knowing Johnny's identity now, have a woman dress up as Dorothy and stake out the drugstore. Johnny still comes back to it, waiting for his date who never came. The woman lures Johnny to the cemetery where Dorothy is buried and he is shot trying to escape. Women in one way or another have been *prima mobilia*, unleashing all this havoc.

A tone of anguish, however, is unrelenting throughout RENDEZVOUS IN BLACK. This is not the case in PHANTOM LADY and I have reserved it for last because it is, in effect, a romance in a *roman noir* setting. The themes which dominate this narrative are literally riddled with all the assumptions of melodramas and *films noirs* from the 1940s. Scott Henderson, the protagonist, made a grievous mistake. He married a woman he had always liked and thought it was love. The assumption here is that there is only *one* right person and if you can find that one person, love will last forever. After he is married to Marcella, Scott meets Carol. She is referred to as The Girl. "It was It, the real thing, the McCoy," Henderson relates. " 'If you're not married, and It comes along—you're safe. Or if your marriage itself happens to be It, that's better still, you're on pure velvet. Or if you're married, and It never comes along—you're still safe, even if you're only half-alive and don't know it. It's when you're married, and It shows up only after it's too late—that you want to look out' " '⁴⁶

Henderson wants a divorce from Marcella. She refuses to give him one. In a sour mood, Henderson storms out of their apartment and goes to a bar. There he meets a woman who agrees to accompany him for a night on the town. They do not exchange names and, afterwards, Scott cannot even recall what she looked like. She disappears and all those who saw them together suddenly cannot remember her, insisting that Henderson was alone. The first chapter is titled "The Hundred and Fiftieth Day Before the Execution," and with it the countdown begins. Marcella is murdered and Henderson cannot establish an alibi. Convicted and awaiting execution, Scott is visited in prison by one of the arresting officers who has come to believe him innocent. He tells Henderson that he has to enlist a friend to help gather evidence for an appeal. " 'Someone,' " he says, " 'who's doing it for you, because you're Scott Henderson, and no other reason. Because he likes you, yes even loves you, because he'd almost rather die himself than have you die.' " '⁴⁷ Scott has only one such friend, an engineer now working in South America. Scott sends him a telegram; the friend comes back to the States and agrees to do everything he can. The friend is named Lombard. In a series of parallel chapters, the reader follows Lombard's efforts,

and the separate efforts of Carol, who is also trying to do her part. The only problem is that when one or another of them gets close to uncovering the truth, the potential witness dies under mysterious circumstances. The idea is that the murderer is stalking their efforts and thwarting them.

Woolrich accepted the popular notions about the use of marijuana, namely that it caused “reefer madness,” and in one chilling scene, which anticipates the jazz combos featured in a number of *films noirs* later, he created a series of extremely vivid images. Carol has gone with a jazz musician to a jam session. “The next two hours were a sort of Dante-esque Inferno. . . . It wasn’t the music, the music was good. It was the phantasmagoria of their shadows, looming black, wavering ceiling-high on the walls. It was the actuality of their faces, possessed, demonic, peering out here and there on sudden notes, then seeming to recede again. It was the gin and marijuana cigarettes, filling the air with haze and flux.”⁴⁸

The reader does not know it until the sequence is over, but near the end of the novel, when it is a matter of hours before Scott is executed, it is Carol who impersonates the phantom woman and comes to Lombard who then tries to kill her. He is caught in the act by the police. It was Lombard all the time. He had been jilted by Marcella, who had promised to go away with him. In his anger, he killed her and then framed Scott for it. The phantom woman turns out to be a lunatic who is now in an asylum and cannot remember anything. Fortunately, the police have Lombard’s confession. Scott and Carol are permitted to live happily ever after because they have “It”.

Consistent with psychoanalytic theory, one can find a variation of an Oedipus Complex in this plot, but that is beside the point. What is more important is the atmosphere of distrust, of being able to rely on no one (except, in this case, Scott *can* rely on Carol).

Contrasting this novel with Edgar Lustgarten’s *ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE* (1947), Tom and Enid Schantz noted that “Lustgarten’s almost documentary handling of the trial creates a tension that far surpasses the suspense engendered by William Irish’s melodramatic treatment of a similar situation in *PHANTOM LADY*. But whereas in the Irish novel the reader’s faith in the legal system is never seriously impaired, in *ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE* it is the system itself that becomes the instrument of terror.”⁴⁹ In Lustgarten’s novel, a nondescript man with a wife, two children, and a comfortable position as a clerk becomes involved with a prostitute. When she is brutally murdered, the clerk, a man named Groome, is suspected on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Groome is put on trial for his life. Two witnesses, who would be able to substantiate his alibi, do not come forward for various reasons. Groome is convicted and hanged. Only then does the real killer write a letter to the Home Secretary declaring that this murder was but the first in a series of such killings which he has planned. Given the two basic terminations to this kind of plot—that in which an innocent protagonist is saved at the last minute and that in which an innocent protagonist is executed—I do not find Lustgarten’s conclu-

sion any more satisfying than Woolrich's. Lustgarten wrote his novel in protest over the use of capital punishment in the United Kingdom. Both PHANTOM LADY and ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE provide compelling rhetorical arguments against ever using purely circumstantial evidence as the basis for execution; but both, notwithstanding what the Schantzes wrote, manipulate much too obviously the narrative events in order to produce a desired effect. ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE served as the basis for a notable British *film noir*, THE LONG DARK HALL (Eagle-Lion, 1951) directed by Anthony Bushell.

In the final analysis it is not the formal difficulties in Woolrich's fiction which flaw it so significantly as it is the fact that Woolrich could not draw character: he could only characterize. There is no depth of understanding of the human condition to be derived from reading him. I shall not criticize Woolrich because he found what Sartre termed "*le néant*" to be at the bottom of life, because a writer such as Herman Melville came very close to the same perception. In fact, in those writers Professor Krieger chose to include in THE TRAGIC VISION, he found they all tended to present an image of an amoral, irrational universe that is fundamentally incomprehensible, at times even absurd. What limits Woolrich most as an artist and yet what remains his most striking quality is that he would sacrifice everything in his stories to provide an occasion to focus on human anguish resulting from the malignant affects wrought by chance and accident. And, whatever his shortcomings, Woolrich in his fiction did provide a literary articulation of many of the themes which, when they became part of the *film noir* canon, seemed so dramatically different from the social and psychological milieux one had come to expect in cinematic melodrama.

JAMES M. CAIN

For Edmund Wilson, every Cain novel has its trashy aspect. He regarded Cain's fiction negatively and for a number of years that continued to be the critical posture assumed toward Cain. Recently this has begun to change. Tom Wolfe in his Introduction to a Cain collection, CAIN X 3 (1969), found much to praise in his fiction as did Harlan Ellison in his Introduction to a re-issue edition of three Cain short novels, HARD CAIN (1980). Above all, what Joyce Carol Oates wrote of him in "Man Under Sentence of Death: The Novels of James M. Cain" in TOUGH GUY WRITERS OF THE THIRTIES (1968), that he is no longer read, is wrong: most of what he wrote is still in print.

In the collection, THREE OF A KIND (1944), Cain included three of his short novels, CAREER IN C MAJOR, THE EMBEZZLER, and DOUBLE INDEMNITY. In his Preface, Cain wrote of the difficulties he had learning to write a novel. What made the form "so hopeless," he recalled, "was that I didn't seem to have the least idea where I was going with it, or even which paragraph should follow which. But my short stories, which were put into the mouth of some character, marched right along, for if I in the third person faltered and stumbled, my characters in the first person knew perfectly well what

they had to say. Yet they were very homely characters and spoke a gnarled and grotesque jargon that didn't seem quite adapted to long fiction; it seemed to me that after fifty pages of ain'ts, brungs, and fittens, the reader would want to throw the book at me. But then I moved to California and heard the Western roughneck: the boy who is just as elemental inside as his Eastern colleague, but who has been to high school, completes his sentences, and uses reasonably good grammar. Once my ear had put this on wax, so that I had it, I began to wonder if *that* wouldn't be the medium I could use to write novels."⁵⁰ Surely, the first person singular narrative structure served him well and virtually all of his successful fiction—that is, his most dramatically effective fiction—is written in this voice with the compelling intensity of a vivid firsthand account which makes even the incredible seem plausible for a time.

THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (1934) was Cain's first novel and later on in this Preface he explained both how he arrived at his title for it and how he defined tragedy. "The whole thing corresponded to a definition of tragedy I found later in some of my father's writings: that it was the 'force of circumstances driving the protagonists to the commission of a dreadful act.' . . . [Vincent] Lawrence [a successful Hollywood screenwriter] liked it [the novel on which he was then at work], and even gave me a title for it. We were talking one day, about the time he had mailed a play, his first, to a producer. Then he said, 'I almost went nuts. I'd sit and watch for the postman, and then I'd think, "You got to cut this out,"' and then when I left the window I'd be listening for his ring. How I'd know it was the postman was that he'd always ring twice.'" ⁵¹

Most importantly, Cain in this Preface summed up his view of women. "In a woman's appearance I take some interest, but I pay much more attention to their figures than I do to their faces—in real life, I mean. Their faces are masks, more or less consciously controlled. But their bodies, the way they walk, sit, hold their heads, gesticulate, and eat, betray them. But here again, on paper, I am more concerned with what goes on inside of them than with what they look like."⁵² In an introductory remark to his later novel, THE BUTTERFLY (1947), Cain enlarged both on what he felt the main thrust of his fiction and the role women play in it. "I think my stories have some quality of the opening of a forbidden box," he wrote, "and that it is this, rather than violence, sex, or any of the things usually cited by way of explanation, that gives them the drive so often noted. Their appeal is first to the mind, and the reader is carried along as much by his own realization that the characters cannot have this particular wish and survive, and his curiosity to see what happens to them, as by the effect on him of incident, dialogue, or character. Thus, if I do any glancing, it is toward Pandora, the first woman, a conceit that pleases me, somehow, and often helps my thinking."⁵³

I have quoted Cain himself at such length because he was both articulate and somewhat accurate when discussing his own stories. Yet, the truth of the matter is that much of the time Cain was not competent in his fiction; there are simply

too many shortcomings, contradictions, inadequacies. *CAREER IN C MAJOR* (1936) has a very interesting beginning, but it falls apart utterly by the end. It is narrated by Leonard Borland, a construction engineer, married to Doris, an amazingly beautiful woman, and they have a daughter. Doris is always harping at Leonard—it is during the Depression and they are living on Leonard's savings—about how she gave up her career as a singer to marry him. Doris decides to resume her career and moves Leonard out of the master bedroom. "She had married me for the dough I brought in," Leonard tells us of Doris, "and that was all she had married me for. For the rest, I just bored her, except for that streak in her that had to torture everybody that came within five feet of her. The whole thing was that I was nuts about her. She was a phoney, she had the face of a saint and the soul of a snake, she treated me like a dog, and still I was nuts about her."⁵⁴

Leonard meets Cecil Carver, an accomplished opera singer, and she makes the discovery that he is a magnificent baritone. She encourages him to start taking singing lessons and they even go on the road together, giving recitals. When Leonard learns that Cecil took a cut in pay to get him on the payroll, he reflects that "that kind of got me. I thought it was the screwiest thing I had ever heard of, but I finally said yes."⁵⁵ In due course, Doris finds out about Leonard, about his singing ability, and his affair with Cecil. Letting himself into his apartment after Doris has stormed out of a party they both were attending, "I groped for the switch. Then I heard a rustle behind me. I half turned, and felt something horrible coming at me. It hit me. She was panting like an animal, and got my face with both hands at once. I went down, and those claws raked me. I must have let out some kind of yell, because one hand grabbed my mouth, and the other hand raked me again. I tried to throw her off, and couldn't. She held me, and pounded my head against the floor. Then I felt myself being beaten with something. The marks afterward showed it was the heel of her shoe."⁵⁶

Leonard and Doris separate and Leonard, in order to make some money since Doris has withdrawn all the money in their joint account, goes on stage to sing. He flubs his role, runs off in a very unprofessional way, only for Doris to become reconciled with him because he, too, as she, has proven a failure. "'Oh, I've been a terrible wife to you, Leonard,'" she affirms. "'I'm jealous, and spiteful, and mean and nothing will ever change me. But when I get too terrible, just sing to me, and I'll be your slave. I'll come crawling to you, just the way you came crawling to them, in the second act tonight [the opera was *RIGOLETTO*]. That woman [Cecil] has given us something that was never there before, and I'm going to thank her, and win her, and make her my friend.'" ⁵⁷

In embryo, Cain anticipated in *CAREER IN C MAJOR* virtually the whole of his plot and themes in the subsequent and far more ambitious *MILDRED PIERCE* (1941).

"Cain broke precedent with past literary works by producing a popular novel (later a play and a motion picture) in which both leading characters are repulsive," Chris Steinbrunner and Otto Penzler wrote of *THE POSTMAN AL-*

WAYS RINGS TWICE in their *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MYSTERY AND DETECTION* (1976)⁵⁸; and they also quoted David Madden who remarked about Cain's crime fiction that Cain " 'was the twenty-minute egg of the hard-boiled school.' " ⁵⁹ The fact that Cain is prominently discussed in a reference book devoted only to mystery, crime, suspense, and detective fiction is perhaps indicative that it is with this genre that his name is most readily associated, although a number of his novels—and *CAREER IN C MAJOR* and *MILDRED PIERCE* are among them—have nothing whatsoever to do with it. However, whether it is a crime story or not, whether the style is a first person narrative or in the third person, the events being described are always positioned firmly in the past: indeed, the events themselves have no meaning, except as they contribute to the outcome of the story. Cain's characters are invariably ordinary human beings who are brought into an encounter with their *moirai*. Yet, as Joyce Carol Oates was careful to observe, whereas European novels by Dostoyevsky, Stendhal, and Camus "are concerned obsessively with the 'why,' " with Cain's fiction "it is the 'how' that is important—'what happens next,' 'what happens finally.' " ⁶⁰

David Madden's argument in "James Cain and the 'Pure' Novel" in the *UNIVERSITY REVIEW* (1963) is that Cain's principal literary interest is technique and that his stories represent nothing so much as the triumph of technique over every other consideration. I would not agree with this wholeheartedly. Too much of what happens, even in his best fiction, strikes me as contrived in order for the story to end the way he wished it to end; and in an instance such as *CAREER IN C MAJOR* even technique is woefully inadequate to make palatable "what happens finally."

Edna Ferber, as was mentioned above, tended to assign specific roles to the sexes: men are the dreamers, women are the builders and preservers. To a degree, Cain's view of the sexes was a variation of this: his men generally want freedom, his women want permanence. What is different from Ferber is that neither ambition is ever realized. The men in Cain's fiction usually wind up in prison facing death or at least totally frustrated and resigned to failure; the women learn to their despair that permanence is impossible and are either destroyed by the recognition or must become resigned to it. Insofar as such a view is a total repudiation of the myth of progress, Cain can be said to have described the underside of the so-called American dream which implies that there is a right way to achieve one's every wish. Life, in Cain's fiction, is at most a "bungling process," to use Joyce Carol Oates' phrase, and it is never educational.

In *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE*, Frank Chambers is a bum. When he arrives at the Twin Oaks Tavern, owned by a Greek named Nick, he turns down a job even though he is broke, that is, until he sees the Greek's wife. "Except for the shape," Frank narrates, "she really wasn't any raving beauty, but she had a sulky look to her, and her lips stuck out in a way that made me want to mash them in for her." ⁶¹ She is vulnerable and available. When they are alone together, she begs him to bite her. He sinks his teeth "into

her lips so deep,” he says, “I could feel the blood spurt into my mouth.”⁶² Frank also observes about Cora that “when she spoke, it was in a whisper that sounded like a snake licking its tongue in and out.”⁶³ Frank wants freedom and Cora wants permanence; they also want each other. The only way to realize all these ambitions is for them to murder Nick who stands in their way.

Frank and Cora have sexual intercourse after they murder the Greek, a scene in the novel and the remake of the film harking back to the sexual exhilaration of Klytaimnestra. “I had to have her,” Frank tells the reader, “if I hung for it. I had her.”⁶⁴ The Greek was insured and Cora and Frank are so intimidated by the district attorney that they betray each other. It is no matter, though; in the corrupt world in which they live, it is easy for their defense attorney to get them off and, as a gift, he turns over the \$10,000 in insurance money to them, knowing fully of their guilt. Betrayal, however, corrodes their love. Cora has to test Frank before she can be sure of his love. They go swimming. Cora gives Frank an opportunity to kill her, but he does not take it. Even so, she dies as a consequence of the effort and for this death Frank is accused of murder and convicted. While he is waiting execution, Frank tells his story, backtells it, and ruminates on an idea voiced by another inmate who claims that he did not kill his brother, “his subconscious did it. I asked him what he meant, and he says you got two selves, one that you know about and the other that you don’t know about, because it’s subconscious. It shook me up. Did I really do it, and not know it?”⁶⁵ Frank then dismisses this idea and so, I believe, should the reader. It would be easy to attribute the actions in this plot to a *daimon*, i.e., the unconscious, but that might be a mistake. Much in Cain’s fiction becomes even more implausible if it is viewed as the consequence of subjective motives rather than the irony of coincidence in external reality.

DOUBLE INDEMNITY is better executed in its screen version than in its literary source. In the story, Walter Huff, an insurance salesman, plots with Phyllis Nirdlinger to kill her husband so she will inherit the money from his insurance policy. When Huff learns that Phyllis murdered Nirdlinger’s first wife and that she is a pathological killer having also put to death three children when she was a nurse and probably two other people, he decides that he has to kill her. Phyllis, however, anticipates Huff and, instead of meeting him in Griffith Park, she hides and shoots him. Lola, Phyllis’ stepdaughter whom Huff has come to love, and her boyfriend, Nino Sachetti, are arrested for this attempt on Huff’s life. This causes Huff to confess the whole business to the insurance investigator working on the case, a man named Keyes. “I had killed a man,” Huff tells the reader. “I had killed a man to get a woman. I had put myself in her power, so there was one person in the world that could point a finger at me, and I would have to die. I had done all that for her, and I never wanted to see her again as long as I lived. That’s all it takes, one drop of fear, to curdle love into hate.”⁶⁶ But in the novel, as opposed to the film, it is not that easy. Keyes manages it so that both Huff and Phyllis are on a passenger boat, off the coast of Mexico. They come to realize that as soon as the boat docks, they will

be arrested. Phyllis proposes they suicide together, jumping into the ocean. “ ‘I want to see that fin,’ ” Phyllis declares, “ ‘That black fin. Cutting the water in the moonlight.’ ”⁶⁷

It was only when Cain attempted a novel in which crime plays no part, as he did in *MILDRED PIERCE*, that the improbabilities and contradictions in his technique became wantonly disruptive. Mildred evicts her husband Bert because he has been carrying on an adulterous relationship. She sets out to find a career for herself. Her own sexuality, however, is completely at odds with her presumed attitude toward Bert. Within a few pages, she herself is in bed with another man, who humiliates her, then helps her, and finally is behind her ruin when she engages successfully in the restaurant business. Just as she is about to open her first restaurant, Mildred meets Monty Beragon and, again, it is only a matter of hours before she is in bed with him. Yet, Mildred appears to derive no particular pleasure from these relationships and they contribute in the end to her fall. There is no love in this novel, merely the will to use and control people. Mildred wants to control the men in her life and her daughter. She ends up failing on all counts, returning to live with Bert, where she started, only after nine years’ effort she has taken to drinking and now the two of them can get drunk together.

Veda, Mildred and Bert’s daughter, is a snob from the beginning, but she turns out to be a fabulously popular and talented contralto whose success is assured. She hates her mother and effectively destroys her, finally taking even Monty from her; although there is no real motive for any of this behavior. In the world of this novel there is no moderation, no inbetween. Everyone is either an instant success or a variety of loser; and in the inevitable course of events success leads to losing.

MILDRED PIERCE is a relatively long novel—for Cain. But the whole plot seems to have only one simple point to make: Mildred’s place is in the kitchen and the bedroom with her husband. *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE* and *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* were *romans noirs* to begin with and so it was not difficult to adapt them for the screen as *films noirs*. To do so with *MILDRED PIERCE*, however, required that a crime be added to the plot. It had to be this way, I suppose, if for no other reason than the utter necessity of having to get the viewer’s mind off of “why” and keep it on “how” which, ultimately, remains the only focus on life to which Cain ever aspired.

PARADIGMS OF THE ROMAN NOIR

While he waited in Hollywood to get work as an extra in films, Horace McCoy wrote short fiction for *BLACK MASK* magazine. In 1932 Captain Shaw praised McCoy as being among “the older writers who helped establish the *BLACK MASK* standard.”⁶⁸ Yet, surveying his contributions, they seem rather to have been violations of the *BLACK MASK* formula of characters in action and tend more toward the lyrical and symbolic. Shaw himself once even confessed to McCoy that his techniques were “almost too fine writing.”⁶⁹ It is also signif-

icant that McCoy persuaded the publisher of his short novel, *THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY?* (1935), to avoid either the word or the idea of “hard-boiled” in describing the book.

Sometimes critics have claimed that *THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY?* was intended as an indictment of the capitalistic system. This it was not. The French recognized McCoy at once for what he was: the first American existentialist writer—especially after the short novel was published in French translation in 1946 under the title *ON ACHÈVE BIEN LES CHEVAUX*. McCoy's second novel, *NO POCKETS IN A SHROUD*, could not find an American publisher and was finally published in England in 1937 by Arthur Barker. Marcel Duhamel initiated Gallimard's popular *SÉRIE NOIRE* (from which, as noted in the General Introduction, Nino Frank derived the term *film noir*). He selected this second novel, under the title *UN LINCEUL N'A PAS DE POCHE*, as the fourth volume in the series.

During the years of his lucrative career as a screenwriter, McCoy wrote and published three subsequent novels, the most noteworthy of which, *KISS TOMORROW GOODBYE* (1948), served as the basis for the *film noir* by the same title. Yet he never achieved the renown he desired as a serious writer. “Basically sensitive and honest, he was torn all his life between the crude material values of fame and fortune, and a dream of enduring greatness,” Thomas Sturak observed in his essay, “Horace McCoy's Objective Lyricism.” “It was his inner, fatal weakness. ‘In the domains of creation, which are also the domains of pride,’ Valéry wrote, ‘the need to distinguish oneself cannot be separated from existence itself.’ Throughout his life, McCoy struggled with a compulsion to fulfill a heightened conception of himself as an artist. The clash of this romantic illusion and the inexorable realities of time and existence resulted in deep feelings of guilt, self-doubt, and self-division. Transmuted by his imagination, these reactions inform all of his fictional dramas as failure, success, corruption, and unrequited ambition.”⁷⁰

The world of *THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY?* is an amoral world in which nothing, therefore, is immoral. For the most part, the story takes place during a dance marathon, an absurd world in which to open an outside door is to risk disqualification from the contest. The chapters of the short novel are intercut with the sentence of execution passed down by the judge on Robert Syverten for having shot his partner in the dance, Gloria Beatty. Is Robert really guilty? Is he really responsible? Can a man be judged on the basis of a single act? It is the identical question that Garcin asks Inès in Jean-Paul Sartre's *HUIS CLOS* [NO EXIT] (1944).

Garcin: Ecoute, chacun a son but, n'est-ce pas? Moi, je me foutais de l'argent, de l'amour. Je voulais être un homme. Un dur. J'ai tout misé sur le même cheval. Est-ce que c'est possible qu'on soit un lâche quand on a choisi les chemins les plus dangereux? Peut-on juger une vie sur un seul acte?⁷¹

All his life Garcin had bet on the same horse, had wanted to live up to his own standard of what he conceived as a man, had wanted to be a hard guy. But

once, in an extreme situation, he showed himself to be a coward. Now that he is damned, doomed for eternity to be with Inès, who insists “*nous sommes assortis*.” [we are matched],⁷² and Estelle, he can only rail at an absurd universe that would damn him for a single act. Yet—and I suspect this is the point—Garcin’s essential soul was revealed by that act; the diabolical in his personality took total possession of him and showed itself stronger than the angelic.

So it is also with Robert Syverten. Before he shoots Gloria because she wants to die and is unable to kill herself, the diabolical in her soul has taken possession of his. Robert tells her she ought to change her attitude. “‘On the level,’ ” he says. “‘It affects everybody you come in contact with. Take me, for example. Before I met you I didn’t see how I could miss succeeding. I never even thought of failing. And now—.’ ”⁷³ He leaves the statement unfinished, but the story itself finishes it: *now Robert wants to fail*.

From the moment Robert meets Gloria, he recognizes the futility of her ambition to become a movie star. “She was too blonde and too small and looked too old.”⁷⁴ Gloria makes no bones about herself. “‘There must be a hell of a lot of people in the world like me—who want to die but haven’t got the guts,’ ” she tells Robert.⁷⁵ It is when the marathon is in its eight hundred and eightieth hour with only twenty couples remaining, when Robert and Gloria have a chance of winning, when a man who may be a motion picture producer wants to talk with Gloria, that she indicates that she has come to her decision. “‘This motion picture business is a lousy business,’ ” she tells Robert. “‘You have to meet people you don’t want to meet and you have to be nice to people whose guts you hate. I’m glad I’m through with it.’ ”⁷⁶ Robert remarks to himself in italics: “*I never paid any attention to her remark then, but now I realize it was the most significant thing she had ever said.*”⁷⁷

Gloria has been resisting her fate; now she would surrender to it. Gloria and Robert are limited individuals who fall victim to an internal compulsion. Taken together, Thomas Sturak concluded, they “‘reveal a dramatic particularization of the common dilemma of young and naive ambition up against a frustrating, hobbling, even destructive world in which the truths of existence run contrary to all logic, morality, and dreams.’ ”⁷⁸ In essence, this is the existentialist “tragic vision” described by Professor Krieger.

Charlie Chaplin was the first one in Hollywood to purchase an option to film *THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON’T THEY?* It was not filmed, however, until 1969 when Sydney Pollack directed it for ABC Films. But Pollack did not want to end the film the way McCoy had ended the short novel. McCoy did not want anyone to win the marathon. “. . . That would have been antithetical to his concept,” Pollack noted in his Foreword to the screenplay based on McCoy’s story, “which was what we have since learned to call existential and absurdist. He solved this problem by having the marathon aborted, the police forcing it to close because of a shooting that takes place in the dance hall. It seemed to me that to present-day film audiences that device would seem arbitrary, particularly in the context of the already melodramatic circumstances of the marathon

itself.”⁷⁹ In fact, in doing the screen adaptation, Robert E. Thompson appears to have gone back to Cornell Woolrich’s “Dead on Her Feet,” at least in some particulars: there will not be enough money to amount to anything for the winners after all the expenses are paid. It was Thompson and Pollack who switched the emphasis from existence in an amoral, absurd universe to a commentary on human behavior under social and economic pressures. Thus, when it was finally filmed, McCoy’s story, which is pure *roman noir*, became at best a compromised *film noir*.

Edmund Wilson in “The Boys in the Back Room,” his critical survey of novels set in California, had almost as little use for them, and felt them to be—with the possible exception of Nathanael West—of as little merit, as he did detective stories. “But the faults of Mr. McCoy’s first novel—lack of characterization, lack of motivation—show up more nakedly in the second,” he wrote, and added: “YOU PLAY THE BLACK AND THE RED COMES UP, by a writer who calls himself Richard Hallas, is a clever pastiche of [James M.] Cain which is mainly as two-dimensional as a movie. It is indicative of the degree to which this kind of writing has finally become formularized that it should have been possible for a visiting Englishman—the real author is Eric Knight—to tell a story in the Hemingway-Cain vernacular almost without a slip.”⁸⁰ Eric Knight is, of course, better known for *LASSIE, COME HOME* (1940) than he is for *YOU PLAY THE BLACK AND THE RED COMES UP* (1938). Notwithstanding, Daniel Feinberg, who wrote the Introduction to the Gregg Press reissue edition, would take exception with Wilson having termed it a pastiche. “This is the hard-boiled novel of Hammett and Cain and Horace McCoy, the genuine article, before psychoanalysis and self-pity took away its sting,” he wrote of it. “The characters in this book don’t worry about motivation or Freud or which side of the law they are on or even about doing the ‘right’ thing. They just do.”⁸¹

For my part, I perceive *YOU PLAY THE BLACK AND THE RED COMES UP* as both a pastiche of the hard-boiled Hollywood novel *and* as an indictment of the California syndrome. It is a *roman noir*, but it would perhaps be even more so if the protagonist, known as Dick who narrates his adventures in the first person, were to die at the end. E. R. Hagemann, in fact, in his essay, “Focus on *YOU PLAY THE BLACK AND THE RED COMES UP*: ‘No Bet,’ ” even went so far as to assert that Dick “throws himself off the moving freight and kills himself. There’s some mystical business in the final pages; however, he’s dead, and in the end, he must cross a desert before he can reach his beloved ‘golden mountains.’ ”⁸² I do not feel that it is altogether clear that Dick is dead; I believe the ending Knight wanted was to leave the question ambiguous.

The plot, simply put, has Dick leaving Oklahoma to pursue his wife who has deserted him and taken their son, Dickie, with her. Entering California is as entering an insane dream. Dick fails utterly to retrieve his son; instead, he becomes involved with a number of California crackpots and various criminal lu-

nacies. In particular, Knight chose to satirize the platform of EPIC (End Poverty in California) and Dr. Francis E. Townsend's plan for a pension of two hundred dollars a month for every person over sixty financed by the motion picture industry. In the novel, the plan is called the Ecanaanomical Front. "All they had to do to get that [prosperity] was to go out and fight along the Ecanaanomical Front and each member must promise to get two members within a week who would promise to also get two members in a week, who would get two more members, and so on."⁸³ This party, which plans to give away money to prime the pump of the American economy, spreads in the novel with the same enthusiasm that would prove true for marathon running, marijuana, health food, and neighborhood pyramids among a later generation of Americans.

The style of the novel is distinctly hard-boiled and anti-intellectual in the best Hemingway tradition. "Non vitae, sed scholae, discimus" [we learn for school and not for life], Seneca wrote. Dick turns this into a soliloquy. "I was pretty good at school" he remarks, "and most of what they taught sort of took on me. But I found that nothing I learned ever came in very handy afterwards in life. But you don't know that at school, and you study what they teach you, and I was pretty good."⁸⁴ Dick takes up with Mamie, one of the divorcées living on alimony in Southern California; he even marries her. Only then does he meet Sheila. In Cornell Woolrich's idiom: Sheila is It. Sheila also shares Dick's attitude about education. "'Education is silly,' " she remarks. "'What does that matter? When you're a child you think it does. Look at me. I've so much education—so much—too much. That's it. They gave me too much. My only salvation is you. Someone who is exactly you. Don't change, Richard. Don't want to change. Don't change me. Let me see you as I do, with beauty and serenity' in your mind. And don't talk of education that is just reading books. You're more educated than I; because you're more prepared to live in the world, and more fit to exist in the world.'" ⁸⁵

Mamie and Sheila agree on one thing: the American dream. "'You could make anything of yourself you wanted to,' " Sheila tells Dick. "'You could be something.'" ⁸⁶ To Dick, "that sounded just like Mamie. She was always after me to be something; but I couldn't ever be anything but myself as I am. I don't know how."⁸⁷ Dick's problem is that he has to kill Mamie so he will be free to marry Sheila. He makes a few abortive attempts, the last one of which kills Sheila, not Mamie. Dick, in the mode of James M. Cain, is tried and convicted for having murdered Sheila, of which crime he is to a degree innocent. Genter, the film director who moves in and out of the story, does not like this ending. It is too pat. It is too much as a movie plot. "'Even life is becoming like a movie plot,' " he tells Dick. "'And it shouldn't be. It should be illogical, unbalanced, bravely strong. I wanted it like that. And now even life is trite.'" ⁸⁸ Genter beats his chest, saying, "'*mea maxima culpa*' "; but he is saying this in an apostate world that, as Santayana expressed it in *WINDS OF DOCTRINE* (1913), cries "joyfully, *non peccavi* [I have not sinned], which is the modern formula for confession."⁸⁹

Genter commits suicide, confessing to Sheila's murder. This releases Dick, who heads back to where he came from. Once out of California, Dick finds: ". . . I could feel again, and I could feel Sheila was gone. I could feel my insides hurting where they were empty because Sheila was dead and I knew as long as I lived that pain would always be there. It was the only thing left of her. The only thing I could have. And having it made me so happy that I began running down the slope." ⁹⁰

YOU PLAY THE BLACK AND THE RED COMES UP could be only a satire of the hard-boiled writing so typical of the *roman noir* in this period. Even taking seriously the world as absurd may be an absurdity.

MONDAY NIGHT (1938) by Kay Boyle is the last of the *romans noirs* about which I wish to speak. It is not written in a hard-boiled style; indeed, in its delicacy and sensitive composition it is the closest English prose has ever come, in my experience, to the subtle imagery of French impressionistic poetry. As so many *romans noirs*, structurally it depends on delayed revelation, but in this case much of the magic of the carefully crafted narrative is lost in the retelling, even in brief. The story opens with Wilt, an American who has been living for many years in France, struggling unsuccessfully to write something important, in fact to write *something*, and Bernie, a young graduate from an American medical school on a visit to France. They are outside a pharmacy owned by Monsieur Sylvestre who has earned a considerable reputation giving expert testimony in murder cases where presumably poison has been adeptly administered to the victims. They are searching for Sylvestre and the story recounts the events of Monday night and Tuesday morning while they are on their quest. As it turns out, however, Wilt is not really Bernie's friend; they have only just met and Bernie is not very interested in finding Sylvestre.

Some of the notable cases in which Sylvestre has given testimony are recreated and the supposed murderers' stories are told in a series of related sub-plots—"supposed" because in truth these men did not commit the murders for which they were convicted. Sylvestre, it is cunningly revealed, is a madman. He shrewdly framed each of them—something which comes out only at the end and, even then, Sylvestre is exposed in the newspapers without Wilt and Bernie ever having met him. The intricate characterizations and interweavings of the plot—proving that the *roman noir* can have characters and not just characterizations—are such that Sylvestre is revealed as a monster, yes, but the milieu in which Wilt and Bernie exist and pursue the quest is itself somehow uncannily disjointed and subtly disturbing.

Wilt is an alcoholic. "Since a long time, since years maybe, intoxication had ceased to be a matter of drunkenness just as sobriety had ceased being the normal either for the spirit or flesh. So that now soberness had become that forlorn, defeated, despairing interval before the first drink was taken, and this other thing that had no name brought the intensity of the young or the enamored to the faculties not only of the mind but of the corporality, bringing what for hours, even for days at a stretch passed from invention to creation to accomplishment;

once started there was no longer the need to distinguish fact from vision or sanity from delirium, only to keep drinking and to pursue.”⁹¹ In a sense this story takes place in this demi-world of unsober vacillation between dream and reality, the true terrain of the *roman noir*.

Wilt suffers from what Alfred Adler termed *Organeminderwertigkeit*. During a drunken binge, he was once arrested by the police. “They had thrown him onto the place on one shoulder, and then the three gendarmes had taken a kick at him while he was on the floor.” “ ‘One of them got me square on the side of the head,’ ” Wilt tells Bernie.⁹² Then he touches the place where once he had had a normal ear but where now there is only an excrescence of which he is ashamed.

The way the sub-plots of the “supposed” murderers are narrated one is led first to believe that justice has been done and they have received what they deserved; this makes the innocence of these victims all the more crushing when it becomes evident.

While Wilt and Bernie are at Sylvestre’s home (he is away, in Lyons) talking to Sylvestre’s servants, Wilt comes to see “the man they had created piece by piece among them. He might have been standing whole now . . . , erect in his elegant black suit with the hair on his head and the hair of his beard sensitive as wire and prodigiously charged with life, his arms folded haughtily, his eyes blazing, and his mouth contorted in contempt or pain.”⁹³ Wilt reconstructs Sylvestre from his past. He perceives how Sylvestre’s “ ‘life, his love, and then finally his child [were] taken from him because of his ambition, or greed, or else just through circumstances, or else just through making one mistake after another. And now the role of dispenser of justice is given to him like a weapon, it’s been handed to him as a conscious or unconscious means of avenging himself—.’ ”⁹⁴

After the visit to Sylvestre’s home, Bernie decides that he must escape from Wilt’s company, albeit the reader has no suspicion as yet that Wilt and Bernie scarcely know one another, so predominant has been Wilt’s fantasy. In a typical *noir* scene, Bernie is following after Wilt, “the shock of the street-lights suddenly there beyond the branches and his foot striking asphalt after gravel . . . and he stopped short in the gate’s shadow, lingering behind as if attending to some forgotten need while concealed in the last recess of unbroken dark. . . . He watched Wilt reach the blue pool of the nearest streetlamp’s light and pause there and lift what seemed the back of his hand and study it a moment.”⁹⁵ Bernie is still standing there, Wilt having again gone on ahead, “When the woman’s figure took shape out of the darkness and quickly, smartly crossed through the streetlight’s arc and mounted the pavement before him and, without seeing him, turned sharply in the direction Wilt had taken a long time back. Her high heels clicked fast down the slabs of pavement, precise nailheads of sound striking in the wide silent night. . . . ”⁹⁶

Perhaps the most moving portrait in this vivid *noir* gallery is that of Madame Coutet, whose husband was framed for supposedly poisoning her sister. He is

in prison and has never seen his small son. Wilt is attracted to her, perhaps because of her hopelessness. By the end, she has vanished. Bernie, too, has wandered away, and Wilt does not know where he has gone. The newspaper headlines have scooped Wilt's would-be story before he could tell it.

MONDAY NIGHT is the closest the *roman noir* has ever come to a prose paradigm of what *film noir* can be at its best.

PART II

CINEMATIC ANTECEDENTS

It seems that entertainment is not, as we often think, a full-scale flight from our problems, not a means of forgetting them completely, but rather a rearrangement of our problems into shapes which tame them, which disperse them to the margins of our attention.

—Michael Wood, *AMERICA IN THE MOVIES*

German Expressionist Cinema

The Weimar Republic was proclaimed on 9 November 1918 by Philipp Scheidemann, a Social Democrat. German troops were still on foreign soil, but the German General Staff was frantic for peace. Kaiser Wilhelm II had been reluctant to abdicate without reassurance that the Prussian throne would be retained, but Chancellor Friedrich Ebert, also a Social Democrat, announced the kaiser's abdication without his consent. That night the kaiser fled to Holland. As it happened, Scheidemann's proclamation was fortuitous; the Spartacists were themselves ready to proclaim a Soviet republic. The day before 11 November, when the war was declared over, Ebert concluded an agreement with General Groener, commander of the German army, that in return for putting the army at the disposal of the government the government would support the army in maintaining internal discipline and in its fight against Bolshevism.

National general elections were held on 19 January 1919 and a parliamentary government was elected. On 11 February 1919, the Assembly elected Ebert president and Ebert appointed Scheidemann to form a cabinet. Notwithstanding this apparent display of order, the nation was plagued by the severest civil strife. The *Freikorps*, a fanatic paramilitary group of ex-officers, unemployed drifters, and young adventurers set out to help restore order but their eagerness to kill tended to have the opposite effect.

Scheidemann's cabinet did not survive the signing of the peace treaty of Versailles. The treaty returned Alsace-Lorraine to France, split off East Prussia from the heartland by ceding West Prussia, Upper Silesia, and Posen to Poland. Danzig (now Gdansk) was made a free city. Belgium was given some small districts while the border areas were to sponsor plebiscites. Germany was deprived of all overseas colonies and forbidden union with Austria. The left bank of the Rhine was to be militarily occupied and the German army was to be reduced to 100,000 men. Further, Germany was to turn over all "war criminals," including the former kaiser, so they could stand trial for "atrocities"; Germany

and its allies must be accountable for all loss and damage sustained by the Allies and an as yet undetermined amount of reparations was to be paid to the victims of German aggression. Even so, a new cabinet led by Social Democrat Gustav Bauer adopted a new constitution on 31 July 1919. On 11 August it became law.

What followed was a series of quick changes in government personnel punctuated by continued armed domestic turmoil and a splintering of political parties and factions. The Allies set the sum of reparations at 132 billion marks gold and declared Germany, which had paid only 8 billion marks in gold, to be seriously in arrears. As the government struggled to meet these obligations, the shortage of gold and the flight of investment capital combined with an adverse balance of payments led to runaway inflation. In 1921 the German mark slid from 45 to the dollar to 160 to the dollar. By January 1923, Germany was so far in default in reparation payments that a French/Belgian contingent occupied the Ruhr in order to operate the mines and industries there in behalf of the victorious powers. This was the death knell for the German economy. By October 1923, trillions of marks were required to buy a loaf of bread or mail a letter. Farmers refused to ship produce and there were food riots. Millions lost everything and nearly starved while a few speculators became fabulously wealthy. On the night of 8 November 1923, Adolf Hitler, Hermann Göring, and others in the National Socialist German Workers' Party staged an unsuccessful *Putsch* in Munich. Hitler was tried for high treason only to receive the minimum sentence of five years of which he served only about eight months during which time he wrote *MEIN KAMPF*, first published in June 1925.

"There is scarcely a trace of originality in the entire book," Erich Eyck wrote in *A HISTORY OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC* (1963). "... Only in the rarest cases can one speak of arguments at all. In their stead one finds vulgar terms of abuse such as had never before appeared in German political literature. . . . His limitless capacity to mock democracy and democrats, parliamentarians and parliaments, is comprehensible only if one realizes that all his exalted praise of the *Führerprinzip* has but one meaning: I, Adolf Hitler, am determined to be that leader beneath whose monstrously powerful will—which is free from every moral scruple—every person and every thing will be inexorably bent. Whoever harbors other thoughts, whoever refuses to accept me as leader, is a Jew or the hireling of a Jew."¹ In a spiritual no less than a political sense the *Führerprinzip* was an antidote for nihilism; following an inspired leader would disperse all introspection in which feelings of nihilism could arise.

Notwithstanding, between December 1923 and June 1928, there was a sturdy surface continuity in the German government. Charles G. Dawes, an American banker and statesman, proposed severely reducing reparation and loan payments by the Germans which offered the prospect of shoring up the country's chaotic economy. Once Germany accepted the plan, foreign troops were evacuated from the Ruhr, Germany again received foreign loans, and the new *Rentenmark* stabilized the currency. It would appear that the "Golden 'Twenties"

began, although, as Theodor Heuss objected in his book, *ERINNERUNGEN: 1905–1933* [*MEMORIES: 1905–1933*] (1963), the expression *von den “goldenen Zwanziger Jahren”* was more a legend in retrospect than real at the time. Yet, whatever the social and political realities, the arts did indeed flourish. Alfred Kerr, an influential critic writing for the *BERLINER TAGEBLATT*, called it a new Periclean Age. The Berlin State Opera held the *premières* of Alban Berg’s *WOZZECK* and Leoš Janáček’s *JENUFA*. Bruno Walter presided over the “Bruno Walter Concerts” with the Berlin Philharmonic and recalled in his autobiography, *THEME AND VARIATIONS* (1946) translated by James A. Galston, that “it was indeed as if all the eminent artistic forces were shining forth once more, imparting to the last festive symposium of the minds a many-hued brilliance before the night of barbarism closed in. What the Berlin theatres accomplished in those days could hardly be surpassed in talent, vitality, loftiness of intention, and variety. There was the Deutsches Theater and the Kammer-spiele, in which [Max] Reinhardt held sway, imparting to tragedies, plays, and comedies the character of festival plays—from Shakespeare to Hauptmann and Werfel, from Molière to Shaw and Galsworthy, from Schiller to Unruh and Hofmannsthal. The Tribüne, under Eugen Robert, was devoted to the careful and vivacious rendition of French, English, and Hungarian comedies. In the State Theater Leopold Jessner’s dramatic experiments caused heated discussions.”²

Jessner was, in fact, one of the leading exponents of German Expressionist staging. His first Berlin production—opening on 12 December 1919—was Schiller’s *WILHELM TELL* and the stage was dominated by the *Jessnertreppe*, a jagged arrangement of steps on which the actors sat, which they would climb for declamations, and from which they could roll when killed. “The *Jessnertreppe* was an Expressionist assault on naturalism,” Peter Gay wrote in *WEIMAR CULTURE: THE OUTSIDER AS INSIDER* (1968), “and an Expressionist demand that the audience participate in the drama by using its imagination. Beyond this, Jessner had muted the patriotic tones of Schiller’s drama by cutting a famous line about the fatherland, and converted the play into a call for revolution against tyranny.”³

Karl Kraus, the Viennese satirist, might have remarked subsequently, “*Mir fällt zu Hitler nichts ein*” [Nothing inspired me during Hitler’s rise to power],⁴ but, as Walter Laqueur pointed out in *WEIMAR: A CULTURAL HISTORY* (1974), “the Weimar era gave birth to a popular culture which was *sui generis*, which left its mark on the whole period and has become part of its legacy. After the end of the First World War Berlin became the entertainment capital of Europe. Truncated, impoverished, facing a permanent economic crisis and with little hope of a lasting improvement, Germany wanted to enjoy itself. Once the war was over a dance fever spread, the like of which had not been witnessed in Europe since the Middle Ages. According to the new *Zeitgeist*, sex, like justice, had to be seen to be done. The new sex wave ranged from the establishment of scientific (or pseudo-scientific) research institutes to nude shows and

hard-core pornography. Periodicals called *FREE LOVE*, *THE GRASS WIDOW*, *WOMAN WITHOUT MAN*, tried to imitate with varying success *RIRE* and *VIE PARISIENNE*, while the Admiralspalast and the Metropol-theater copied the Folies Bergères and the Casino de Paris.”⁵

Stefan Zweig, one of the brightest literary lights of the period, took a somewhat dimmer view of all this gaiety when he came to write *DIE WELT VON GESTERN: ERINNERUNGEN EINES EUROPÄERS* [*THE WORLD OF YESTERDAY: MEMORIES OF AN EUROPEAN*] (1944). “All values were changed, and not only materially,” he observed; “the decrees of the state were laughed away, no custom, no morality respected, Berlin transformed itself into the Babel of the world. Bars, places of amusement, saloons shot up as mushrooms. What we had seen in Austria proved only a mild and shy prologue to this Witches’ Sabbath, for the Germans devoted themselves to perversion with their vehement capacity for organization. All along the Kurfürstendamm young boys promenaded with rouged cheeks and artificial bodices and not merely professionals; every high school [*Gymnasiast*] boy wanted to earn something, and in the shadowed bars one saw state secretaries and the people in high finance affectionately letting nature take its course without shame, as if they were drunken sailors. Even the Rome of Suetonius never knew such orgies as the transvestite balls in Berlin where hundreds of men in women’s clothes and women in men’s clothes danced beneath the well-wishing eyes of the police. A kind of delirium amid the collapse of all values seized even the middle class whose circle had had hitherto an imperturbable order. Young girls boasted proudly of their perversions; to be suspected of being a virgin at sixteen would be regarded as a disgrace in every Berlin school, everyone wanted to be able to report her adventure, and the more exotic the better.”⁶

It was also a period which saw published two of the finest novels in modern German literature: Hermann Hesse’s *DEMIAN* (1919) and Thomas Mann’s *DER ZAUBERBERG* [*THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN*] (1924). Both of them became bestsellers in the Weimar Republic. Hesse had undergone a brief analytical session with C. G. Jung and he characterized the Jungian concept of the Self as Demian in his novel. It was to this Self that he referred when, narrating the book in the first person singular as Emil Sinclair, he wrote that “the piecing together caused pain. Everything that has happened to me since has caused pain. However, when I sometimes find the key and descend completely into myself, there where in a glass darkly the architect of my destiny slumbers, then I need only to lean over the dark glass and see my own image, that now wholly resembles him, him, my friend and guide.”⁷ Mann in *DER ZAUBERBERG* went beyond personal analysis and personal healing: it was European culture itself which was sick and in need of *Ganzung* [wholeness], to use the Jungian term. After seven years’ experience at a sanatorium for tuberculars, Mann left his protagonist, Hans Castorp, on the battlefield. “Farewell—now you may survive or you may expire. Your prospects are not good; the dreadful pleasure dance into which you are drawn will endure many sinful years yet, and we ought

not wager highly that you will come out of it. Speaking honestly, in moderate unconcern, we leave the question open. Adventures in body and spirit which excited your ingenuous nature allowed you to survive spiritually what you could scarcely have survived bodily. Moments came where out of death and physical lechery a dream of love filled with misgiving and a commanding manner took form within you. Ere, from this world-feast of death, from this evil fever-lust bursting into flames in the rain-filled evening sky, might love sometime arise?"⁸

A similar impulse can also be found in Friedrich Meinecke's attitude in his *IDEE DER STAATSRÄSON* [THE REASON OF STATE IDEA] (1924) which appeared the same year as *DER ZAUBERBERG*. He, too, felt that the *daimon* in humankind had to be faced directly. "Contemplation cannot tire of looking into its sphinxlike countenance," he wrote, "and will never succeed in penetrating it fully. It can only appeal to the active statesman to carry in his heart state and God together, that he may prevent the *daemon*, whom he can never wholly shake off, from becoming too powerful."⁹ Peter Gay reflected that "like Mann, Meinecke was a cultural aristocrat converted to the Republic; like Mann, Meinecke was master of a ponderous irony, enjoyed the subtle interplay of motives, sought the good but found evil, and from the pains of war and defeat derived the single lesson that if man is ever to conquer the *daemon* that is within him, he can conquer him only by looking at him unafraid, and taking his measure."¹⁰

And, too, there was the voice of philosopher Martin Heidegger whose philosophy grew out of the sense of nihilism he had found reverberating in Nietzsche's agonized thought, and which had found a no less eloquent expression in the tortured writings of Kierkegaard. As Peter Gay wrote, "more than one critic has noted that words like 'Angst,' 'care,' 'nothingness,' 'existence,' 'decision,' and (perhaps most weighty) 'death' were terms that the Expressionist poets and playwrights had made thoroughly familiar to those who had never read a line of Kierkegaard. What Heidegger did was to give philosophical seriousness, professorial respectability, to the love affair with unreason and death that dominated so many Germans in this hard time."¹¹

Finally, there was the cinema. "Weimar, in brief, was the age of Fritz Lang, of Marlene Dietrich and Richard Tauber as much as of its thinkers," Walter Laqueur admonished. "In many ways the films of the period, the operettas and the hit songs, reflect the *Zeitgeist* as accurately as *THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN* and *DEMIAN*. In the cinema in particular the hopes and fears of the immediate postwar era, the trend toward objectivism during the stabilization period, the shock and the confusion of the Great Depression, are manifest. But it is also true that there was a constant desire to be entertained, to escape to far-away ages, to distant countries or to a better future. In the cinema the daydreams usually prevailed over the nightmares for the simple reason that the public wanted it that way. Thus it is dangerous to read too much into the content of the films of the period; whether they provide a key to the depths of the German soul, let alone to subsequent trends in German politics, is at best a moot point."¹²

Laqueur's words, in effect, contain a veiled warning against the kind of abuse perpetrated by what remains one of the most comprehensive books written on the German cinema during the Weimar Republic, Siegfried Kracauer's *FROM CALIGARI TO HITLER: A PSYCHOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE GERMAN FILM* (1947). Almost a model of exhaustive cinema research, the major problem with the book is that Kracauer tried to project into German films the various emotions and attitudes which accompanied Hitler's political rise. An equivalent approach would be to write a history of the American cinema in the 1970s in an effort to show how Ronald Reagan's election in November, 1979 would have been clearly discernible to an astute film critic. Surveying the German cinema more objectively, and not insistent on proving something from it, Laqueur concluded that "the cinema was apparently subject to logic and laws of movement of its own."¹³ Equally notable was the lack of censorship during the Weimar Republic. It was the most permissive of any country in Europe and, indeed, many of the films made and shown in Germany were banned in France and Great Britain and were severely edited before they were released in the United States.

In 1925 Field Marshal Paul von Hindenberg was elected president of the Republic. In his address following his taking of the oath of office, Hindenberg said, according to S. William Halperin in *GERMANY TRIED DEMOCRACY: A POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE REICH FROM 1918 TO 1933* (1946), that "the Reichstag and the president. . . . were the embodiment of that popular sovereignty which was now the foundation of Germany's national life. This, in his opinion, was the deeper meaning of the constitution which he had just sworn to uphold. He emphasized, too, the duty of the president to unite all the constructive forces in the land in a spirit of non-partisanship. His proclamation to the people was couched in a similar vein. He promised to safeguard the country's well-being and to practice justice toward all. His efforts would be designed to advance the interests of the nation as a whole and not those of a particular class or religion or party. Simultaneously, he urged the army to serve the Reich in conformity with its oath and with the duties imposed upon it by the constitution. Hindenberg thus seemed content to uphold a regime which he, a staunch believer in authoritarian rule, despised with all his being."¹⁴

That same year Germany signed the Locarno Treaty with France, Great Britain, Belgium, and Italy, settling its Western frontiers and calling for the peaceful settlement of any future dispute. In June 1926 Germany signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union and in September of that year joined the League of Nations. By 1928, unemployment fell below three-quarters of a million. It was a period of seeming prosperity, but at the same time business mergers were proceeding at an alarming rate, federal and local bureaucracies were wasteful and incompetent, and the powerful industrial magnate, Alfred Hugenberg, who had become rich during the inflation was systematically taking over the opinion-making industries which would eventually include the German film industry. Moreover, much of the prosperity was due to foreign investment, not gen-

uine internal growth. Hugenberg soon began making overtures to Hitler and the Nazi Party which held its first party rally at Nuremberg in August 1927.

Walter Laqueur stressed the continuity of much of the personnel of the German film industry as the country passed from the Weimar Republic through the Third Reich and into its current political division of West and East Germany. His point is that filmmakers and those who worked in the industry generally did not greatly concern themselves with political issues—and, of course, those who did became emigrés. Therefore it is not especially significant that Paul Wegener who filmed the first version of *DER STUDENT VON PRAGUE* (German, 1913) before the First World War in 1933 wrote a screenplay about the life of Horst Wessel. What is interesting in this early film is its central idea of the *Doppelgänger* and its use of the Faust legend. Baldwin, a poor student, signs a compact with Scapinelli, a sorcerer, whereby in exchange for a splendid marriage and fabulous wealth he agrees to give a mirror-image of himself to this incarnation of Satan. Of course, the double, after a chilling sequence when he steps out of the mirror, proceeds to reduce Baldwin's life to a shambles. With a long-standing German Romantic literary tradition behind it, of which Hesse's *DEMIAN* would be only an infinitely more subtle and commensurately far more benign variation, this image of a man and his *daimon* proved highly influential during the years of the German cinema in the Weimar Republic. In fact, the screenplay was remade under the same title again in 1926, and still again in 1936.

The most famous of the German film producing companies during the 'Twenties, known as UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft), was formed in 1917 under the authority of a directive from the German High Command with its shares of stock capitalized at about 25 million marks of which the Reich owned 8 million. Its immediate objective was to make films which not only supported the German war effort but which delineated German culture in a favorable light for national educational purposes. While the war was approaching its end, Ernst Lubitsch was engaged to direct dramatic films in which he adapted for the screen many of the theatrical and staging devices he had learned from Max Reinhardt. Two of the most famous of these films featured Polish personality Pola Negri, *DIE AUGEN DER MUMIE MA* [American release title: *THE EYES OF THE MUMMY*] (German, 1918) and *CARMEN* [American release title: *GYPSY BLOOD*] (German, 1918). A series of historical pageants followed, including *MADAME DU BARRY* [American release title: *PASSION*] (German, 1918) and *ANNA BOLEYN* [American release title: *DECEPTION*] (German, 1920). This latter group began to appear after the Armistice and so was subject to export to Allied countries. The historical films proved so popular in the United States that Lubitsch came to be referred to as the "great humanizer of history" and the "Griffith of Europe." It was not long before he was invited to the United States to direct, being placed under a personal contract to Mary Pickford. The two did not turn out to be compatible, but Lubitsch was in Hollywood and he decided to stay there.

Siegfried Kracauer was himself the product of Weimar culture, working as a reporter for the *FRANKFURTER ZEITUNG*. In writing of Lubitsch's historical films in *FROM CALIGARI TO HITLER*, he concluded, I believe rightly, that they embodied "a nihilistic outlook on world affairs. . . . They characterized history as meaningless. History, they seemed to say, is an arena reserved for blind and ferocious instincts, a product of devilish machinations forever frustrating our hopes for freedom and happiness."¹⁵ Lubitsch had begun his career directing comedies, always preferred them it would seem, and presently, in the United States, returned to directing them. Behind him in Germany and Austria, however, he left many admirers in the film industry, Erich Pommer, Carl Mayer, and the young Billy Wilder who would later be associated with him at Paramount in the late 1930s, perhaps most prominent among them.

Mayer collaborated on the screenplay and Pommer produced the first notable film of the German Expressionist cinema, *DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI* [*THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI*] (German, 1920). Originally Fritz Lang was to direct the film, but completion of his serial, *DIE SPINNEN* [*THE SPIDERS*] (German, 1919), took precedence and he was replaced by Robert Wiene. Dr. Caligari is a hypnotist accompanied by a somnambulist named Cesare. They are an attraction with a touring carnival. Supposedly, under Caligari's spell, Cesare can tell of future events. As it turns out, Caligari is actually a psychopath, the director of an insane asylum, who came upon a legend of a man named Caligari in the Eighteenth century. This Caligari hypnotized his medium, named Cesare, to murder several people. These facts are brought to light when Francis, a student, becomes suspicious of the present-day Caligari and the murders which begin to occur in the small German town where the carnival is playing. Cesare expires from exhaustion after an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap the heroine, Francis' girl, Jane. When the director of the asylum is shown Cesare's corpse, he goes raving mad and must himself be placed in a straitjacket. Wiene, following Lang's original plan, created around this narrative a framing story whereby all of the events are actually the insane ravings of Francis who is an asylum inmate and the director, far from being the fantasy character in Francis' hallucination, is in truth a benign and caring individual. Because of the framing story, and not in spite of it, the staging of the film could be approached in an Expressionist style, a style which permitted characters and events to assume the emotional, introspective tones of the deranged Francis. Alfred Kubin, the art director, went about painting the sets so that material objects would appear to be emotional ornaments, in which tree-like arabesques were threats rather than trees and painted shadows, when combined with disharmonious lighting, imbued everything with a minatory, oppressive atmosphere. The carnival itself became a metaphor for anarchy, for instinctual life liberated in chaos, a protest against restraint combined with a fear of the consequences of that very protest.

The same year F. W. Murnau directed *JANUSKOPF* [*JANUS-FACED*]

(German, 1920), a variation on the Jekyll and Hyde theme. By the time Murnau came to direct *NOSFERATU* (German, 1922), his version of the Dracula legend, he had developed a screen style in which the customary boundaries between reality and fantasy were obliterated. Reality was photographed in such a way that the corporeal might appear to be an apparition, an apparition might seem tangible. The ideology of *NOSFERATU* is that the vampire is helpless before those who would encounter him fearlessly. When Nina, the heroine and a chosen victim, openly welcomes him into her room, a miracle happens: the sun breaks through and *Nosferatu* dissolves.

DR. MABUSE, DER SPIELER [*DR. MABUSE, THE GAMBLER*] (German, 1922) directed by Fritz Lang featured another menace, no less threatening than *Caligari* or *Nosferatu*. The world pictured in the film is one of depravity and lawlessness. Orgies are common; homosexuals and child prostitutes are to be found everywhere. Dr. Mabuse is the arch criminal masterminding this activity. He is also a counterfeiter and the schemer behind robberies and bank failures. Lang made the film during the period of great inflation. He had to pay his cast and crew daily because overnight the money would be devalued. This element of German economic life became part of the film whereas the figure of Mabuse himself, Lang later claimed, was based on the American gangster, Al Capone. Mabuse is an organizing metaphor: he is behind all of the violence and what otherwise might seem haphazard acts. To keep his identity secret, Mabuse uses a great many disguises—a plot ingredient which would be adopted by Mascot Pictures in the United States later on in the decade in their chapter plays.

“Siegfried Kracauer states that Mabuse’s tyranny is offered by Lang as the alternative to chaos, yet that is not the case at all,” Paul M. Jensen wrote in *THE CINEMA OF FRITZ LANG* (1969). “Actually, Lang establishes Mabuse as the cause of all this chaos and violence in order to give form to what is in reality haphazard; he provides a concrete figure against whom to fight, and thus creates a meaning and source for meaningless violence. He is against chaos, but instead of offering tyranny as an alternative, he equates the two by discovering a tyrant who is the source of what seems on the surface to be disorder.”¹⁶

Lang collaborated on the screenplay with his wife, Thea von Harbou, whose first husband, Rudolph Klein-Rogge, was cast in the role of Mabuse. Erich Pommer was the producer of *DR. MABUSE, DER SPIELER*, as he had been of Lang’s earlier film, *DER MÜDE TOD* [*WEARY DEATH*] (German, 1921). *MABUSE* consists of two parts: Part One is titled *DER GROSSE SPIELER*; Part Two is titled *INFERNO*. It has its brilliant moments of direction, but on the whole the pace is excruciatingly slow and Lang had not yet learned, as he would eventually, to make use of cross-cutting to increase dramatic tension.

In *DER MÜDE TOD* the plot concerns the immutability of Fate and the indifference of Death to human entreaties. In a reverse of the situation of Euripides’ *ALCESTIS*, the heroine bargains with Death to allow her lover to come back to her. Death makes her a counterproposal, but she proves unsuccessful—again, a reversal from Euripides—and, instead, the lovers are united only in

death. As such, it embodies one of Lang's deepest, if also hopelessly romantic notions, that one can achieve dignity and victory by dying because love is as strong as death. This pessimistic perspective is absent from *DR. MABUSE, DER SPIELER*. In defeating and finally capturing Dr. Mabuse, society has rid itself of its arch demon, or, in other words, its collective *daimon*, and a better life seems in the offing.

Lang's next film, *DIE NIEBELUNGEN* [*THE LAY OF THE NIEBELUNGS*] (German, 1924), again produced by Pommer with the screenplay by Thea von Harbou, was epic drama. In a way, it combined the perspectives of the two preceding films and arrived at a new synthesis. Consisting of two parts, *SIEGFRIEDS TOD* [*SIEGFRIED'S DEATH*] and *KRIEMHILDS RACHE* [*KRIEMHILD'S REVENGE*], Lang's approach was to keep the pace slow and stately, with panorama shots replacing close-ups and imbuing the narrative ritual with a consciously visual atmosphere of unreality ideally suited to heroic myth. For his source, Lang went back to the original German legends, and not to Wagner. Siegfried is a tragic hero destroyed by the all-too-human natures of those with whom he is surrounded. Kriemhild is innocent, a worthy woman to receive Siegfried's love. After Siegfried's death, she is transformed. From being passive, she becomes active; her innocence becomes guilt as her desire for virtuous justice changes into a passion for revenge. Paul M. Jensen compared her character in the second part appropriately with that of Medea and, as Medea, "having suffered evil she now inflicts evil; blinded by extreme emotion, she and her actions, though basically just, become corrupt. At the same time, however, this refusal to accept human limitations gives her a kind of heroic grandeur."¹⁷

Henry Adams once observed that he saw all human endeavor finally ending in chaos. It cannot be stressed too much that Nordic mythology, unlike Classical mythology, envisioned just such an end for the world: everything falling into ruin, Valhalla crashing down, the gods and heroes destroyed. In Lang's Niebelung epic human passions do not merely run their course; they and the attendant disorder they create lead directly into a world barbaric and grotesque, the world of the violent Huns who smashed the symmetry and order of Classical Antiquity. Yet, visible and ever-present, is *das Schicksal* [Destiny], a power greater than *Moirai* and *Fortuna* who were always very individual deities. Destiny is all-encompassing. I tend to agree with Siegfried Kracauer that "from the moment when the dying dragon with a movement of his tail makes the ominous leaf drop on Siegfried's back down to the moment of Attila's self-chosen death, nothing seems left to mere chance. An inherent necessity predetermines the disastrous sequence of love, hatred, jealousy, and thirst for revenge."¹⁸

Robert Wiene, after the completion of *CALIGARI*, immediately engaged Carl Mayer to work on the production of another Expressionist film. It was titled *GENUINE* (German, 1920) and it established Mayer himself as a guiding force in the German Expressionist cinema. He began his own series of films with *HINTERTREPPE* [*BACKSTAIRS*] (German, 1921) which was staged for the

screen by none other than Leopold Jessner. The social milieu of this and the other films made by Mayer was invariably the same: the lower-middle class, that part of German society which had been especially hard hit by the defeat, the inflation, and the cultural dislocations accompanying both. As Georg Büchner's *Wozzeck* character of almost a hundred years before, Mayer's characters are incapable of moderating their passions and generally become victims of their instinctual natures. The proliferation of these images no doubt prompted the revival of interest in Büchner himself and Alban Berg's twelve-tone opera in 1925, mentioned above, was based on Büchner's stage play. In typical Expressionistic fashion, none of Mayer's characters have names; they are merely roles. The protagonists are *Durchschnittsmänner* [average fellows] and it is obvious from their allegorical natures that what happens to them, what Destiny has in store for them, could happen to everyman. Lighting, too, played a singular part in these films. "The illumination seemed to emanate from the objects themselves," Carl Vincent noted concerning *HINTERTREPPE* in his *HISTOIRE DE L'ART CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE* [HISTORY OF FILM ART] (1939).¹⁹ Lupu Pick, who directed several films for Mayer including *SYLVESTER: EIN LICHTSPIEL* [American release title: *NEW YEAR'S EVE*] (German, 1923), remarked in a printed "*Vorwort des Regisseurs*" [Director's Foreword] accompanying release of the film that Mayer may well have intended the lighting "to disclose brightness and darkness . . . within the soul itself, that eternal alternation of light and shadow characterizing the psychological relations between human beings."²⁰ In order to achieve some of the effects Mayer had called for in his scenario for this film, Lupu Pick's cameraman introduced the technical innovation of mounting a tripod camera on rails so that tracking shots became possible.

This series reached its apogee with *DER LETZTE MANN* [American release title: *THE LAST LAUGH*] (German, 1924) scripted by Carl Mayer, directed and staged by F. W. Murnau, and photographed by Karl Freund. The plot concerns a middle-aged hotel porter, played by Emil Jannings, who wears a bright uniform as he ushers people through the revolving door of a swank hotel patronized by the very wealthy. The porter lives in a tenement hovel; but he is very much respected in this neighborhood because of his uniform and his position. The hotel manager, however, seeing the porter struggling with a trunk, takes pity on him and orders him to take a new albeit less demanding position, exchanging his uniform for the white smock of a lavatory attendant. This change in circumstances is viewed by all those who live in the tenement district as a demotion and they heap ridicule on Jannings' head, so much so that he becomes utterly despondent. In the final scene, the shadows outside the lavatory transform it into a dark abyss. The night watchman is first seen approaching by the light cast upon the walls from the lantern he is carrying. Finding the pathetic Jannings sitting nearby, he helps wrap him in a blanket. It is an isolated act of kindness in a universe which has suddenly become unremittingly hostile. The atmosphere, due above all to the lighting, is clearly in anticipation of *film*

noir, but not Jannings' character: *noir* men will not allow themselves the dubious luxury of self-pity.

Vincent in his HISTOIRE DE L'ART CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE related how Karl Grune, a former disciple of Max Reinhardt and creator of the first of the German street films, came to want to be a film director. For many years during the war, Grune had had to live among foreign soldiers. Instead of learning their language, he studied instead their gestures and faces. He became convinced that a pictorial language could be developed that would be as communicative as the spoken word. Evidently Murnau had quite the same thing in mind while making DER LETZTE MANN since, upon release, the film did not have a single subtitle. The action was self-explanatory.

Alfred Hitchcock was in Germany at this time, working as a supervisor on the British film THE BLACKGUARD (British, 1926), and he would film his own first two features in 1925 at the Emelka Studios in Munich. "Those were the great days of the German pictures," he later told his biographer, Donald Spoto. ". . . The studio where I worked [UFA] was tremendous, bigger than Universal is today. They had a complete railroad station built on the back lot. For a version of SIEGFRIED they built the whole forest of the NIEBELUNGENLIED [which Hitchcock promptly ordered torn down on his arrival to make room for his grand staircase in THE BLACKGUARD]. . . . The Germans placed great emphasis on telling the story visually—if possible with no titles or at least very few. THE LAST LAUGH was almost the perfect film. It told its story even without subtitles—from beginning to end entirely by the use of imagery, and that had a tremendous influence on me."²¹

Karl Grune's DIE STRASSE [THE STREET] (German, 1923) had an almost comparable influence in terms of its story. It tells of a man, disillusioned with the boredom of his marriage, who ventures out into the sinful, even sinister life of the streets. He becomes so overwhelmed by the total chaos which envelopes him that he retreats back to the security of home and hearth, where he is met by a forgiving, albeit maternal, wife. "The theme of security at home against outer social chaos provided the basis for other German street films," Spoto pointed out in THE DARK SIDE OF GENIUS: THE LIFE OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK (1983), "and Hitchcock's films (from RICH AND STRANGE through NORTH BY NORTHWEST) make it clear that he felt a spiritual kinship to this motif."²²

To an extent, Grune's central motif in this film was anticipated by F. W. Murnau in PHANTOM (German, 1922). This film was based on a novel by Gerhart Hauptmann which was in turn a variation—a rather Teutonic variation—on Dante's infatuation with Beatrice. In the film, a humble clerk has dreams of becoming a great poet and marrying the exquisitely beautiful woman he saw once in the street riding in a phaeton. Unable to quiet his longing, he sleeps with a prostitute who somewhat resembles the idealized woman and sinks ever deeper into perdition until he finds himself in prison. The film includes a montage sequence which combines street impressions with visions of chaos. The

clerk's *anagnorisis* comes when he determines to renounce all phantoms of idealized women.

A film which caused a sensation both in Germany and throughout Europe and the United States was E. A. Dupont's *VARIÉTÉ* (German, 1925). As early as 1918 Max Weber had condemned Expressionism and regarded it as no less a spiritual narcotic than irresponsible mysticism. In an article in the *FRANKFURTER ZEITUNG* he called for a "*neue Sachlichkeit*," a new objectivity which would engender "*Schamgefühl*," feelings of conscience, of moderation. "Whatever its ultimate meaning—and that meaning differed from artist to artist—in substance the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was a search for reality, for a place to stand in the actual world," Peter Gay wrote of it in *WEIMAR CULTURE*; "it was the struggle for objectivity that has characterized German culture since Goethe. It called for realism in setting, accurate reportage, return to naturalistic speech, and, if there had to be idealism, sober idealism. It was a movement toward simplicity and clarity in which many of the Expressionists could join, not merely because they were weary with old modes or venally adapted themselves to new fashions or experienced outright conversion; Expressionism itself had contained impulses toward objectivity, which now gained the upper hand."²³

In *VARIÉTÉ* Emil Jannings played a convicted criminal who is given a pardon and who proceeds to tell the warden his story. He had been running a shabby amusement show; his wife's beauty had faded. He remembered fondly the days when he had been a trapeze artist. He hires a young and sensuously beautiful woman with whom he runs away. After training her for the trapeze, the two launch themselves on a new career. When a young man joins their successful act and falls in requited love with the young woman, Jannings is seized with jealousy. He murders the young man and turns himself in to the police. "Unusual camera angles, multiple exposures, and sagacious transitions help transport the spectator to the heart of the events," Siegfried Kracauer wrote of this film. "Thus Dupont superseded the conventional realism of the past by a realism that captured along with visible phenomena the psychological processes below their surface. However, nothing he offered was essentially new. Psychological ubiquity as well as fluidity of pictorial narration: all sprang from *THE LAST LAUGH*. *VARIETY* was a derivative of the fundamental film; it resumed in the realistic sphere what *THE LAST LAUGH* had accomplished in the sphere of introspection."²⁴

I would agree with this assessment, but it was an important innovation for a film to combine images of physical reality with psychological overtones, whether it was owed to Murnau, as Kracauer believed, or to E. A. Dupont in association with Erich Pommer, who produced *VARIÉTÉ*, and Karl Freund who photographed it. Fritz Lang also furthered this tendency toward dealing with psychological reality at once introspectively and objectively. After a trip to the United States during which he saw New York City at night glittering with a thousand lights, he returned to Germany and began work on *METROPOLIS* (German, 1927). It required more than a year and a half to complete, thus becoming the

most expensive film UFA had ever undertaken. Even before filming ceased, UFA had so depleted its resources it had to float a four million dollar loan from two American film companies, Paramount and M-G-M. Prior to its release, UFA's combined debt totaled more than forty million marks; even though METROPOLIS played to large audiences all over the world, it was insufficient to earn back what it had cost. In April 1927, Alfred Hugenberg, who by this time had the largest non-official news agency in Germany, seized control of the company.

Thea von Harbou and Lang collaborated on the screenplay. But, as Peter Gay pointed out, "METROPOLIS is a fantasy without imagination, a picturesque, ill-conceived, and essentially reactionary tale which has only a few good shots of mass movement and rising waters to recommend it; the film sees the class struggle as science fiction and draws the kind of conclusion that can only be called a studied lie: Metropolis is the city of the future, where brutally enslaved workers toil, often unto death, in underground factories, while a small elite of masters enjoys leisure and irresponsible pleasures on vast estates and in ornamental gardens, complete with fountains and peacocks. The son of the master goes below, to 'seek his brothers,' and reconcile the two strata, which never meet. But his very reasons for his social interest are rotten: he has fallen in love, naturally at first sight, with a lovely working girl who has wandered into his garden."²⁵ The young man is named Freder. His efforts are ruined by his father, the master, who orders a robot created that duplicates Maria, the girl with whom Freder is in love, and the robot invokes rebellion. The workers revolt and smash the underground machines, causing an internal flood. Freder and Maria, however, are able to rescue the workers' children from death by drowning. Freder then has a fight to the death with Rotwang, the mad scientist who created the robot for Freder's father, and there is a reconciliation at the end with Freder's father shaking hands with the representative of the workers.

Peter Gay, Siegfried Kracauer, and others who have attacked the muddled political ideology of METROPOLIS have made valid criticisms, but, in terms of the relationship between METROPOLIS and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Paul M. Jensen was no doubt also right that in this futuristic vision Lang was trying to show how "the split in each individual between the mental and the physical has evolved, by the year 2000, into a social division. One group of people retains only the brain, while another uses only muscle. These extremes are geographically and pictorially contrasted, with the underground workers marching slowly in tight formation while the rulers cavort freely in pleasure gardens on the surface. Yet the two types are also 'brothers,' and complementary parts of a single organism."²⁶

Sigmund Freud in his essay "Contributions to the Psychology of Love: The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life" (1912) addressed the problem of how certain men, as well as certain societies, insist on making a distinction between an ideal of woman which can be loved but never ravished, and a degraded view of woman which can be ravished and cannot be loved. He

diagnosed this split as coming about because “the whole current of sensual feeling in a young man may remain attached in the unconscious to incestuous objects, or, to put it another way, may be fixated to incestuous phantasies.”²⁷ Lang made use of this split in *METROPOLIS*—just how consciously I do not know—so that, as Jensen further observed, “the real Maria embodies purity and virginity, while her mechanical double is an evil, seductive harlot; at the same time, these two also contrast humanity with its opposite, the machine.”²⁸ Throughout *FROM CALIGARI TO HITLER*, Kracauer repeatedly drew attention to those German films which find their resolution in scenes where a man is shown helplessly putting his head on a woman’s bosom. Certainly this is how Karl Grune concluded *DIE STRASSE*, which also contains the split between the maternal wife and the sensuous harlot, and it is related thematically, if not illustrated pictorially, in Lang’s ending of *METROPOLIS*—in Peter Gay’s words—: “only an evil demon can urge strikes or revolt; the truth lies always in the mediation of the heart.”²⁹ The reconciliation of a male protagonist in the arms of a maternal woman is iconographically irrelevant to American *film noir*, but not the splitting of women into vestal purity and sensuous harlotry, nor the ultimate impotence—pictured as the need for a man to live utterly alone and away from women—which such splitting of the loved object necessitates.

This theme is also to be found in *DIRNENTRAGÖDIE* [American release title: *TRAGEDY OF THE STREET*] (German, 1927) directed by Bruno Rahn. In this film, a young man who has quarreled with his parents goes to seek his fortune in the streets. He is befriended by an aging prostitute who comes to believe that he is in love with her. She goes to invest her savings in a shop, so as to have a career worthy of this new relationship. In the meantime, her *souteneur* introduces the young man to a young, sensuous prostitute. The two fall in love. In addition to her own misery, the aging prostitute is convinced that the younger one, Clarissa, will destroy the young man. She persuades her *souteneur* to murder Clarissa and herself commits suicide. The young man returns home and is embraced fondly by his mother in the characteristic gesture, knowing now that the streets hold only dissipation and ruin. Paul Rotha wrote of *DIRNENTRAGÖDIE* in *THE FILM TILL NOW* (1930) that “throughout, all things led back to the street; its pavements with the hurrying, soliciting feet; its dark corners and angles; its light under the sentinel lamp-posts.”³⁰ Dark streets and their inhabitants had become a metaphor for moral depravity.

Perhaps the most notable street film from the period was G. W. Pabst’s *DIE FREUDLOSE GASSE* [*THE JOYLESS STREET*] (German, 1925). It provided a vivid picture of the reduction of the middle class in Vienna to pauperdom during the inflation. It was so explicit in many of its scenes that it was completely banned in Great Britain and shown only in truncated versions in Italy, France, Austria, and elsewhere. Greta Garbo, in her first important screen role, was cast as the daughter of a government official. When the official’s savings are wiped out by the inflation and he is facing starvation, his daughter saves the day by getting a job as a dancer in a nightclub. Virtually everyone is cor-

rupted in a world in which all stability and moral values have been shattered by the inflation. The few who hold out because of an inherent sense of decency face almost certain destruction. This was the *Neue Sachlichkeit* at its most implacable.

Pabst followed the film with *GEHEIMNISSE EINER SEELE* [SECRETS OF A SOUL] (German, 1926) which was an attempt to film the process of the new science of psychoanalysis. Karl Abraham and Hanns Sachs, who were important Berlin psychoanalysts, acted as technical advisers on the film. The plot concerns a man who has a dream about his wife and his wife's cousin, both of whom were childhood friends of his, which culminates in his attempting to stab his wife with a dagger. The man develops a phobia about touching knives and, when alone with his wife, is nearly overwhelmed with a desire to murder her. He moves out of his home and back to his mother's home and begins psychoanalytic sessions. In a summary of these sessions, the dream is dissected. The phobia is shown to have been engendered by unconscious jealousy directed toward the possible attraction between his wife and her cousin—unfounded in reality—and the patient is restored to sound mental health. "GEHEIMNISSE EINER SEELE could not be copied because 'psychoanalysis in action' did not necessarily make good cinema," Walter Laqueur commented; "but in an indirect way, through the use of sexual symbols, this film exerted a profound influence."³¹ To cite only two examples, both Alfred Hitchcock's *SPELLBOUND* (RKO, 1945) and *PSYCHO* (Paramount, 1960) were indebted to Pabst's introduction of psychoanalytic technique as a component to screen storytelling and the elucidation of the mental states of characters according to psychoanalytic theory.

At first, Freud himself had been approached to act as a consultant, but he had declined. Although Karl Abraham was very ill, he had agreed to fill in for Freud, and his being president of the International Psycho-Analytical Association lent authority to the project. Hanns Sachs, however, did most of the work. There were also repercussions. According to Ernest Jones in Volume III of *THE LIFE AND WORK OF SIGMUND FREUD* (1957), "in August Freud complained [in a letter to Karl Abraham] that the film was being made and presented 'with Freud's co-operation.' In New York it was stated that 'every foot of the film, *THE MYSTERY OF THE SOUL*, will be planned and scrutinized by Dr. Freud.'"³² Jones did not remark about whether or not Freud ever saw the film, although he noted seeing it himself in Berlin. It is therefore all the more ironical that Pabst saw fit to end this film with that pathetic gesture which had become so stereotypical: the cured man places his head in his wife's protective lap. I suspect that this imagery was so much an accepted part of German manners at the time that not even the psychoanalysts working on the film or viewing it realized its symbolic significance.

All during the years 1926 and 1927 "spy fever" spread in Europe. "Europe," the *NEW YORK TIMES* reported on 6 March 1927, "is being stirred by its first big international spy scare since the first World War. Secret agents,

mystery women, melodramatic plots and counter-plots—all the adventurous secret service stories of pre-war days when every European country was supposed to be spied on and plotted against by every other country—are being revived by sensational ‘revelations’ in a half dozen countries.”³³ It was in the midst of this atmosphere that Fritz Lang made *SPIONE [SPIES]* (German, 1928) based on a screenplay by Thea von Harbou. Rudolf Klein-Rogge, who had played Dr. Mabuse, was back, this time cast as Haghi, the head of an international spy ring. Haghi is a master at simulation. Although the director of a large bank intricately involved in finance, he is also Nemo, a music-hall clown who is working as an agent for the American secret service! Just as much a master of deception and disguise as Mabuse, Haghi is nonetheless portrayed far more realistically. Only the cigarette smoke which perpetually hovers as an aura about him suggests otherworldliness. Sonia, played by Gerda Maurus, an agent in Haghi’s employ, is assigned to kill Donald Tremaine, played by Willy Fritsch, another agent of the United States sent to Germany to find out why Burton Jason, the agent for whom Haghi works as Nemo, has been unsuccessful in solving the thefts of numerous important diplomatic documents. Sonia and Tremaine proceed to fall in love—instantly, in fact, which remained a Lang convention—and she begs Haghi to relieve her of the assignment. He refuses. This situation almost exactly duplicates the later situation in one of Lang’s American *films gris* *HUMAN DESIRE* (Columbia, 1954), where a husband urges a wife to see another man: in both cases romances result which boomerang, causing the destruction of the original agent.

Lang was able in *SPIONE* to abandon all the more obvious techniques of cinematic Expressionism and instead to substitute far more sophisticated techniques, such as showing parts of a human body in isolation, thus reducing their humanity to an abstract objectivity—Jean-Luc Godard used this very technique to film the love scenes in *LA FEMME MARIÉE [A MARRIED WOMAN]* (French, 1964). Rather than distorting reality, Lang chose to photograph it in new ways, using close-ups and unusual angles. Such practices permitted Lang to evoke Expressionistic images in the midst of reality. Lang also developed a new method of creating tension, what Paul M. Jensen termed “forced waiting.” The camera does not cut away from a scene to build tension, but rather remains focused on a setting or a person, avoiding “tedium by investing the scene with an intangible, gripping atmosphere of approaching menace.”³⁴

The American film in the 'Twenties knew nothing of these techniques, probably because of disinterest on the part of directors, producers, and screenwriters. In fact, David Robinson in his book, *HOLLYWOOD IN THE TWENTIES* (1968), found this to comprise the essential difference between the European cinema and that in the United States. “So,” he wrote, “while filmmakers in France, Germany, and Sweden were discovering new artistic dimensions—the film’s potentialities for exploring psychology and atmosphere, for lyricism and for new sensory and visual experiences—the American cinema had settled in its ways of being primarily a storytelling medium. The characteristics of the

pre-war cinema still prevailed to a large extent: the predominance of narrative; the dominance of literary and dramatic traditions; an exclusively objective vision of the world on the screen.”³⁵

On 7 June 1929, Germany signed an agreement worked out by an Allied committee with the American, Owen D. Young, as its chairman. It required Germany to make reparation payments according to a graduated scale, ranging from 1.7 billion marks the first year to about 2.5 billion in 1966 and about 1.5 billion thereafter until 1988. Hitler denounced the agreement, as did Hugenberg and everyone else on the right. When Gustave Stresemann, the principal architect of German foreign policy in the ‘Twenties, died on 3 October 1929, it was the beginning of the end for the Weimar Republic.

The world-wide economic crisis which emerged at this time was particularly ominous in Germany. By early 1929, unemployment climbed to two million. Foreign loans to Germany were curtailed or not renewed as lending institutions sought to deal with domestic panic in their own countries. Bankruptcies in Germany multiplied and unemployment continued to rise inexorably. The Nazis took to the streets, despite an official ban, and pursued an obstructionist policy.

G. W. Pabst made a powerful anti-war film titled *WESTFRONT 1918* (German, 1930) which used the special and peculiar power of Expressionist techniques—from helmets and fragments of corpses forming a grotesque still life to a dark field hospital where groans and screams issue forth, where there is no chloroform for amputations, adding to the agonized cries of the wounded. It so disturbed the German censors that there was some question about its being released. In the end, the censors gave in. Oddly enough, the Nazis did not protest, possibly because all of their attention was distracted by *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* (Universal, 1930) which was released under its original German title *IM WESTEN NICHTS NEUES* and ‘which they violently picketed, condemning it as defeatist propaganda.

“Fritz Lang told me,” Siegfried Kracauer recalled in *FROM CALIGARI TO HITLER*, “that in 1930, before *M* [German, 1931] went into production, a short notice appeared in the press, announcing the tentative title of his new film, *MÖRDER UNTER UNS* (MURDERER AMONG US). Soon he received numerous threatening letters and, still worse, was bluntly refused permission to use the Staaken studio for his film. ‘But why this incomprehensible conspiracy against a film about the Düsseldorf child-murderer Kürten?’ he asked the studio manager in despair. ‘Ach, I see,’ the manager said. He beamed with relief and immediately surrendered the keys of Staaken. Lang, too, understood; while arguing with the man, he had seized his lapel and caught a glimpse of the Nazi insignia on its reverse. ‘Murderer among us’: the Party feared to be compromised. On that day, Lang added, he came of age politically.”³⁶

M was filmed in six weeks. It is concerned with two kinds of murder. The first is that committed by a mentally deranged child killer, played by Peter Lorre. He is not associated in any way with the underworld and, in fact, organized crime joins, somewhat improbably, with the police in hunting him down. The

second kind of murder is that committed by the mob of commonfolk and criminals that captures him and puts him on trial. Franz Becker, the captured child murderer, confesses to this murderous mob: "I am always forced to move along the streets, and always someone is behind me. It is I. I sometimes feel I am myself behind me, and yet I cannot escape."

This was Lang's first sound film, but, as Paul M. Jensen pointed out, it deals with "general themes common to so many of Lang's films: the individual trapped, and menaced from all sides; the danger of allowing the emotions to gain control; the ambiguity of responsibility."³⁷ The film also illustrates how cleverly Lang was now able to combine the manipulation of objective reality to reflect the inner emotions of characters and the subjective responses of the director with a naturalistic visual narrative technique. The presence of sound permitted him to innovate transition techniques between scenes, such as when a character is asked where Becker has been taken and responds, naming the old distillery, and while he is speaking the visual of the distillery is already on the screen; when he finishes, Becker and his captors enter the scene. Whenever Becker is about to commit a murder, he whistles a few bars from Grieg. A visual of a child seemingly alone and happy is transformed into a moment of menace without Becker even being shown, merely indicating his presence by his voice humming the now all too familiar bars.

In the late 'Twenties, Robert Siodmak began directing some joint French and German productions for Erich Pommer. His first film as a producer/director was *BRENNENDES GEHEIMNIS* [BURNING SECRET] (German, 1933) based on a story by Stefan Zweig. It opened the day after the Reichstag fire. It is perhaps notable that a film directed by a Jew from a story by a Jew should have been allowed to open at all. Siodmak and his brother Curt, a screenwriter, decided to wait around to see what happened. The film actually played a month before Dr. Goebbels personally launched a vehement attack on it in the *VÖLKISCHER BEOBACHTER*, condemning it and accusing its director of corrupting the German family by dwelling on unhappy marriages and disoriented children. The Siodmak brothers got on the next train for Paris and, later, in Hollywood, Robert Siodmak would make a number of important contributions to *film noir*. As for the German film industry, its days of free expression were over. Many of the directors who had raised it to world-wide distinction went into exile. The next time their films would be shown in Germany would be during the Allied occupation.

American Cinema Between the Wars

Certainly one of the more memorable events in the United States following the end of the Great War was the “Red Scare.” In 1919 there were thirty-six bombs intercepted in the mail. Radical political activity was blamed and many Americans were troubled, even apprehensive, at the course events were taking in Russia. When a bomb damaged the home of Attorney General Palmer, a number of ex-servicemen and other citizens committed to preserving the American way of life began breaking up Socialist meetings. Physical injuries were common and even loss of life occurred. The hysteria reached its peak when some 6,000 suspected Communists were rounded up. In some cases, arrest was followed by deportation; and those who visited internees in prison were themselves liable for questioning and possible arrest. “The worst of the scare was over shortly after the start of the ‘Twenties, when Harding’s election and other sensations distracted the public’s attention,” David Robinson noted in *HOLLYWOOD IN THE TWENTIES*; “but the Red Scare has proved an enduring element of fear, an indelible fact of American life.”¹ Even more intense Red Scares would follow the Second World War which would have an effect on American filmmakers who tended to be the least critical of American society.

In the decade of the ‘Twenties, this same fanaticism came to characterize the treatment accorded other minority groups. Racial hatred rose to almost unparalleled heights and the Ku Klux Klan began using D. W. Griffith’s *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* (Epoch, 1915) as a recruiting film. Henry Ford initiated an anti-Jewish propaganda campaign so virulent that years later he received a high award from Adolf Hitler. Moreover, the automobile was readily identified as the major cause of the breakup of the American family. It was blamed for offering young people the prospect of unlimited independence and unprecedented opportunities for promiscuity. Local magistrates complained that a third of all sex-related crimes were committed in automobiles. The havoc in human lives which automobiles cost—by 1940 the death toll would rise to 40,000—was at

best a secondary consideration and, as slavery in Antiquity, highway fatalities were accepted as the unavoidable adjunct for maintaining an otherwise presumably very praiseworthy life-style.

The most prestigious American film director in the 'Teens was D. W. Griffith and his pre-eminence persisted for the first few years of the new decade. His view was distinctly Victorian and belonged to the Nineteenth century. Often in his early short films he would resort to allegorical endings which appealed to the anagoge of the Middle Ages. In *HOME SWEET HOME* (Mutual, 1914) Lillian Gish was cast as the long-dead sweetheart of the protagonist. At the conclusion of the picture, while the protagonist, played by Henry B. Walthall, appears to be struggling up what seems to be a smoking hill in Hell, Lillian Gish comes floating through the air literally to draw him up to heaven. "The allegorical endings with which Griffith embellished his films at this period were not in general well done," Edward Wagenknecht observed in *THE MOVIES IN THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* (1962), "but this one [i.e., *HOME SWEET HOME*] was surely the most absurd of all."²

What was called the "new morality" of the 'Twenties would come to make this kind of sentimental appeal appear old-fashioned, and, in part, Griffith's Victorian morality brought about the decline in his popularity. However, it should also be stressed that Griffith's fantasies about the sanctity of womanhood exerted far more visual influence on the decade than he did because these fantasies were embodied in the images of actresses he had trained or who had begun their careers working for him: Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Mary Pickford, Blanche Sweet, Bessie Love, and, to a lesser degree, Mae Marsh. Of course, there were numerous other notable female stars in the 'Twenties, but there is no question that Griffith's images did exert some influence on the collective notion of the attributes proper to a heroine. In *BROKEN BLOSSOMS* (Griffith, 1919), one of Griffith's most notable feature films, Lillian Gish was cast as Lucy, a slum child whose spiritual purity attracts Richard Barthelmess, cast as a Chinese called "The Yellow Man" on the credits, and who tries to save her from the vicious brutality of Battling Burrows, played by Donald Crisp. In one scene, where Burrows is intent on killing the child, Lucy locks herself in a closet. "The scene of the terrified child alone in the closet could probably not be filmed today," Lillian Gish recalled in *THE MOVIES, MR. GRIFFITH, AND ME* (1969). "To watch Lucy's hysteria was excruciating enough in a silent picture; a sound track would have made it unbearable. When we filmed it I played the scene with complete lack of restraint, turning around and around like a tortured animal. When I finished, there was a hush in the studio."³

Lillian Gish was the embodiment *par excellence* of the imperiled heroine. She was no less this in one of Griffith's last Biograph films, *THE BATTLE AT ELDERBUSH GULCH* (Biograph, 1914), where she was menaced by attacking Indians; and she was similarly menaced in the final reels of *BIRTH OF A NATION*. She was also victimized in *WAY DOWN EAST* (United Artists, 1920), Griffith's greatest commercial success in the entire decade. Originally

screen rights for the 1897 stage play cost Griffith \$175,000 with another \$10,000 to Anthony Paul Kelly for a screenplay Griffith scarcely used. According to Robert M. Henderson in *D. W. GRIFFITH: HIS LIFE AND WORK* (1972), "Griffith's instinct told him that there was still a quality in this story that could reach the public. This time he was right. The public still responded to melodrama, particularly a familiar one."⁴ The film put forward Griffith's plea for monogamy in the name of Christ and for the sanctity of the Christian family, pitting the purity of feminine constancy against the selfishness of men. Lillian Gish played Anna Moore, a woman who was deceived into a mock marriage with a scoundrel played by Lowell Sherman. Much of the picture was shot on location, as part of Griffith's desire for total realism. Lillian Gish had to be repeatedly thawed out during her scenes on the ice floes on the frozen Connecticut River. In *ORPHANS OF THE STORM* (United Artists, 1922), which starred both Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Griffith tried his hand at a costume drama. It was not a financial success, but critically it was compared to the costume dramas Ernst Lubitsch was directing in Germany. There was, however, no comparison between Griffith's sentimentality regarding the role women ought to play in life and history alike, and the cynicism which Lubitsch's films had as an invariable part of the story line.

By the middle of the decade, Lubitsch's attitude, and not Griffith's, came to typify a great number of American films. An interesting contrast is provided by *DANCING MOTHERS* (Paramount, 1926) directed by Herbert Brenon. Alice Joyce, cast as Ethel Westcourt, discovers that her husband is being unfaithful to her and she also objects to her daughter, Kittens, played by Clara Bow, who is seeing too much of Jerry Naughton, played by Conway Tearle. Ethel goes to Naughton's apartment, but her intention is frustrated. She herself falls in love with Naughton. When Ethel's affair becomes known to her husband, he reverses his former attitude about loyalty to the family as old-fashioned and he begs her to give up Naughton and return to the nest. This Ethel refuses to do. Instead she books passage on a boat bound for Paris intent on establishing there a new life for herself. *DANCING MOTHERS* is something of an exception insofar as the conclusion is decidedly ambiguous. As David Robinson pointed out in *HOLLYWOOD IN THE TWENTIES*, it was actually "characteristic of Hollywood's double thinking as of the dilemma of the times that. . . . Jazz Age films almost invariably find the *dénouement* of their modern plot problems in the old morality. The Dancing Daughters and flappers and It Girls all end up married and adjusted to a respectable middle class future: the erring wives come back to patient husbands."⁵ *DANCING MOTHERS* did not end this way, but the ambiguity was such that Ethel's uncertain fate was intended to remove all sympathy concerning her unconventional choice.

More generally, the trend was to depict sin entertainingly and graphically while condemning it; and at this no one in the decade was perhaps more a master than Cecil B. deMille. One of his most memorable films from the period is *THE KING OF KINGS* (Producers Releasing Corp., 1927). "I knew," deMille wrote

in his AUTOBIOGRAPHY (1959), “that there would be in the audience religious people fearful of how a subject dear and sacred to them would be treated, and people who were skeptics and had come to scoff, and people who were cynics and had come to witness deMille’s disaster. I decided to jolt them all out of their preconceptions with an opening scene that none of them would be expecting: a lavish party in the luxurious home of a woman of Magdala, and that beautiful courtesan surrounded by the leering, sensual faces of her admirers who taunt her because one of their number, young Judas, has evidently found the company of some wandering carpenter more interesting than hers. When Mary Magdalene, goaded to jealous fury, calls for her chariot to take her to this Nazarene carpenter who has bewitched her favorite suitor, the people in the audience have forgotten their preconceptions: they want to see what happens when Mary, Judas, and the carpenter meet.”⁶

Although there continued to be occasional vamps, women in the majority of films in the 'Twenties were faithful, adoring, and self-sacrificing. The man might be seduced by the vamp, or just distracted by her, but the loyalty and devotion of a good woman was enough for love to overcome all difficulties by the fade. The situation was such that Marjorie Rosen could well ask in POPCORN VENUS (1974) why screen heroines coveted winning a man’s love above all else. “Why did they not value themselves? Their work? An independent future? Or dedication beyond that of their heart? Clearly films of the 'Twenties attempted to squash feminine self-determination whose seeds were rooted in the reality of events. It is interesting to speculate what the strength of the Women’s Movement would have been if it had been positively reaffirmed by intelligent female screen images during the formative and crucial 'Twenties.”⁷

It is no less curious to note the way in which Providence was used as *deus ex machina* in the boisterous, frolicking comedies of the era. For example, Frank Capra worked in his early days for the Mack Sennett studios and Sennett attributed the following gag to him. One of the Sennett comedy idiots is running away from a pursuing cop. He pauses long enough to beg for divine intervention. A moment later a piece of machinery falls from a passing airplane, knocking out the cop. “That,” the sub-title remarks, “is what I call service.” Some time later, when Harry Langdon left Sennett and began making his own feature films for First National, he took Capra with him. Capra worked on the screen story and, although uncredited, directed parts of TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP (First National, 1926). There is a scene in this film in which the town’s legion of the righteous is marching around a vaudeville saloon imitating Joshua outside Jericho. Langdon is inside the building, standing in for the Strong Man. He becomes entangled in his stage equipment which saves him as the building collapses all around him. This kind of gag is only a little removed from those comedies where a Sennett idiot would happen to be standing in a space directly in line with an open window or doorway when the whole side of a building would collapse. To escape what would seem certain disaster by such providen-

tial means could be relied upon to evoke instantaneous laughter from audiences.

Conversely, the silent cinema might flirt more seriously with the possibility of personal disaster. In *THE CROWD* (M-G-M, 1928) directed by King Vidor, there is an opening shot in which the camera tilts up a skyscraper, selects a single window, irises in on it, moving into a great office filled with clerks at their desks, selecting a single clerk, John, the protagonist of the story. Billy Wilder in *THE APARTMENT* (United Artists, 1960) used a variation of this establishing shot, as have others. It is then backtold how five years before John, a dreamer, met Mary, a working girl. They fell in love on the first date and were married. This brings us up to date. When John wins \$500 in a slogan contest, it seems at last that he will be able to distinguish himself from the faceless masses of which he is a part. However, he and Mary have had two children and, when the younger child dies, John becomes despondent. He quarrels with Mary, loses his job, tries door-to-door sales, and Mary's family persuades her to leave him. John, in his despair, is about to commit suicide when he is forestalled by consideration for his son. Mary returns to him and, by the end, because of his talent for creating slogans, John has become a successful advertising executive. When I saw this film, shown at a tribute for King Vidor by the U.C.L.A. Film Archives, Vidor himself was on hand to introduce the picture. He remarked that this was not the ending he had originally wanted for the film; that this ending had been forced on him by the front office. He had wanted it to conclude on a dark note. After the film was screened, a student in the audience asked Vidor if its tone in general—excluding the end—did not indicate his Marxist sympathies at the time he was making it. Vidor responded, somewhat bemused, that concern for the human condition does not *necessarily* mean that one is a Communist. In fact, cinematically, he had been far more influenced by the German cinema than by any social ideology.

The esteem accorded the German cinema by Americans was so evident that early in the decade Will Rogers in *THE ROPIN' FOOL* (Goldwyn, 1922) remarks on a title card: "If you think this picture's no good, I'll put on a beard and say it was made in Germany. Then you'll call it art." Ernst Lubitsch had been the first of the notable German directors to arrive in the United States and the female star of his first commercial success, *THE MARRIAGE CIRCLE* (Warner's, 1924), was Florence Vidor, at the time King Vidor's wife. Based on Lothar Goldschmidt's *NUR EIN TRAUM, LUSTSPIEL IN 3 AKTEN [ONLY A DREAM, A COMEDY IN 3 ACTS]* (1909), *THE MARRIAGE CIRCLE* is set in Vienna. Professor Stock, played by Adolphe Menjou, finds his chance to divorce his wife, Mizzi, played by Marie Prevost, when she begins a flirtation with Dr. Braun, played by Monte Blue. Braun is the husband of Mizzi's best friend, Charlotte, played by Florence Vidor, and Charlotte in turn becomes an object of affection for Dr. Mueller, played by Creighton Hale, Braun's business partner. This latter flirtation comes to nothing, nor does that between Mizzi and

Braun, leaving Mizzi and Mueller attracted to each other at the end. The plot, in terms of its resolution, does not run counter to the old morality; but in terms of the cynical view of marriage and the constant flirting throughout the body of the film, the resolution is thoroughly undermined without its seeming to be. In his way, Lubitsch was not so far removed from deMille's exploitation of certain situations albeit in both cases they were framed in what appeared to be an appeal to traditional values.

Emigrés from the German cinema would exert an even greater influence when they arrived truly *en masse* during the political turbulence of the next decade, but one of the most significant films of the 'Twenties which prepared the way for *film noir* was F. W. Murnau's first American film, *SUNRISE* (Fox, 1927), which contained, albeit somewhat stylized, many of the ingredients which had so distinguished his German films discussed in the last chapter. "In some ways," David Robinson said of it, "this American film was the apogee of the German Expressionist cinema. The designs of Rochus Gliese and the superb photography by Charles Rosher evoke an atmosphere no less distinct and haunting than Murnau's *NOSFERATU* had done. Even today . . . the mists on the dawn marshes, the reflecting pavements of the rain-drenched city, the lights of the fairground, the tram-ride from country into town (this extraordinary scene was entirely shot on built stages) are bewitching."⁸ *SUNRISE* was based on a novel by Hermann Sudermann, rather extensively modified for American taste by Carl Mayer who had collaborated with Murnau in Germany. Edgar G. Ulmer, himself later a director of *films noirs*, worked on the picture as an assistant art director. The story tells of how a young man, played by George O'Brien, is so completely seduced by a woman of the city, portrayed by Margaret Livingston, that he agrees to murder his wife and sell his farm so the two can live a life of pleasure in the city. Ultimately, the man cannot go through with it. After a trip together into the city, the man and his wife renew their vows in a church and love returns to them as they spend a delightful day in an amusement park. That night, on the way home, a storm comes upon them and the man believes his wife is drowned. Blaming the city vamp, he returns to the city and is about to strangle her when word comes that his wife is still alive. Reunited with her at her bedside, the lovers see the sun rise.

Murnau was a homosexual. Reportedly, it was while performing fellatio with his young, handsome male chauffeur while the latter was driving Murnau's high-powered car that the car went out of control and Murnau was killed. The story of the incident was so well known in Hollywood that only Greta Garbo had the social temerity to attend Murnau's funeral. I mention it because I believe this aspect of Murnau's personality sheds light on the extremely negative portrait of women which can be found in his films, and particularly in *SUNRISE*. Hatred for the vamp is the dominant emotion at the end, not joy at the prospect before the rejoined lovers.

The first time the word gangster was used in print in the United States was in the *COLUMBUS DISPATCH* of 10 April 1896. The first gangster film was

THE MUSKETEERS OF PIG ALLEY (Biograph, 1912) directed by D. W. Griffith, but, as Eugene Rosow stated in *BORN TO LOSE: THE GANGSTER FILM IN AMERICA* (1978), it was not until the release of Josef von Sternberg's *UNDERWORLD* (Paramount, 1927) that "the gangster genre began to move into the foreground."⁹ Kevin Brownlow went further in *THE PARADE'S GONE BY* (1968) when he called it "the film that began the gangster cycle, and it remains the masterpiece of the genre, containing all the elements which become clichés in later pictures. The characterizations are very rich; George Bancroft, the gangster, constantly roaring with laughter, is offset by his dignified and eloquent accomplice, Clive Brook, and the disturbingly attractive Evelyn Brent. In von Stroheim style, von Sternberg sketches the atmosphere with staccato titles: 'A great city in the dead of night. . . . streets lonely. . . . moon clouded. . . . buildings as empty as the cave dwellings of a forgotten age.' Fade in to a clock; the camera pulls back and tracks down a skyscraper to the street. Dissolve to the front entrance of a bank; there is a shattering explosion. Clive Brook, as Rolls-Royce, unshaven and down-at-the-heel, stands on the sidewalk as George Bancroft emerges from the bank. 'The great Bull Weed closes another bank account,' he says sardonically. Bancroft grins, grabs him, and they make their getaway as the cops race up, firing."¹⁰

Fred Kohler, Sr., was cast as Buck Mulligan who forces his attentions on Brent. Bancroft objects and kills Buck after a gangland ball. Bancroft is captured, tried, and sentenced to hang. In the meantime, Brook and Brent fall in love. Notwithstanding, Brook tries to spring Bancroft and fails. Bancroft becomes jealous of the lovers and manages his own jailbreak. Brook is killed in a pitched battle with the police. Realizing the sincerity of Brook's friendship and the purity of the love that had existed between him and Brent, Bancroft surrenders to the police with a clear conscience. *UNDERWORLD* proved so popular with the public that it was the first film that had to have midnight showings at the New York Palace Theatre to accommodate the crowds. Nor is this popularity incomprehensible.

In many ways, the gangster was an embodiment of the spirit of people in the United States in the 'Twenties. Gangsters broke laws and got what they wanted; and what they wanted was what many people wanted: wealth and notoriety. "There is a feeling of corruption, of everything being corrupt, and it is bringing itself into the trade unions," one president of the A.F. of L. complained to the Wickersham Congressional Committee. "They feel if a judge can be bought for liquor, he can be bought for anything else; if a police officer can be quieted by a little money for liquor, he can be quieted for something else."¹¹ It was not merely bootleggers who were corrupt. As the decade began and President Harding declared a "return to normalcy," what he had meant was a return to "business as usual." Harding made Harry Daugherty, a corporation lawyer from Columbus, Ohio, Attorney General. Together with some business associates, Daugherty set up two road houses in the nation's capitol, the "Little Green House" at 1625 K Street which was a center for illegal liquor, prostitution,

gambling, and the peddling of narcotics and the “House on H Street” where Harding could relax with his mistress, Nan Britton. Albert Bacon Fall, the former Senator from New Mexico, became a ’Twenties version of a “sagebrush rebel” and began secretly leasing oil reserves on Indian reservations and at naval installations after Harding appointed him Secretary of the Interior. He was subsequently indicted for taking a \$100,000 bribe from Harry Sinclair and Edward Doheny, oil company executives who expected to make \$100 million on the deal. Before even Harding was elected and Fall appointed, Sinclair had contributed \$260,000 to the Republican Party campaign fund as “earnest money.” The man who accepted this contribution, along with others of a similar ilk, was the Republican National Chairman, Will Hays, whom Harding appointed as Postmaster General. Later on in the decade, when there was a public outcry about the supposed immorality of motion pictures and concern voiced by independent producers on the monopolization of the film industry by the large film producing and releasing companies, Hays was made head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association to police the industry.

According to William E. Leuchtenburg in *THE PERILS OF PROSPERITY: 1914–1932* (1962), “all the Hays Office succeeded in doing in the 1920s was to add hypocrisy to sex by insisting on false moralizations and the ‘moral’ ending.” What this came to in a film such as *UNDERWORLD* was that Bancroft had to be apprehended at the end, Brook had to die, and Brent had to be left alone and unloved because she consorted with criminals. “The most striking feature of this corruption in government, the worst in at least half a century, was the public response to it,” Leuchtenburg added. “Instead of public indignation, there was a barrage of abuse at the men who brought the corruption to light.”¹²

This was true, certainly, in the urban areas—and the United States was an urban civilization—but not in the rural areas. Here there was a protest. These anti-urban elements had brought about Prohibition to begin with, and now they organized into the Fundamentalist Crusade to save America from moral decline or joined the Ku Klux Klan to keep America white, Protestant, and Anglo-Saxon. The Fundamentalist Crusade focused on motion pictures in particular as a continuing provocation to immoral license and demanded censorship boards to legislate the morals of the viewing public. To stem these protests, the film industry countered with the proposal that it would police itself, and, therefore, instigated the creation of the Hays Office to do the job. Hays as a conservative Republican proved politically attractive to the Fundamentalists.

Yet, it is dubious if any stronger measure would have stemmed the inevitable tide. “The mockery of ethics of the old ‘inner goodness’ of the film heroes and heroines was paralleled by the new regard for material things,” Lewis Jacobs wrote in *THE RISE OF THE AMERICAN FILM* (1939). “A burning ambition to be identified with the rich, a deep reverence for material goods, characterized American attitudes. Silk stockings, silk underwear, furs, automobiles, phonographs, elaborate furniture, servants, apartment houses, electrically equipped

kitchens, hotels, night clubs, country clubs, resorts, sports, colleges—these were paraded across the screen in exaggerated splendor.”¹³ Following in the tradition of *UNDERWORLD*, Howard Hughes, who in himself would become the embodiment of so many of the materialistic values of Americans, produced the first version of Bartlett Cormack’s 1928 stage play by the same title, *THE RACKET* (Paramount, 1928). Nick Scarsi is able to carry on his illegal bootlegging activities because a crooked politician needs the votes controlled by his gang. Louis Wolheim played Scarsi, Marie Prevost the gangland nightclub entertainer, and Thomas Meighan the honest cop who finally does in the bootleggers and the politician. One of the titles put the situation this way: “Government of the professionals—by the professionals—and for the professionals—shall not perish from this earth!” Lewis Milestone directed *THE RACKET* and the publicity emphasized how he had enlisted actual gangsters who were “on the lam” as character actors. There were those, of course, who objected to showing how gangsters traded votes for protection and contributed to campaign funds in exchange for immunity, how the police and Revenue agents could be bribed and how this was to be accepted as merely part of “business as usual.” “A film such as this,” commented the president of the P.T.A. of the Far Rockaway Public Schools to the New York censor board, “can only serve to create in the minds of our youth contempt for our courts and judicial officers and prosecutors and disgust for and disappointment in a government where crime and criminals can run rampant: in open defiance of law and order.”¹⁴ Bartlett Cormack summed it up otherwise, objecting to the cuts in the film. “I suppose,” he said, “the suggestion that the district attorney could be in league with an underworld baron too much for a politician to let the public see. Consider some of the titles cut, and then form your own opinion. For instance, there is the one where the district attorney tells Scarsi, ‘We can’t carry you and this election both’; or where the racketeer defies the district attorney: ‘Do you imagine I’d let any lousy politician who’d knock his own mother over the head for a vote tell me what to do?’ And the newspaper reporter’s explanation of why the district attorney’s assistant finally shot Scarsi when the latter threatened to spill the works: ‘So the government of the professionals by the professionals, and for the professionals shall not perish from this earth. . . .’ Can you think of any but political reasons for the cutting of such titles?”¹⁵

But all this was before the bubble burst, before the Crash and the Depression and the nagging realization that things were not necessarily going to get better and better just by wishing and willing them to be better. As the ’Thirties began, the movies entered a new era in more ways than one. The screen found sound and the film industry a new function. “No medium has contributed more greatly than the film to the maintenance of the national morale during a period featured by revolution, riot, and political turmoil in other countries,” Will Hays observed in his 1934 President’s Report to the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association. “It has been the mission of the screen, without ignoring the serious social problems of the day, to reflect aspiration, optimism, and kindly

humor in its entertainment.”¹⁶ Films have never so much reflected what audiences have felt as they have prescribed what those audiences ought to feel. Even when commercial films have sought to be realistic, that reality has always been stylized to be entertaining. In the darkest days of the Depression, American films neatly avoided the idea of despair, nor did they want to question fundamental American values. Newspapers featured optative pronouncements by bankers and business leaders on their front pages while unpleasant evidence concerning plant closures, layoffs, and shrinkage in production occupied middle and back pages, if they were mentioned at all. It is interesting to contrast how the Reagan administration during the severe recession of the early 1980s wanted to turn back the clock and complained that the press was not according them that optimistic service which it had formerly accorded the efforts of the Hoover administration. Yet, it remains a fact of American life that Americans want to believe that things will get better and keep getting better: the trick is to say it so that it will be believed. In the early 'Thirties, one of the ways to assure and reassure everyone—or so filmmakers felt—was to concentrate on the romantic tragedy of the gangster.

Ben Hecht, who wrote the screenplay for *UNDERWORLD* and, later, for *SCARFACE* (United Artists, 1932), reflected in his autobiography, *A CHILD OF THE CENTURY* (1954), how fellow screenwriter, Herman Mankiewicz, had explained the Hays Office code to him when he first arrived in Hollywood. While the hero had to remain pure, the villain was able to “have as much as he wants” as long as he is punished by the end. Hecht decided at once that “the thing to do was to skip the heroes and heroines to write a movie containing only villains and bawds. I would not have to tell any lies then.”¹⁷ I presume he really believed this was what he was doing. Critics and the public in general felt that the gangster films of the early 'Thirties represented a new realism in contrast to the films of previous decades; but it was at best realism in style, never in substance.

“The gangster,” Robert Warshow wrote in his essay, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero,” in *THE IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE* (1970), “is the man of the city, with the city’s language and knowledge, with its queer and dishonest skills and its terrible daring, carrying his life in his hands like a placard, like a club. . . . for the gangster there is only the city; he must inhabit it in order to personify it: not the real city, but that dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so much more important, which is the modern world.”¹⁸ At times Warshow almost seemed not to know that his “modern world” is itself but another romantic image, although he did conclude that “the gangster’s story. . . . is a romantic tragedy based on a hero whose defeat springs with almost mechanical inevitability from the outrageous presumption of his demands: the gangster is *bound* to go on until he is killed.”¹⁹

One of the difficulties I have always encountered in writing critically of the emotional and intellectual milieux of motion pictures is that critics, reviewers, and even readers to a large extent want to preserve somehow the romantic il-

lusions in films and tend to resent anyone questioning them, much less identifying them as illusions. Yet that is what they nearly always are, illusions, albeit at times illusions which may serve as dramatically appealing metaphors. "The images of the gangster using his car as a weapon," Eugene Rosow wrote in *BORN TO LOSE*, "of gangsters speeding through the streets as they blast away at enemies or the cops, or of a car screeching around a corner as a body is flung out are basic iconographic elements of the genre—reflections of the rapid and violently aggressive nature of American industrialization."²⁰ In *THE PENALTY* (Goldwyn, 1920), gangsters were identified as Reds. In the 1930s, gangsters were men whose ambition to achieve the American dream—wealth and fame—was so all-consuming that it became a caricature of that dream. The gangster's "attitude toward society is reflected in the environment he inhabits: he lives in a world of sirens and gunfire, of dark, menacing streets and threatening shadows," John Gabree wrote in *GANGSTERS: FROM LITTLE CAESAR TO THE GODFATHER* (1973). "His efforts to 'be somebody' are successful only at the expense of other people, and he spares no one to satisfy his drive to power. He is tough, cold-blooded, ruthless, brutal, often unbalanced, always as cunning as he is evil. But he has that other side. If he is the personification of much that is wrong with America, he is also an expression of American ideals. He achieves many of the goals—power, money, fame, status—that are held out by society as symbols of success. What is he if not the rugged individualist, the aggressive entrepreneur. He vanquishes his enemies, overcomes often incredible odds to come out on top. His energy, dedication, and ingenuity make us admire him, in some films even love him."²¹

It was Wheeler Oakman, cast as Hawk Miller in *LIGHTS OF NEW YORK* (Warner's, 1928), who first spoke the words on the screen which included "take him for a ride." From this point on almost, guns and cars became indelibly associated in the iconography of the movie gangster. Given such masculine imagery, it is curious to note the ways in which women were regarded in the three gangster pictures usually singled out in the period of the early 'Thirties: *LITTLE CAESAR* (Warner's, 1930) directed by Mervyn LeRoy, *THE PUBLIC ENEMY* (Warner's, 1931) directed by William Wellman, and *SCARFACE: THE SHAME OF A NATION* directed by Howard Hawks. John Gabree went so far as to suggest that "Little Caesar is probably a homosexual."²² Surely there are grounds for such a view. Rico, the Little Caesar character played by Edward G. Robinson, objects when his closest friend, Joe, played by Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., becomes a professional dancer. "Dancin' ain't my idea of a man's job," Rico says. "Joe, you're getting to be a sissy." However masculine this sounds, the fact is that Rico is trying to get Joe to give up women and come back to him. He even threatens to kill Joe if he does not give up dancing, but when it comes down to doing it he is unable to pull the trigger because he has gone soft. "This is what I get for liking a guy too much." Rico himself sedulously avoids any attachment to women.

If there is the hint of latent homosexuality in *LITTLE CAESAR*, there is

none in *THE PUBLIC ENEMY*; instead there is an hostility and aggressive dominance toward women so extreme as to seem no less aberrant. When Tom Powers, played by James Cagney, pushes the grapefruit into Mae Clarke's face, it is only the most overt expression of this attitude. It would also appear that Tom never consummates his relationship with the character played by Jean Harlow, Gwen Allen, but she is treated by him as if she were a whore and this would become more or less the attitude that screen gangsters have toward women with whom they have, or might have, a relationship: they are regarded as sluts.

In *SCARFACE*, Paul Muni as Tony Camonte is made so jealous by the least attention paid to his sister, Cesca, played by Ann Dvorak, that even she feels he is treating her as a lover would. When Tony discovers Cesca in the apartment of his closest friend, Rinaldo, played by George Raft, their past relationship counts as nothing and Tony kills him. Cesca plots to kill Tony in revenge; but, at the end, when he is fighting with the police for his life, she joins forces with Tony, in John Gabree's words, "substituting a communion of violence for the forbidden communion of sex."²³ This incestuous element in the plot was included at Howard Hawks' insistence. When Ben Hecht was beginning work on the screenplay, Hawks told him he wanted the Camonte family to be treated as if they were Borgias and to play up the incestuous and unnatural character of the inter-relationships. "We made the brother/sister relationship clearly incestuous," Hawks once told me in conversation. "But the censors misunderstood our intention and objected to it because they thought the relationship between them was too beautiful to be attributed to a gangster. We had a scene in which Muni told his sister that he loved her, and we couldn't play it in full light. We wound up playing it in silhouette against a curtain with the light coming from outside. It was a little bit too intimate to show faces—you wouldn't dare take a chance."²⁴

More than fifty gangster pictures were released in the year following *LITTLE CAESAR* and, as the genre continued to flourish, so it continued to reinforce various kinds of brutalities toward women. In *LADY KILLER* (Warner's, 1933), Cagney was back with Mae Clarke, this time dragging her around a room by her hair. In *SING AND LIKE IT* (RKO, 1934) Nat Pendleton gives his moll a black eye when he feels she is getting out of hand. "Most women in gangster films were objectified as sexual punching bags to be smacked with grapefruit, hands, or feet and dragged around by the hair," Eugene Rosow wrote and added, trying to explain this trend, "The Depression conditions put a tremendous strain on masculine identities rooted in men's roles as bread winners and the frustration bred an aggression that was expressed in this violent behavior toward women."²⁵ It is perhaps significant to note that among the objections raised by various groups with regard to gangster films the treatment of women was never among them.

As a general rule, the molls, or sluttish girlfriends, of gangsters were portrayed by slim, blonde, and sensual actresses. Sisters and supposedly respectable women tended to be brunettes. There was a third role for women: mothers

of gangsters. They were, almost invariably, dressed in simple peasant clothes, spoke in heavy foreign accents, and could usually be found in the kitchen engaged in domestic activities. Yet, one exception was *BLONDIE JOHNSON* (Warner's, 1933) which starred Joan Blondell.

It was an unusual film for the 'Thirties—only *MADAME RACKETEER* (Paramount, 1932) had anticipated it—although women gang leaders became common enough on the screen later. Blondell and her mother are tossed into the street when they cannot pay the rent. After her mother dies of pneumonia, Blondell seeks help from a lawyer and then a priest; they offer her nothing but platitudes. The film proceeds to tell how Blondie works her way up the gangland ladder, finally heading her own gang. She falls in love with her right-hand man, Curley, played by Chester Morris. By the end, the gang is rounded up but Blondie and Curley vow that after they get out of jail they will go straight. As characterized in the film, Blondie, while forced into crime by wretched social conditions, is loyal to the members of her gang and honest in her dealings with them.

There were a few gangster films—*SCARFACE* is perhaps a prime example—which adopted a Calvinistic attitude toward gangsters, attributing their wayward conduct to an innately evil character. The majority blamed economic and social factors and, therefore, constituted an indictment of American society. Once the Roosevelt administration had taken office, the emphasis was changed; instead of complaining about the failings of the old order, Americans were urged to contemplate a vision of a brighter future. The vocal protests about gangster films and their supposed effects on young viewers appear to have caused film producing companies to alter the perspective, just as small, but vocal, groups have always had a superficial, if sometimes also disastrous, impact on American popular politics from the Volstead Act to the Clean Air Act of the 1980s without changing anything fundamental. James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, and others, who had established their screen popularity playing gangsters, now switched sides and became characters with an underworld background, or a knowledge of the underworld, fighting on the side of law and order against racketeering and gangsters. Not only was corruption of all kinds to be defeated in films with a social theme, even the existence of the American class society was to be denied. "We would like to recommend, in passing, that you be less emphatic, throughout, in the photographing of this script, in showing the contrast between conditions of the poor in tenements and those of the rich in apartment houses," Joseph Breen of the Hays Office wrote in a letter to Samuel Goldwyn regarding the screenplay for *DEAD END* (United Artists, 1937). "Specifically, we recommend you do not show, at any time or at least that you do not emphasize, the presence of filth, or smelly garbage cans, or garbage floating in the river, into which the boys jump for a swim. This recommendation is made under the general heading of good and welfare because our reaction is that such scenes are likely to give offense."²⁶

There is a point I made in *BILLY THE KID: A BIO/BIBLIOGRAPHY* (1983)

and make at even greater length in *THE AMERICAN WEST IN FILM*, but which applies no less in this connection. In Eugene Rosow's words in *BORN TO LOSE*, it ought not be asserted "that those who make and distribute movies are not consciously catering to the audience's need for a mythic acknowledgment of an entrenched criminality. Rather, as Lévi-Straus suggests, myths signify the mind that produces them."²⁷ Of course, Rosow was addressing himself specifically to gangster genre movies, but the same principle applies to films in general: they do not so much reflect audience taste as *prescribe* what is and what is not proper, or morally acceptable, behavior in given circumstances. What films tell us, as students of film, is not what people were thinking in a certain era—i.e., when the film was made and released—but rather what they were being persuaded to think or to feel. All of which brings me back to an observation I made earlier in this chapter: American films between the wars, as films virtually at any time in their history, have generally attained only to realism in style, and never, for a number of reasons, have dared to attempt realism in substance.

What might well serve as an ideal illustration is *CITY STREETS* (Paramount, 1931) directed by Rouben Mamoulian. "For sheer technical competence in the film-making process," John Baxter wrote of him in *HOLLYWOOD IN THE THIRTIES* (1968), "Mamoulian can have few equals. His films abound in visual and aural tricks, exotic effects, juxtapositions of sound, image, and music that verge occasionally on the ridiculous but seldom slip over."²⁸ It is to Mamoulian that is owed what might be termed the "art" gangster film of the 'Thirties. It had originally been Paramount's intention to put Clara Bow in a vehicle that would counteract her sagging popularity at the box office, due certainly in part to her off-screen sexual escapades. One of her more successful silent films had been *LADIES OF THE MOB* (Paramount, 1928) directed by William Wellman. In this film, much as the Blondie character in *BLONDIE JOHNSON*, Bow found herself on the wrong side of the law and in love with a gangster, but she does everything she can to make her partner in crime, Red, played by Richard Arlen, go straight, including shooting him in the shoulder. Finally they agree to turn themselves in, to pay the penalty for their crimes so they can start life anew when they get out of prison. Mamoulian had only begun to work with Bow on her role for *CITY STREETS*, when she had a "nervous breakdown" and had to be replaced. Nancy Carroll turned down the role and eventually it was given to Sylvia Sidney, a relative newcomer.

Dashiell Hammett had written the original screen story and the thinking in Hollywood at that time was that Hammett was an expert on the underworld. The story tells of Nan whose stepfather works for a racketeer. She falls in love with "The Kid"—played by Gary Cooper—who works for a carnival and wants him to go into the rackets so they will have more money. The Kid initially rejects this idea, claiming that being a racketeer is as bad as being a cop! But after Nan is railroaded to serve a prison term, The Kid does join the rackets to get the money to spring her. When she is released, she decides The Kid should

quit the rackets, but by this time he has come to like the work. Not until Nan is taken for a ride by the gang does The Kid change his mind and rescue her, thus breaking with the mob.

Mamoulian did a lot of realistic location shooting, experimented with tracking shots and the use of low-key lighting which, henceforth, came to characterize how gangster films were lit; he even made an early use of overlapping dialogue in the scene where Nan is in jail and a jumble of previously heard conversations plays through her mind as well as anticipated later “new wave” techniques during a sequence such as that where Nan and The Kid walk along the beach. In *THE GREAT GANGSTER PICTURES* (1976) James Robert Parish and Michael R. Pitts concluded that because it is “typically rough and tough in the Hammett style” and “because of its own intrinsic entertainment value, *CITY STREETS* is a picture that will not be forgotten even by future generations.”²⁹ John Baxter was less enthusiastic, declaring “the overall effect of *CITY STREETS* is more confusing than impressive.”³⁰

But what is the sum total of all this technical artistry and “rough and tough” style? Nan is a victim of her upbringing. She comes to her senses when she finds true love and, in due course, so does her lover. The law is inept, but gangsters are no alternative. What seems different from traditional American melodrama are the tone and style, but all the essential ingredients are there, notwithstanding, albeit masquerading in disguise.

In the anti-gangster films toward the end of the decade, such as *BULLETS AND BALLOTS* (Warner's, 1936), *THE ROARING TWENTIES* (Warner's, 1939), and *BROTHER ORCHID* (Warner's, 1940), Humphrey Bogart, as in *DEAD END*, was cast as a reprobate gangster, while James Cagney's character in *THE ROARING TWENTIES* is shown sympathetically as a victim of social exigencies and Edward G. Robinson is a cop working undercover in *BULLETS AND BALLOTS* and winds up joining a monastic order in *BROTHER ORCHID* after finishing off Bogart who has taken over his old mob. In *KID GALAHAD* (Warner's, 1937)—in contrast to so many subsequent *films noirs* with a fight background—Edward G. Robinson was cast as a down-and-out fight promoter. When a hotel bellhop, played by Wayne Morris, knocks out the world champion boxer in a hotel scuffle, Robinson decides to train him for the ring, encouraged to do so by his mistress, Fluff, played by Bette Davis. The Kid, as he is called, has the makings of a true champ and, while he is on the rise, he falls in love with Robinson's sister, played by Jane Bryan. This is all right with Robinson, but it is not all right when he discovers that Davis, too, is attracted to the Kid. He arranges for him to have a match with the champ and fixes the fight with gangster Bogart for the Kid to take a fall. During the bout, both Bryan and Davis convince Robinson that he is wrong—the Kid is taking a terrible beating—and he begins to give him sound advice on how to win. The Kid is victorious. Traditional morality, however, is at work, so Robinson must lose his life in the gun battle which ensues between himself and Bogart who wants revenge.

“Film needed the stimulus of a disordered and slightly hysterical period to discover its true potential,” John Baxter observed in *HOLLYWOOD IN THE THIRTIES*, “as its first great advances had been made under the complex social pressures of Germany after the First World War.”³¹ Something of the malevolence of fate true of the German cinema could be found in *I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG* (Warner’s, 1932) directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Originally the film was intended as a gangster picture to cash in on Paul Muni’s popularity after his role in *SCARFACE*, but LeRoy shifted the emphasis to an attack on social injustice. Muni was cast as an innocent man who is accused of theft, indicted, jailed, and tortured and who, after his escape, is doomed to a sub-existence as a fugitive. The oppressive atmosphere of the film is achieved in part because of the low-key lighting which tends to stress the sordidness of the sets. The picture ends contra the general trend toward optimism. Muni breaks into the house of his former girlfriend, Glenda Farrell. “But how do you get along?” she asks him. “How do you live?” “I steal,” he hisses in response.

I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG was a thematic anticipation of *film noir*, showing a man taken from high to low, forced onto the rack by *rota Fortunae*. Another, more visual, anticipation was Karl Freund’s work as cameraman on *MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE* (Universal, 1932) directed by Robert Florey. In Germany, Freund had photographed F. W. Murnau’s *DER LETZTE MANN* [*THE LAST LAUGH*] (German, 1924), E. A. Dupont’s *VARIÉTÉ* [*VARIETY*] (1925), and Fritz Lang’s *METROPOLIS* (German, 1927), all of which were discussed in the previous chapter. Although he himself eventually became a director, his camerawork in this film remains notable, with its close-ups of the angry and frightened faces in crowd scenes, with its studies of the shadowed madness to be seen in the eyes and features of Doctor Mirakle played by Bela Lugosi. (The plot really has nothing to do with Edgar Allan Poe’s short story save its title and the presence of a gigantic ape.) It is via the startling images of the grotesque set that the nightmarish quality of what is going on is made palpable to the viewer.

Another Poe short story (with Poe’s middle name misspelled on the credits) was cited as the inspiration for *THE BLACK CAT* (Universal, 1934) directed by Edgar G. Ulmer, an immigrant from Austria who was mentioned in connection with Murnau’s *SUNRISE*. This film throughout maintains a dream-like quality. The characters are controlled by motives so complex and abstract as to seem incomprehensible, just as figures in a dream. After fifteen years as a prisoner of war, Bela Lugosi, cast as Dr. Vitos Verdigast, returns to Boris Karloff’s futuristic castle built on the ruins of a fort which Karloff had commanded during the war and which he had surrendered to the enemy. The images are reminiscent of German Expressionism. In the subterranean reaches of his castle, Karloff officiates at the rites of an antichristian sect. Karloff is obsessed by necrophilia and the finale shows Lugosi—whose daughter has become Karloff’s mistress and whose wife’s dead body has been preserved in one of the castle vaults—flaying Karloff alive. The script was written by Peter Ruric who con-

tributed stories to BLACK MASK under the pen name Paul Cain. Although, as John Baxter pointed out, in THE BLACK CAT “the ambience is far from Germanic, suggesting rather a dream-like state owing little to national characteristics,”³² it did establish what was to remain Ulmer’s fundamental perception in his most notable films. “Ulmer frequently builds his films around the entry of innocent, uncomprehending characters into a decadent or corrupt world that is moving slowly but inevitably toward its own destruction,” John Belton wrote in THE HOLLYWOOD PROFESSIONALS: VOLUME THREE (1974). “Finding themselves in this world, Ulmer’s innocents are unable to resist its evil, become entangled in the deadly web spun by its inhabitants, and almost share their fate.”³³ These elements are present, although somewhat in embryonic form, especially in the persons of Peter and Joan Allison, played by David Manners and Jacqueline Wells respectively, the innocent couple whom Lugosi involves in his plot for revenge and who become witnesses to the horrors perpetrated in Karloff’s castle.

The sets in THE BLACK CAT, as with virtually all of the Universal horror pictures of the 'Thirties, are made to resemble German Gothic, but are also rather cheap and insubstantial. To compensate for budgetary deficiencies, lighting is used to engender the atmosphere of mystery and dream, providing an unexpected visual sense of quality production. But then, too, I must remark in passing that what, in retrospect, makes the Universal horror films from the early 'Thirties particularly impressive is the *psychological* use of sets and lighting to create emotional affects. By the end of the decade this had changed in its way as much as had screen attitudes toward gangsters as rugged individualists. Henceforth American cinematic fantasy became hopelessly literal-minded and, instead of relying on style, relied on special effects to achieve the desired end. This was a great loss. Only in *film noir*, especially in the next decade and a half, would atmosphere remain the product of style.

It was noted above that American films, in terms of their relationship to what might be called “real” life, have been prescriptive, not descriptive. However, those who lived and worked in Hollywood in the 'Thirties seem also to have had the *idée fixe* that, if not even more real, movies were more important than life. John Russell Taylor observed in STRANGERS IN PARADISE: THE HOLLYWOOD EMIGRÉS, 1933–1950 (1983) that “the secret seems to have been that life was only some larger, more diffused, and probably less spectacular movie. Understand that, and everything else falls into place. In the 1960s people were to start complaining that elections, especially presidential elections, were fought more on the kind of figure the candidates cut as television personalities than on any even faintly reasoned assessments of the political programs they stood for (Kennedy is more attractive than Nixon, so Kennedy gets elected). But Hollywood already judged along these lines in the 1930s—everything depended on star quality.”³⁴

In a later chapter I will detail how many of the notable German directors, during their Hollywood years, influenced, if they did not actually create, the

tone of *film noir*, but before leaving entirely the period between the wars in American filmmaking it would be instructive to note how one German emigré director, Fritz Lang, managed to make the transition and how his first Hollywood films even anticipated his own considerable contributions to *film noir*. After the Nazis banned Lang's *DAS TESTAMENT DES DR. MABUSE*, Goebbels summoned Lang to his office in the Ministry of Propaganda and adopted toward him a rather conciliatory attitude. The essential objection the Party had to the film was that, instead of going mad, the professor who assumes Dr. Mabuse's identity should have been destroyed by the infuriated people. The *Führer* regarded himself a connoisseur of film art. As Alan Bullock noted in *HITLER: A STUDY IN TYRANNY* (1960), "at the height of the political struggle in 1932 he and Goebbels would slip into a picture-house to see *MÄDCHEN IN UNIFORM* [German, 1932], or Greta Garbo. When the Chancellery was rebuilt he had projectors and a screen installed on which he frequently watched films in the evening, including many of the foreign films he had forbidden in Germany."³⁵ Goebbels now confided to Lang that Hitler considerably admired *METROPOLIS*—perhaps because it showed laborers being led by an elite corps—and on this basis he was prepared to offer Lang management of the newly reorganized National German Film Industry. Lang agreed for the moment with all that Goebbels had to say, but that night departed for Paris, leaving behind his wife and long-time collaborator who was an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazi regime and who would later denounce him as a traitor.

Lang was put under personal contract and brought to the United States by David O. Selznick who was at that time working at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer: Irving Thalberg, who was studio boss Louis B. Mayer's right hand whereas Selznick was only Mayer's son-in-law, once screened *M* for a group of writers to take as a model. However, when Thalberg was asked, after the screening, how he would react if a writer were to bring him such a script, Thalberg replied that he would probably tell the writer to go to Hell. Thalberg had had more than one run-in with Erich von Stroheim when they were both working at Universal and perhaps Lang, when he arrived with his monocle and cold Prussian manner, aroused unpleasant memories.

For whatever reason, Lang remained under contract to M-G-M for a year and a half before he was able to direct his first film. During this time, he worked on a number of projects, perhaps the most interesting of which was an idea for a film titled *THE MAN BEHIND YOU* which was a study of schizophrenia. Lang was no doubt reminded of Peter Lorre's final speech in *M* when he describes the sound of footsteps behind him. Here was another screen story with the potential of revealing two personalities in the same psyche. In the meantime, Lang refused to speak German, saw a great many American films, read comic strips, even traveled to small towns where he would engage residents in conversation. Unlike the majority of German directors, including earlier emigrés, Lang's German films, whatever the attention to detail and atmosphere, had depended on an extremely strong narrative line and this was wholly consonant

with American filmmaking. By a fortunate confluence of factors, Norman Krasna came up with a story titled “Mob Rule” about small-town lynching that so excited Joseph L. Mankiewicz that he persuaded M-G-M to buy it and intended to make his *début* as a producer with it. The studio assigned Lang to direct it at Mankiewicz’ request. Mankiewicz also asked for, and got, relative new-comer Spencer Tracy to star in it.

It was Lang’s idea to have the central character in the story made a lawyer so he could explain the plot. Both Mankiewicz and Mankiewicz’ boss, Sam Katz, nixed this notion, insisting the protagonist must be an average person, to illustrate that what happened to him could indeed happen to anybody. Many years later, Lang quipped: “This was practically the only lesson I ever learned in America.”³⁶ In the finished film, Joe, played by Tracy, is in love with Sylvia Sidney, but they are too poor to marry and must even work in different towns. Sidney’s character was named Katherine. When Joe has saved enough money to afford marriage, he sets out in his car to meet Katherine. However, he is waylaid and accused of kidnapping a young girl. Circumstantial evidence—the insubstantial and insufficient nature of which Robert Siodmak had memorably dramatized in *VORUNTERSUCHUNG [BEFORE THE TRIAL]* (German, 1931) and which would long remain one of Lang’s cinematic preoccupations—is what seems to prove Joe’s guilt. The guilty man drove the same kind of car, was fond of salted peanuts, and had a dog with him: all of these things are true of Joe. In addition, Joe is found to have a five dollar bill from the ransom money. He is locked up. The local citizens proceed to work themselves up into a collective fit, mob together, and storm the jail. Katherine arrives at the scene just in time to see Joe’s face in a flaming window—the jail has been set on fire—and it is believed that Joe expired in the blaze. Notwithstanding, he manages to escape. He seeks out his brothers and persuades them to prosecute the mob for having caused his death. Katherine learns the truth and confronts Joe. She cannot love a man who would be so cruel. After spending a difficult night, Joe appears in court the next day—his innocence now is known, although not, of course, the fact that he is really alive—and he brings the trial to a close.

The film was titled *FURY* (M-G-M, 1936) upon release. Bartlett Cormack, who had written *THE RACKET*, was co-credited with Lang for the screenplay. “*FURY* is the story of a mob action,” Lang said at the time. “Lynching happened to be the result. People the world over respond in the same way. . . . They often start out in the best of spirits. Suddenly you realize that humor has given way to hate and violence. I attempted to picture that imperceptible line where the change comes.”³⁷ In the course of the film, one of the characters, a barber, comments: “People get funny impulses. If you resist ’em, you’re sane; if you don’t, you’re on the way to the nuthouse, or the pen.” The film proved a solid money-maker at the box office and Spencer Tracy was on his way to becoming a star. Critical comment, too, was for the most part favorable.

“*FURY* is divided into two sections,” according to Paul M. Jensen, “the

first dealing with the lynch mob and the other with Joe's subsequent revenge. These halves roughly correspond to those of *DIE NIEBELUNGEN*, with Siegfried (Joe Wilson) becoming his own vengeful Kriemhild."³⁸ John Russell Taylor saw even more in it. "There is. . . . virtuoso play with cross-cutting between related actions, to produce suspense or ironic contrast, and many moments when lighting and composition take us straight back to silent German cinema, or at least to *M* or *THE TESTAMENT OF DOCTOR MABUSE*. The final effect of the film is a fusion of these two elements—American narrative drive, European subtlety of suggestion—which makes it quite unlike anything else up to then in the American cinema and points clearly in a direction that many more were subsequently to follow; toward, especially, the *film noir* of the 1940s. . . ."³⁹ Above all, the film does seem to embody one of Lang's deepest convictions, however melodramatic the setting, to wit, that in the perpetual struggle between impulse and self-control one moment of weakness can successfully bring about the destruction of an individual. This became the predominant theme *par excellence* in his next Hollywood film, *YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE* (United Artists, 1937).

Lang was disgruntled by the cliché ending he had to use in *FURY*: Joe and Katherine embrace and kiss at the fade. "I had to, of course, I had to," he said shortly after its release. "I just hoped that maybe they, too, would see that it was wrong. But they didn't. They kept it. I never could understand how they would think two people could kiss in a courtroom after a scene like that. I could not understand, so I left."⁴⁰ Lang agreed to direct Walter Wanger's first production for United Artists release. Wanger had set himself up as an independent producer, contracted to bring in a number of feature films *per annum* financed as a package by United Artists. The association would prove propitious for both men and, later, Lang would join Wanger in forming Diana Productions.

Henry Fonda was cast as Eddie Taylor, a three-time loser, who, when he tries to dissociate himself from a gang, is framed by them for a robbery and murder. He is put on trial—again, the evidence is purely circumstantial—and he is convicted. He manages to escape from prison. In his desperation, he falls victim to a momentary *hamartía*; beside himself, he shoots a priest who has come to him with the news of his pardon. Now Eddie really is a murderer. Together with his wife, Jo, played by Sylvia Sydney, he attempts to flee to Canada. They are both mortally wounded breaking through a roadblock. Although they actually make it onto Canadian soil, it is too late; they die in each other's arms.

It is worth noting that, despite Lang's personal experience having been married to Thea von Harbou and rejected by her over the issue of National Socialism, Lang nonetheless provided his marked men—Joe Wilson in *FURY*, Eddie Taylor in *YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE*—with loyal women; especially in the latter, Jo is willing to go through everything with Eddie, even though it means giving birth to a child and abandoning it, running from the law, sharing his doom. However alone Eddie might be, surrounded by an hostile and menacing

world, he can count on his wife's devotion. An alternative ending was shot, showing the two lovers escaping to find a new life; but it was discarded. I would agree with Siegfried Kracauer that in using the ending Lang did he was adding that "touch of tragedy which many Germans consider an infallible sign of emotional depth,"⁴¹ to say nothing of the demands of the Hays Office: crime cannot be shown to pay. But also, right in the midst of the trend in American films to condemn morally criminal behavior of all kinds, Lang succeeded, again in Kracauer's words, in depicting a situation in which "the law triumphs and the lawless glitters,"⁴² as he had in *DAS TESTAMENT DES DR. MABUSE*. Indeed, I would go even a step beyond this and suggest that Lang was able to depict in this film the desperation of a man hunted by officialdom, the corrosive, collective experience of the emigré in Europe in the 'Thirties.

In this connection I recall the words from Thomas Mann's *DOKTOR FAUSTUS* (1947): "—and more: Germany herself, that unfortunate land, has become strange to me, wildly strange, even though, certain of her frightful end, I held myself back from her sins, sheltering myself in loneliness. Must I not ask myself, if I have done right? And again: have I really done it? I have clung unto death to one sorrowful, significant human being and have described his life that never ceased to fill me with a loving dread. Having made my compact with this faith, I fled in terror from my country's guilt."⁴³ This is how Thomas Mann sought to assimilate and explain his spiritual, no less than his physical, exile. Lang, in showing how poverty during the Depression could drive a man to a wanton criminal act, was able, at the same time as he revealed society's indifference to that man's fate, to generate sympathy for him.

"The bank robbery takes place depressingly in the rain," Paul M. Jensen wrote, "besides being well-constructed of shots taken from numerous angles; the death cell contains a bright light within it that casts stark shadows of the bars into the rest of the room; the prison break occurs in thick fog, that hides people and objects in the same way that the truth is unintentionally obscured. The love scene by a frog pond reflects the contrast between their feeling for each other, and the environment in which it is asked to survive; the muddy embankment where they meet their deaths creates a similar effect. All of these scenes are photographed with such mastery of dramatic lighting and composition that the film seems to take place in another world. As the net of uncontrollable circumstances gradually tightens around Eddie, we know that there is nothing we can do, and we can almost see the inevitability of it as the mist engulfs him."⁴⁴

There is no question that *YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE* gave rise to such later *films noirs* as *GUN CRAZY* (United Artists, 1949), but also *films gris* such as *BONNIE AND CLYDE* (Warner's, 1967) and *THE GETAWAY* (Cinerama, 1972), to say nothing of *A BOUT DE SOUFFLE* (French, 1945) and its American remake, *BREATHLESS* (Orion, 1983). Yet, what makes Lang's film so unique from all of these, and from gangster films of the early 'Thirties which similarly indicted society for criminal behavior, is that there is no sense of righ-

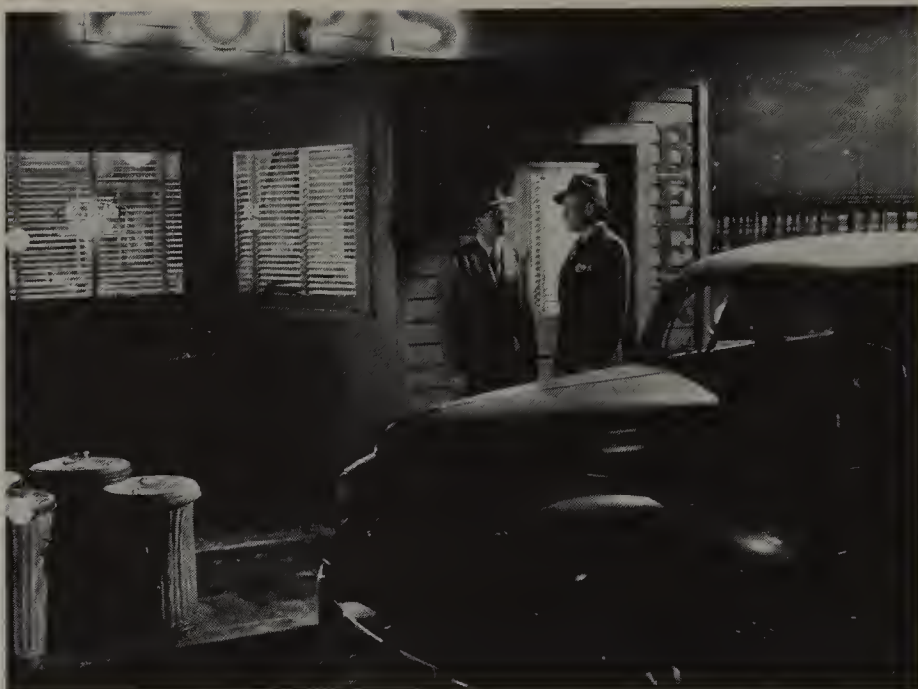
teousness, no feeling of justice having been done in the deaths of Eddie and Jo. There is instead the impression of “sorrowful, significant” human beings, in Thomas Mann’s words, to whom the viewer has clung to the death. The film remains, on the whole, a remarkable achievement, a blending of the “*Neue Sachlichkeit*” with American crime melodrama, of psychological subtlety with a propulsive story.



1. Ruth Warwick, Ray Collins, Dorothy Comingore, and Orson Welles (*left to right*) in the confrontation scene in *CITIZEN KANE* (RKO, 1941). The characters move in and out of shadows. Photo courtesy of RKO General.



2. Victor Mature is menaced by Laird Cregar as the corrupt cop, Cornell, in *I WAKE UP SCREAMING* (20th-Fox, 1941). Photo courtesy of Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation.



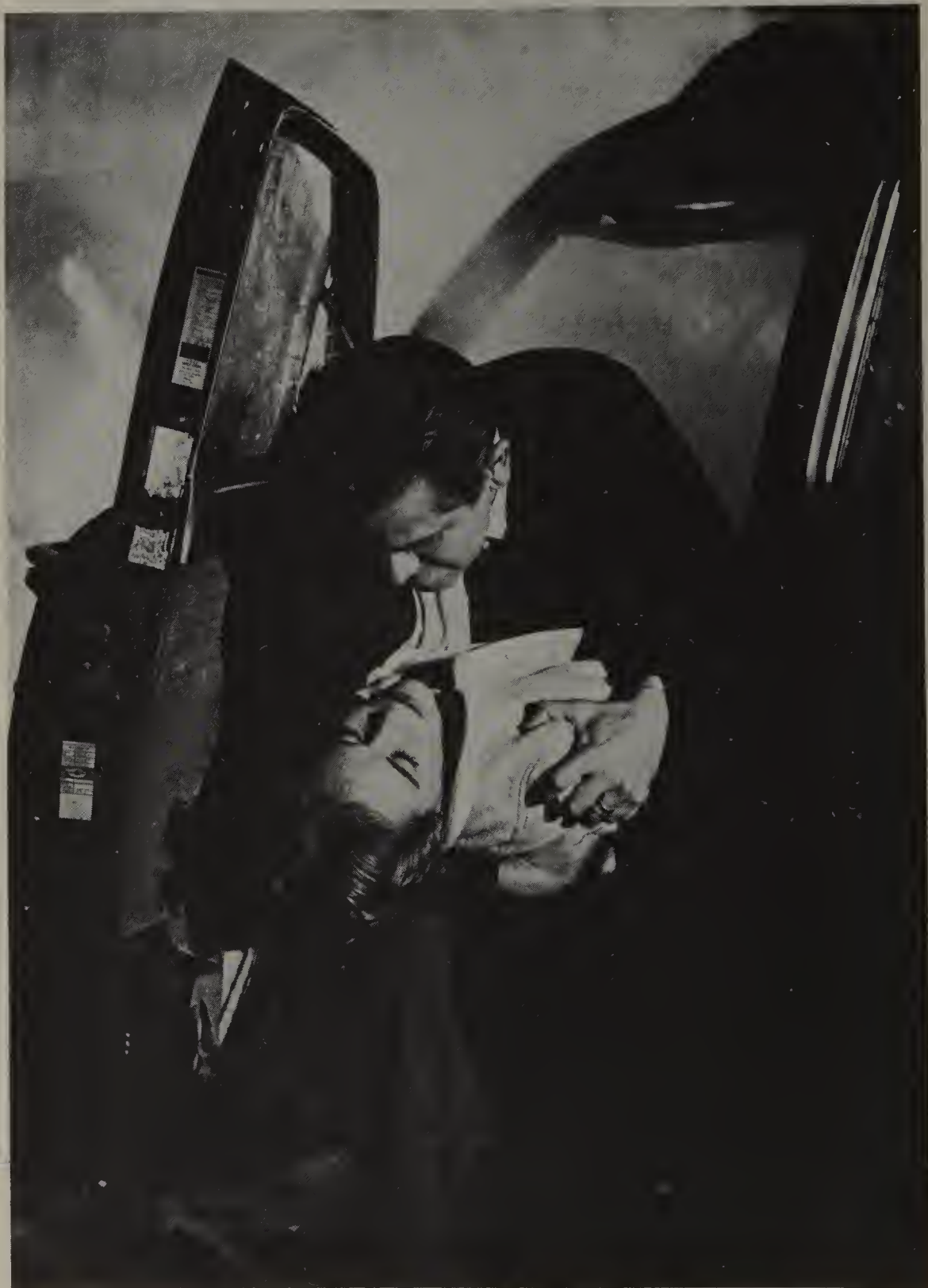
3. Overcast skies (even in the studio), indirect lighting and neon lights helped give a sinister cast to the *noir* visual style in this scene from *FALLEN ANGEL* (20th-Fox, 1945). Photo courtesy of Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation.



4. Films influenced by *film noir* frequently were set in the seedier parts of society, as is this scene from *RIDE THE PINK HORSE* (Universal, 1947) with Robert Montgomery, Wanda Hendrix, and Martin Garralaga (*left to right*). Photo courtesy of MCA-Universal.



5. Location shooting at night became commonplace in *films noirs* after the war, as in this scene from *THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS* (Republic, 1953). Photo courtesy of VIEWS & REVIEWS Magazine.



6. Glenn Ford's wife, played by Jocelyn Brando, is consumed in a fiery inferno in **THE BIG HEAT** (Columbia, 1953). Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures Industries.



7. *Noir* men were often victims of sardonic fate, as was the character played by Edmund O'Brien in *D.O.A.* (United Artists, 1949). Photo courtesy of Gold Key Entertainment.



8. Dixon Steele, played by Humphrey Bogart, possessed by irrational jealousy, choking Laurel, played by Gloria Grahame, in *IN A LONELY PLACE* (Columbia, 1950). Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures Industries.



9. Burt Lancaster got his start in films influenced by the *noir* style, such as *I WALK ALONE* (Paramount, 1947) from which this scene is taken, with Wendell Corey. Photo courtesy of MCA-Universal.



10. The *noir* woman frequently tried to break out of traditional roles, acting and dressing as a man, as did Joan Crawford in *MILDRED PIERCE* (Warner's, 1945). Photo courtesy of M-G-M/United Artists Entertainment.



11. Robert Montgomery as Philip Marlowe is battered and bruised in *LADY IN THE LAKE* (M-G-M, 1946), but by the end the case is solved and business executive Audrey Totter is ready for a traditional role. Photo courtesy of M-G-M/United Artists Entertainment.



12. Barbara Stanwyck set the style of the *femme fatale* in one of the most notable *films noirs* ever made, *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* (Paramount, 1944). (Left to right) Stanwyck, Tom Powers, and Fred MacMurray. Photo courtesy of MCA-Universal.



13. Ava Gardner played the *femme fatale* opposite Burt Lancaster in *THE KILLERS* (Universal, 1946). Photo courtesy of MCA-Universal.



14. Lizabeth Scott was the embodiment of greed, opposite Arthur Kennedy in **TOO LATE FOR TEARS** (United Artists, 1949). Photo courtesy of **VIEWS & REVIEWS Magazine**.



15. Gloria Grahame becomes violent herself in **THE BIG HEAT** (Columbia, 1953). Photo courtesy of **Columbia Pictures Industries**.



16. DEAD RECKONING (Columbia, 1946), Tableau #1: Lizabeth Scott is pushed into the shadows by protagonist Humphrey Bogart.



17. Tableau #2: Lizabeth Scott reveals herself to be a murderer as she shoots Bogart.



18. Tableau #3: Lizabeth Scott “reduced” at the end. Photos courtesy of Columbia Pictures Industries.



19. In another form of "reduction," Barbara Stanwyck is reduced from a *femme fatale* to a helpless victim in *SORRY, WRONG NUMBER* (Paramount, 1948). Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures.



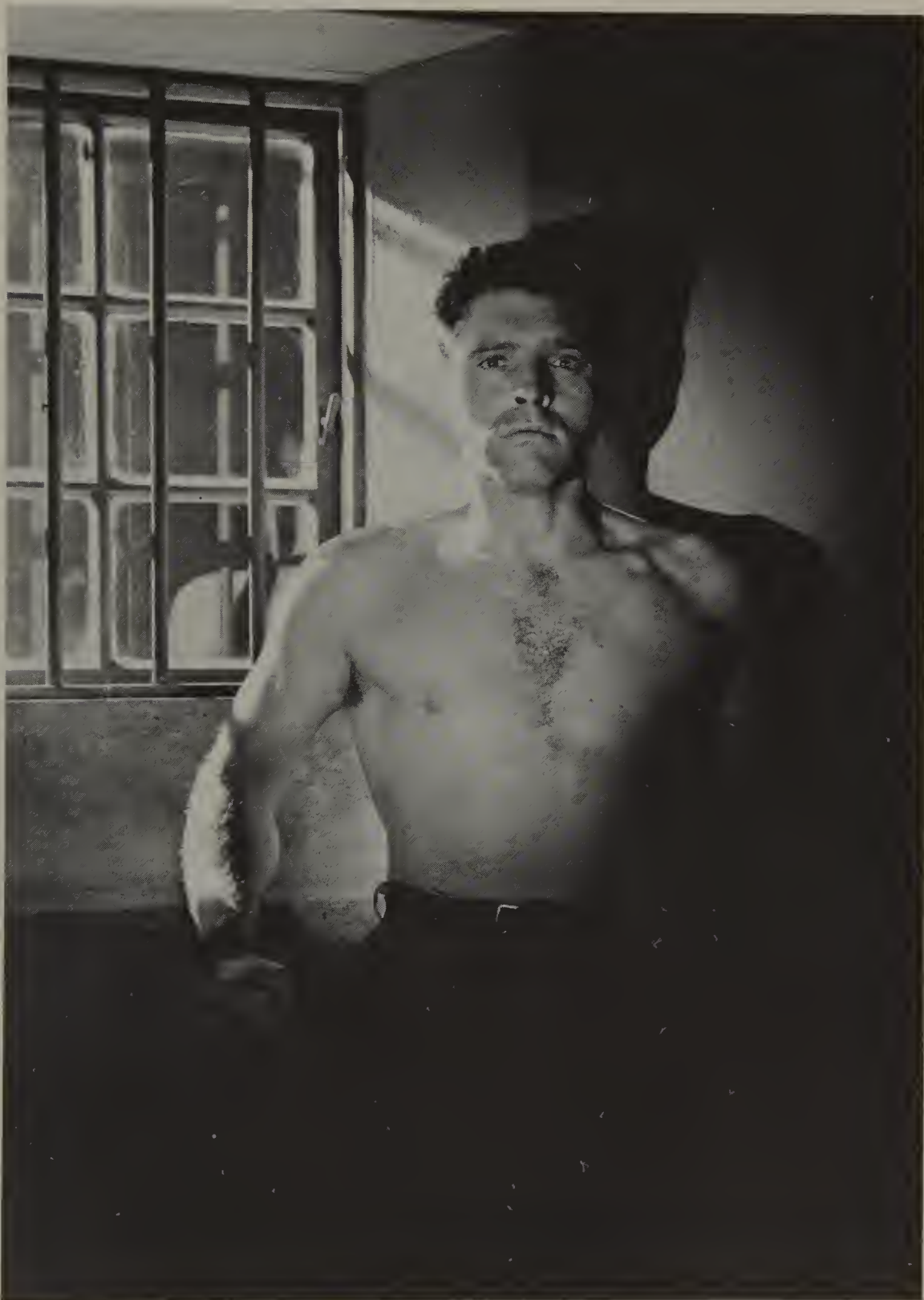
20. The “reduction” of the *femme fatale* in MURDER, MY SWEET (RKO, 1944), Claire Trevor reclining, Mike Mazurky above her. Photo courtesy of RKO General.



21. John Garfield and Lana Turner in the original screen version of THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (M-G-M, 1946). Photo courtesy of M-G-M/United Artists Entertainment.



22. Edmund O'Brien was another actor familiar to viewers because of his many *noir* roles. Photo courtesy of VIEWS & REVIEWS Magazine.



23. Burt Lancaster with his back literally against the wall in **BRUTE FORCE** (Universal, 1947). Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures Industries.



24. Nicholas Ray with Gloria Grahame, to whom he was married at the time, on the set of *IN A LONELY PLACE* (Columbia, 1950). Photo courtesy of Nicholas Ray.



25. John Cromwell directing Lizabeth Scott in *DEAD RECKONING* (Columbia, 1946). When I spoke with him years after the film was made he did not have as high an opinion of it as most critics have had. Photo courtesy of John Cromwell.



26. Dana Andrews, here in a scene with Anne Revere from *FALLEN ANGEL* (20th-Fox, 1945), was another male protagonist associated with *film noir* roles. Photo courtesy of Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation.



27. Edward Dmytryk directing Dick Powell on the RKO back lot in *CORNERED* (RKO, 1945). Photo courtesy of Edward Dmytryk.

PART III

AMERICAN *FILM NOIR*

Creon: This is im-pos-si-ble. I can't let that madman
leave scot-free with Antigone. I have my
duty . . .

Tiresias: Duty! It's no longer any of your business. It is
out of your hands.

Creon: And whose business is it?

Tiresias: The peoples', the poets', the pure of heart.

—Jean Cocteau, *THE INFERNAL MACHINE*

The *Film Noir* Canon

I

It was Paul Schrader who remarked that “almost every critic has his own definition of *film noir*, and a personal list of film titles and dates to back it up.”¹ Nino Frank first used the term in his article for L’ECRAN FRANCAIS [THE FRENCH SCREEN], “Un Nouveau Genre ‘Policier’: L’aventure Criminelle” [A New Kind of Detective Story: The Criminal Adventure]; but, as has already been noted, he cited Marcel Duhamel’s SÉRIE NOIRE as his inspiration for the term. Duhamel himself, in his Preface to PANORAMA DU FILM NOIR AMÉRICAIN (1941–1953) (1955), admitted the aptness of the attribution and added, somewhat facetiously, “lisez donc force romans noirs et voyez des films noirs en abondance. Tant que vous ne vous truciderez qu’en imagination, nous pourrons dormir tranquilles. C’est la grâce que je nous souhaite.”²

In their Introduction to the PANORAMA, the authors, Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, noted that it was first in the spring of 1946 that the Parisian screen began featuring American films “qui avaient en commun une atmosphère insolite et cruelle, teintée d’un érotisme assez particulier. . . .”³ Nino Frank had observed, ten years before them, that these *films noirs* “appartiennent à ce qu’on appelait jadis le genre policier, et que l’on ferait mieux de désigner désormais par le terme d’aventures criminelles, ou mieux encore, de psychologie criminelle.”⁴ Borde and Chaumeton accepted this distinction and, if anything, made it even more emphatic, concluding that “c’est la présence du crime qui donne au film noir sa marque la plus constante.”⁵ They perceived, correctly I believe, that whether “sordide ou insolite, la mort émerge toujours au terme d’un voyage sinueux. A tous les sens du mot, le film noir est un film de mort.”⁶ They also made a distinction between the police documentary and the true *film noir* which, I think, should be adopted. They recognized that “le

documentaire policier américain est en réalité un documentaire à la gloire de la police et rejoint dans le même sac des productions telles que, en France, IDENTITÉ JUDICAIRE [(French, 1950) directed by Hervé Bromberger], ou, en Angleterre, POLICE SANS ARMES [THE BLUE LAMP (British, 1950) directed by Basil Dearden]. Rien de tel dans la série noire. S'il y a des policiers, ils sont véreux—comme l'inspecteur de QUAND LA VILLE DORT [THE ASPHALT JUNGLE (M-G-M, 1950) directed by John Huston], ou cette belle tête de brute corrompue incarnée par Lloyd Nolan dans LA DAME DU LAC [THE LADY IN THE LAKE (M-G-M, 1946) directed by Robert Montgomery]—parfois même meurtriers (CRIME PASSIONNEL [FALLEN ANGEL (20th-Fox, 1946)] et MARK DIXON DÉTECTIVE [WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS (20th-Fox, 1950)] de Otto Preminger).’’⁷

PANORAMA remains a landmark study of *film noir* and I cannot but agree with Marcel Duhamel who praised its authors for “l’énorme travail de compilation et de décorticage accompli’’⁸; but, as Borde and Chaumeton themselves noted “d’ailleurs certains films noirs qui paraissent importants, n’ont pas été projetés en France . . . ,’’⁹ their work is somewhat limited in its usefulness as a resource, although this does not necessarily invalidate many of their conclusions.

It was not until the late 1960s that *film noir* began being discussed in English among film critics and historians, followed by a deluge of publications in the 'Seventies and 'Eighties, a substantial list of which can be found in the bibliography of this book. “The essential question,” Nino Frank wrote about *film noir* in an article in Georges Sadoul’s DICTIONNAIRE DES CINÉASTES [DICTIONARY OF FILM PROFESSIONALS] (1965), “is not to know who committed the crime, but what the protagonist does. What matters is the enigmatic psychological relationship between the detective and the criminal—at once enemy and friend.”¹⁰ A. M. Karimi seemed pretty much to accept this notion in his doctoral dissertation, later published as a book, TOWARD A DEFINITION OF THE AMERICAN FILM NOIR (1941–1949) (1976). Karimi also quoted Graham Greene with obvious approval: “In my books there are crimes, but not criminals.”¹¹

I disagree with both the French critics and with Karimi about the necessity of there being a crime in a *film noir*. There often is a crime, but there need not be one. Rather, what is far more important is that the narrative structure doubly determine the actions of the protagonist. As in Shakespeare’s MACBETH or Dostoyevsky’s CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, such human actions appear to be both fated *and* consciously willed. In the paradigms of *film noir*, which are discussed later on in this chapter, this is invariably the case, along with what might be called the CITIZEN KANE technique: the narrative need to account for a particular life.

For me, there is a difference between a *film noir*—a truly *black* film—and both *film gris* and melodrama, these being *noir* only at times but never in their resolution. In the melodrama, THE DARK CORNER (20th-Fox, 1946), di-

rected by Henry Hathaway, the protagonist, a private detective played by Mark Stevens, finds himself embroiled in a net of seemingly meaningless but fated circumstances. “I feel all dead inside,” he says at one point. “I’m backed up in a dark corner, and I don’t know who’s hitting me.” Yet, by the end, all the circumstances make sense; they come together, revealing a pattern which permits the protagonist to triumph over them. The resolution in a true *film noir*, such as *DETOUR* (PRC, 1946) directed by Edgar G. Ulmer, is much different, far more ambiguous and threatening, leaving a sense of continuing, persisting *malaise* in its wake. “Someday fate or some mysterious force can put the finger on you or me for no reason at all,” the protagonist observes; at no point does he have control over his individual fate, although much of the time, while he is living through it, he believes that he does. I am reminded of the superscription Ludwig van Beethoven wrote over the final movement of his last string quartet: “Der schwer gefasste Entschluss” [the difficult to grasp resolution]. In a subscript beneath an opening trio figure in that movement, E, C, and F-flat, he wrote these words: “Muss es sein?” [Must it be?] and for the following two trio figures, a quarter note followed by two half notes, A,C,G and G,B-flat,F, he wrote this subscript: “Es muss sein! Es muss sein!” [It must be! It must be!]. The protagonist in *DETOUR* has come to just such an unshakeable and inevitable conclusion. “That’s life!” he says, as he begins to narrate what has happened to him. “Whichever way you turn, Fate sticks out its foot to trip you.” I disagree, therefore, with Myron Meisel’s conclusion in his essay on Ulmer in *KINGS OF THE Bs* (1975) that “*DETOUR* is an exercise in sustained perversity, a consistent demonstration of the absence of free will.”¹² In the same collection of essays and interviews, there is an interview with Edgar G. Ulmer in which he spoke about *DETOUR*. “I was always in love with the idea and with the main character,” Ulmer said, “a boy who plays piano in Greenwich Village and really wants to be a decent pianist. He’s so down on his luck that the girl who goes to the Coast is the only person he can exist with sex-wise—the *BLUE ANGEL* thing. And then the idea to get involved on that long road into Fate, where he’s an absolute loser, fascinated me. The same thing, of course, with the boy who played the leading character, Tom Neal. He wound up in jail after he killed his own wife. He did practically the same thing he did in the picture.”¹³

One of the sources of confusion in much that has been written about *film noir* derives from the fact that it is both a style and a kind of narrative structure. Because it is a style, it can cut across generic lines and be found in a gangster film such as *WHITE HEAT* (Warner’s, 1949), or a Western such as *PURSUED* (Warner’s, 1947), or a comedy such as *UNFAITHFULLY YOURS* (20th-Fox, 1948); but what ultimately determines such films as examples of *film noir*, or not, is the presence of the *film noir* narrative structure. “What keeps the *film noir* alive for us today is something more than a spurious nostalgia,” Robert G. Porfirio wrote in “No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the *Film Noir*.” “It is the underlying mood of pessimism which undercuts any attempted happy

endings and prevents the films from being the typical Hollywood escapist fare many were originally intended to be. More than lighting or photography, it is this sensibility which makes the black film black for us.”¹⁴ Critics used to speak of the loss of innocence in connection with American literature, and then American film, as if they were saying something meaningful, as if there ever had been any innocence to lose. There was not. What *film noir* was, what was so revolutionary about it, was its inherent reaction to decades of forced optimism. In the chapter on American films between the wars, it was seen how the motion picture industry was charged with keeping the hopes of Americans alive during the Depression. *Film noir* divorced itself from this ideological obligation with a vengeance. For this reason I tend to agree with Janey Place, in her article in *WOMEN IN FILM NOIR* (1978), that *film noir* is not a genre of film, such as those to which Hollywood filmmakers had become accustomed over the years, but instead a *movement* among individual filmmakers which evoked similar techniques to make anti-generic statements.

As Christine Gledhill pointed out in the first part of her essay on *KLUTE* (Warner's, 1971) in *WOMEN IN FILM NOIR*, “the formulaic plots, stereotypes, and stylistic conventions of the different genres were developed in response to the needs of a mass industry to predict market demand in order to standardize and so stabilize production. A contradictory demand of the market, however, is for novelty, innovation. So unlike the concern with artistic exploration of the human condition which became the concern of the European art cinema, Hollywood genre production tended both to foreground convention and stereotypicality in order to gain instant audience recognition of its type—this is a Western, a Gangster, a Woman's Picture, etc.—and to institute a type of aesthetic play among the conventions in order to pose the audience with a question that would keep them coming back—not ‘what is going to happen next?’ to which they would already have the answer, but ‘how?’ ”¹⁵

In the chapter on theatrical tragedy, it was noted, with regard to the Greeks, that quite a similar process was at work. Audiences knew, before a play would begin, how it had to come out; the challenge was in *how* the playwright would bring about that conclusion and what meaning he would provide it. Such interpretations of mythic events, however, were never permitted to venture outside the conventions of what comprised the *participation mystique* of ancient Greek culture. Film genres differ slightly insofar as they constitute artificial and commercial fabrications created by an essentially narcissistic industry, but the final result is the same. In the gangster film, crime could not be shown to pay; in the romance and the Western, the ending was usually a happy one, not because of any special quality in the events or the characters, but because of the narrative conventions of the genre. *Film noir*, as a cinematic movement within the Hollywood system, sought to repudiate these conventions and, to a surprising extent, it succeeded. It is on the basis of this distinction that I hold that a *film noir* cannot have a conventional happy ending and still be considered a *film noir*.

In a rather curious and improbable book, NABOKOV'S DARK CINEMA (1974), Alfred Appel, Jr., nonetheless had some cogent observations to make about *film noir* in and for itself, and not in its relationship to Nabokov's fiction. "Because the *film noir* is not a genre," he wrote, "its properties cannot be defined as readily or exactly as those of, say, the Western. . . . What unites the seemingly disparate kinds of *films noirs*. . . . is their dark visual style and their black vision of despair, loneliness, and dread—a vision that touches an audience most intimately because it assures them that their suppressed impulses and fears are shared human responses."¹⁶ In the best *films noirs*, the visual style and the narrative structure work hand-in-hand and constitute a consistent, unified ensemble. "In fact, the most familiar or evocative images of the *noir* universe, from a general motif of street lights flashing off those damp, urban landscapes to a particular broken sign flashing its remaining neon letters—'kill . . . kill . . . kill . . . ' outside a murderer's window in THE UNSUSPECTED [Warner's, 1947], are arguably also the most naturalistic," Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward wrote in the Introduction to FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN STYLE. "A high angle long shot, cluttered with foreground masses and twisted shadows, entangles the private detective in a deterministic web in KISS ME DEADLY [United Artists, 1955]; a traveling camera traces a long, slow arc around an oversized mechanism to reveal a figure concealed behind its threatening bulk in THE BIG CLOCK [Paramount, 1948]; a succession of low, wide angle cuts awkwardly frames a fleeing man as he moves around corners and down steps against an unending array of backstreets and narrow alleys in NIGHT AND THE CITY [20th-Fox, 1950]—the key elements of each sequence differ radically, from static shot to moving one to montage, from high angle to low; but the result is the same. The viewer understands from convention that the characters are threatened, alienated, hemmed in. It is through this sort of direct, nonverbal association that *film noir*'s visual substance is created, that relationships or situations established through narrative and characterization are refined or reassessed."¹⁷

Paul Schrader in his "Notes on *Film Noir*" further defined the characteristics of the movement. He felt the narrative structure and its visual component in *films noirs* combine to give an unprecedented, harsh, and uncomplimentary view of American society; that *films noirs*, as German Expressionism and French New Wave, belong to a specific historical period, namely the 'Forties and early 'Fifties; that visually *films noirs* combined the techniques of German Expressionist cinema with cinematic realism; that, just as German Expressionism influenced the visual style of *films noirs*, the hard-boiled writing, especially of the BLACK MASK school, influenced screenwriting and, above all, dialogue. I would agree with him on every one of these points; I would disagree only when he asserted that "*film noir* is more interested in style than theme. . . ."¹⁸ I regard them as inextricable components, one to the other, so that *noir* visual style without *noir* narrative structure yields not *film noir*, but *film gris* or melodrama; although a *noir* narrative structure without a *noir* visual style may, notwithstand-

ing, yield a *film noir*, e.g., *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE* (M-G-M, 1946). An instance of a *film gris* would be *THE BIG SLEEP* (Warner's, 1946), of melodrama, *I WAKE UP SCREAMING* (20th-Fox, 1941).

The principal visual techniques of *films noirs* were noted by Jane Place and L. S. Peterson in their article, "Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*." Foremost among these, of course, is lighting. "The dominant lighting technique which had evolved by the early 'Forties is 'high-key lighting,' " they wrote, "in which the ratio of key light to fill light is small. Thus the intensity of the fill is great enough to soften the harsh shadows created by the key. This gives what was considered to be an impression of reality, in which the character's face is attractively modeled, but without exaggerated or unnatural areas of darkness. *Noir* lighting is 'low-key.' The ratio of key to fill light is great, creating areas of high contrast and rich, black shadows. Unlike the even illumination of high-key lighting which seeks to display attractively all areas of the frame, the low-key *noir* style opposes light and dark, hiding faces, rooms, urban landscapes—and, by extension, motivations and true character—in shadow and darkness which carry connotations of the mysterious and the unknown."¹⁹ Added to this was the trend toward night-for-night shooting, as opposed to earlier decades when night scenes were filmed during the day using powerful filters over the camera lens to give the illusion of night. Finally, the use of the wide-angle lens became commonplace, shrinking rooms, producing a claustrophobic effect. In visual terms, *film noir* as cinematic art represents the apogee of the black and white film.

Robert G. Porfirio, in the article to which I have already referred, limited the period of *film noir*, rightly I believe, to "no longer than twenty years: from 1940 (*STRANGER ON THE THIRD FLOOR*) roughly to 1960 (*ODDS AGAINST TOMORROW*)."²⁰ However, he added, "to place these films within a specific time period is not enough. . . . Their so-called 'Expressionistic' style was quite literally a combination of impressionistic (i.e., technical effects) and expressionistic (i.e., *mise-en-scène*) techniques, which can be traced back to the period of German Expressionism. The infusion of this style into Hollywood filmmaking was due partly to the talents of the European emigrés and partly to the growth of the classic gangster and horror genres of the 1930s which called for such a style. But the unique development of this style in the *film noir* was most immediately due to *CITIZEN KANE*. Welles' film not only invigorated a baroque visual style which was later to characterize the period, but also provided a new psychological dimension, a morally ambiguous hero, a convoluted time structure, and the use of flashback and first person narration—all of which became *film noir* conventions. It is no surprise that Welles later made some classic *films noirs* (*THE STRANGER*, *LADY FROM SHANGHAI*, *TOUCH OF EVIL*) and some near misses (*JOURNEY INTO FEAR*, *MR. ARKADIN*) and provided a permanent blueprint for what might now be termed *RKO noir*."²⁰ Porfirio also noted that Welles, as well as Edward Dmytryk who was an *RKO*

contract director during this period, both acknowledged a tremendous debt to F. W. Murnau.

Most of these same influences on the development of *film noir* were repeated by Robert Ottoson in his *A REFERENCE GUIDE TO THE AMERICAN FILM NOIR: 1940–1958* (1981), but he added to them pre-war influences such as the “poetic realism” in Marcel Carné’s *QUAI DES BRUMES* [QUAY IN THE FOG] (French, 1939) and *LE JOUR SE LÈVE* [DAYBREAK] (French, 1942), the advent of another movement in world cinema: Italian Neo-Realism, the post-war interest in Freudian psychology, and “general post-war despair: the plight of the returning veteran, and his readjustment to a changing society, used in a number of *films noirs*; the new assertiveness of women in the job market, which caused an uneasiness among men, thereby influencing the misogyny that is so often found in the *film noir*; and the general sense of dread, or fear of a nuclear holocaust.”²¹ What Ottoson did not mention, but what he well might have, is the fact that the war created in Americans, or at least stimulated, a curiosity about violence, even an appetite for it. Quite frankly, violence to equal that which was shown in newsreels during World War II had *never* been filmed before. Moviegoers, whether they were civilians or in the Armed Services, were exposed to films of Japanese soldiers executing Chinese civilians, including women and children, and dumping the bodies in mass graves; the firepower of the Blitzkrieg during the Russian invasion, the firebombing of London, European cities reduced to rubble, and, following the invasion of Germany, scenes from the death camps and the living cadavers discovered, barely alive, by the Allies were images that could and did haunt the minds of Americans, the whole montage of war which reverberated in Winston Churchill’s words when he spoke of “a new Dark Age, made more sinister and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science.”²² This was the cauldron, as these were the influences, which congealed and stole forward in the darkened streets of America’s dark cinema.

II

In Euripides’ conflict with Socrates, and after him with Plato and Aristotle, modern psychology in this century has come down on the side of Euripides. “Anybody possessing analytical knowledge,” Theodor Reik wrote in *THE COMPULSION TO CONFESS*, “recognizes the fact that the world is full of actions performed by people exclusively to their detriment and without perceptible advantage, although their eyes were open.”²³ This perspective on human nature is evident at once in all three of the seminal films which established the *film noir* style: in order of release *STRANGER ON THE THIRD FLOOR* (RKO, 1940), *CITIZEN KANE* (RKO, 1941), and *I WAKE UP SCREAMING* (20th-Fox, 1941). Moreover, Euripides’ conviction that the universe might be *au fond* irrational is also oppressively apparent; nor is it relieved by the comfort of an inclusive and binding moral order.

H. F. Rey in an article in the 29 June 1948 issue of *L'ECRAN FRANCAIS*, titled "Hollywood fabrique des myths comme Ford des voitures" [Hollywood manufactures myths the way Ford does automobiles], commented that the view of morality in *films noirs* cannot be regarded as "immoral" in Nietzsche's sense, as being revolutionary or calling for a revaluation of values. Borde and Chaumeton accepted this basic position, while making an exception, namely the film *GUN CRAZY* (United Artists, 1949) which is titled in French somewhat more graphically as *LE DEMON DES ARMES* and which might best be rendered—as we have defined the word—*THE DAIMON IN THE GUNS*. What they did conclude is that "it is one of the traits of [*film noir*] to be neither moral nor immoral, *but ambivalent with regard to morality* (the ambivalence being more or less according to the circumstances of the case). Its social universe is a world where morality is in decay: it preserves it to confound the sensibility and to pervert the appearance of reality, but it has nothing about it of inhibition or conviction; and, in this twilight, no dawn of new morality is really visible. Vice has seduced it; vice is no longer even felt to be 'vicious'; and the delinquent appears to be tormented by anguish and the sensation of culpability."²⁴

STRANGER ON THE THIRD FLOOR is melodrama while its visual style is clearly *noir*. In it, Peter Lorre was cast as a psychopathic murderer in the prototypical role first assigned to him by Fritz Lang. John McGuire was cast as Michael Ward, an aspiring but impecunious young journalist. He discovers a murder at an all-night beanery. The event brings him a newspaper exclusive, a raise, enough money to marry his girlfriend, played by Margaret Tallichet, while his testimony completes the final link in the circumstantial evidence implicating a young ex-con played by Elisha Cook, Jr. The ex-con's trial is dramatized with such a bitter, cynical edge concerning the American judicial system that it would not be duplicated in *film noir* until Orson Welles' *THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI* (Columbia, 1948). The judge is thoroughly bored. One juror is snoring while Cook is on the witness stand. "All they want," Margaret Tallichet remarks to Cliff Clark, "is to get it over with and go home." "What difference does it make?" Clark responds. "There are too many people in the world anyway." Once the guilty verdict is brought in, the film becomes filled with shadows.

Ward's thinking to himself is used as narration. He begins to have second thoughts about how accurate was his testimony. While musing in his room, Ward notices that his next-door neighbor is not snoring. He recalls all the run-ins he has had with him. When he tries banging on the neighbor's door to arouse him, there is no answer. Ward's paranoia now intensifies. What if the man is dead, murdered as was the man Cook was convicted for having killed? Might he not be blamed? Might not just as strong a case be made out against him? A dream sequence follows, completely expressionistic in style, as Tom Flinn noted in his essay, "Three Faces of *Film Noir*," "with strong contrasts in lighting, angular shadow patterns, and distorted, emblematic architecture. . . . The use of a tilted camera destroys the normal play of horizontals and verticals, creating a

forest of oblique angles that recalls the unsettling effects of expressionist painting and cinema. The tilted camera was a favorite device of horror director James Whale [THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (Universal, 1935)], and it later enjoyed a great vogue around 1950 [THE THIRD MAN (Selznick, 1950); STRANGERS ON A TRAIN (Warner's, 1951)]. In STRANGER ON THE THIRD FLOOR the Germanic influence, so important in the creation of the *film noir* style, is quite obvious, and not confined to the dream sequence. Throughout the film the lighting by Nick Musuraca is very much in the baroque 1940s manner, with numerous shadow patterns on the walls. Peter Lorre, who appears only briefly in Ward's dream, brings a full expressionistic approach to his brief role as an escaped lunatic, slithering through a door in a manner distinctly reminiscent of Conrad Veidt in THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI [German, 1920]. In 1940 Lorre was quite thin and much more graceful than he had been in his debut as the pudgy child murderer in M, made nine years earlier. Actually, his role, although even briefer than in M, is quite similar, and in both films he manages to obtain the audience's sympathy in the final moments with just a few lines of dialogue."²⁵

Ward's dream is something of a premonition since his neighbor is found murdered and he is accused and arrested. Margaret Tallichet then takes it upon herself to find the murderer, thus turning the final part of the film into a female detective yarn. I have no doubt that this film influenced Robert Siodmak when he came to direct PHANTOM LADY (Universal, 1944), if it did not influence Cornell Woolrich in writing the novel itself. A mailman tells her cynically: "People are just names to me. Sometimes I try to think of what they look like, but I never thought of anyone who looked like that." Tallichet is at last successful.

It is the conventional "happy ending" which makes this film a melodrama. Lorre is run over by a truck, but he manages nonetheless to confess. This frees Ward and the ex-con and it is the ex-con who drives the reunited couple to city hall for their marriage license!

I do not wish to engage in the debate as to who contributed more to the screenplay of CITIZEN KANE, Herman J. Mankiewicz or Orson Welles, primarily because my concern is with the contributions of this film to the *film noir* style and these have largely, if not exclusively, to do with Welles' direction. Although Welles' THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI will be discussed later on in this chapter and his contributions to *film noir* in general in a later chapter, we would nonetheless do well to keep in mind from the beginning Welles' tremendous debt as a filmmaker to the techniques of German Expressionist cinema. "The geometric groupings in MACBETH [Republic, 1948] recall Fritz Lang's SIEGFRIED [i.e., SIEGFRIEDS TOD (German, 1924)]," Peter Cowie wrote in THE CINEMA OF ORSON WELLES (1973), "the psychological force of staircases in THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS [RKO, 1942] recall such German classics as ASPHALT [German, 1929], HINTERTREPPE [German, 1921], and PANDORA'S BOX [German, 1929]. Welles' recurrent use of mir-

rors brings to mind *THE LAST LAUGH* [German, 1924] or *BERLIN, RHYTHM OF A CITY* [German, 1927]. His rendering of what the Germans call *Stimmung* (mood) is controlled by means of light and mist, as in *DER MÜDE TOD* [German, 1921], as well as through superimpositions (several images from *AMBERSONS* and *THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI* have their counterparts in *SECRETS OF A SOUL* [German, 1926]). The vast gatherings of people in *THE TRIAL* [French, 1962], in and outside the court, or at K's office, remind one of *METROPOLIS* with its cowed workers, blindly subservient to an almost abstract power. And the central battle for supremacy in Welles' world is waged between darkness and light, producing a wealth of chiaroscuro effects that could be those of Pabst, Lang, or Dupont. Like these German masters, Welles regards power with an unmistakable foreboding. It is built up, only to be destroyed. Destiny waits in the wings of Welles' stage, as inexorable a presence as it is in the German tradition."²⁶

This basic pattern of power built up only to be destroyed, so intrinsic to virtually all of Welles' screen work, is the basic structure of *CITIZEN KANE*. André Bazin, in his book on Welles, attempted to articulate this pattern as summarized in Kane's dying word, "Rosebud." "Unmasked by his best friend and by the woman he thought he loved the most," Bazin wrote, "Kane admits before dying that there is no profit in gaining the whole world if one has lost one's own childhood."²⁷ In its broadest configuration, this process finds its origin in tragedy, the *ate* which waits on all human achievement, the *thymos* which inflates the human soul with *hybris* and inspires *nemesis*, that emotion which Rilke sought to capture in the closing lines of his tenth Duino Elegy

Und wir, die an steigendes Glück
denken, empfänden die Rührung,
die uns beinah bestürzt,
wenn ein Glückliches fällt.

[And we, who contemplate good fortune ascending, felt emotion which almost startled us, when such a fortunate one falls.]²⁸

"*CITIZEN KANE* is the story of a search by a [journalist] named Thompson . . . for the meaning of Kane's dying words . . . ,” Orson Welles himself described the plot of the film. “He decides that a man's dying words ought to explain his life—maybe they do. He never discovers what Kane's mean. But the audience does. His researches take him to five people who knew Kane well—people who liked him or loved him or hated his guts. They tell five different stories, each biased, so that the truth about Kane, like the truth about any man, can only be calculated by the sum of everything that has been said about him. Kane, we are told, loved only his mother—only his newspaper—only his second wife—only himself. Maybe he loved all of these, or none. It is for the audience to judge. Kane was selfish and selfless, an idealist, a scoundrel, a very big man and a very little one. It depends on who is talking about him. He is

never judged with the objectivity of an author, and the point of the picture is not so much the solution of the problem as its presentation.’’²⁹

I have disagreed with Borde and Chaumeton that to be *film noir* a film must have a crime. Their error, I believe, came about from the fact that they tried to conceive of *film noir* as a genre, whereas it is to the contrary a film style, a movement in filmmaking similar to German Expressionism or Italian Neo-Realism, and was no doubt engendered by similar feelings of social desperation. *CITIZEN KANE* was photographed much of the time through a 25mm. lens and this gave it something of an unnatural look; in fact, the resulting deep-focus photography gives the viewer greater freedom to find in an individual shot what is of interest. This also gives the film greater ambiguity; the camera does *not* focus the viewer’s attention. Viewpoint is further obscured by the delay of close-ups and sudden reversal angles which subliminally suggest radical alterations in perspective. By stressing technique, as in many subsequent *films noirs*, Welles tended to discourage viewer identification with the characters and, instead, achieved a degree of more or less impartial interest in them. When he was a columnist for a newspaper, before his advent as a filmmaker, Welles had questioned American moral superiority in view of American racism, support of dictators around the world, desire for economic domination of all countries and markets, and the strength of reactionary political tendencies. *CITIZEN KANE* provided him with an opportunity to explore the life of a man who in many ways is the embodiment, the extreme, exaggerated fulfillment of the American dream, but by inquiring simultaneously into Kane’s private meaning contrasted with his public meaning it is found that, in the end, he was a man who had everything and who lost everything. Americans like oversimplified approaches to complex subjects and tend to think that a key can be found to explain everything. This tendency, which was manifest in theatrical newsreels and is still apparent today in network news telecasts and documentaries, was parodied by Welles in *CITIZEN KANE* in the newsreel and the foolish effort to sum up Kane by his last word. The reality of the matter is that Kane is *not* explained in the film; a man’s life and its meaning cannot be reduced.

The narrative technique employed throughout the film is the flashback; and, while creative use had been made prior to *CITIZEN KANE* of flashbacks, as for example in the reconstruction of the crime in Warner Bros. detective films, e.g., *THE KENNEL MURDER CASE* (Warner’s, 1933) directed by Michael Curtiz, or in Marcel Carné’s *LE JOUR SE LÈVE*, the narrative structure of *CITIZEN KANE* is preponderantly one of flashbacks. This extensive use of the technique was truly an innovation and insofar as it came to characterize many *films noirs* Welles’ importance to the development of the structure of *film noir* narrative remains preeminent.

I WAKE UP SCREAMING was based on a story by Steve Fisher in which he had based his character of the psychopathic cop, Cornell, played by Laird Cregar in the film, on Cornell Woolrich. Carole Landis is murdered. Victor Mature is taken to police headquarters and grilled. Cregar is intent on framing

Mature for Landis' murder because he was in love with Landis and Mature's successful efforts to promote Landis into a personality removed forever any possibility for Cregar to realize a relationship with her. A woman, therefore, is exalted to such a degree that a traditional role in the patriarchal system, i.e., wife and mother, becomes impossible. Betty Grable played Mature's love interest in the film, although she, too, comes to suspect his guilt. In tandem, Landis and Grable represent the two polarities that were established for *noir* women: a woman in possession of her own sexuality and hence powerful and unapproachable by men and a woman who is a virgin and thus dependent on men for her identity. H. Bruce Humberstone, better known by the nickname "Lucky," directed *I WAKE UP SCREAMING* and the narrative plot advances in a parallel structure so that, while the viewer learns more and more about the Landis character through flashbacks narrated by those who knew her, the viewer is kept in suspense as to the identity of her murderer. Mature, as so many later *noir* protagonists, is a victim of circumstances; but in the real story being told in this film, he is not the main protagonist: that role belongs to the cop, Cornell. It is his life which has been destroyed by the way Carole Landis was in life and it is he who is devastated by her death.

There is one scene in particular in the film which reveals Cornell's state of mind. On a visit to Betty Grable's apartment, he studies a cheap picture hanging on the wall, titled *THE GARDEN OF HOPE*. Grable remarks that it would be difficult to live without hope. "It can be done," Cornell responds, his voice dull and lifeless in despair. It is a foreshadowing of Cornell's subsequent suicide in the film, once his attempt to frame Mature has been exposed by a fellow police detective, played by William Gargan. Originally, this conclusion had not been in the screenplay. Humberstone had a work print screened for Darryl F. Zanuck, then head of production at Twentieth Century-Fox.

"Humberstone," Zanuck said, "there are only two things wrong with this picture, as it stands. One: it is a Betty Grable picture in black and white. That's bad enough. But second: the exhibitors will never sit still for a Grable picture where she doesn't sing one song!"

"But, Darryl," Humberstone objected, "you yourself said this was a psychological murder mystery. She can't sing. It wouldn't be consistent with the whole thrust of the picture."

"Listen," said Zanuck, sweeping all that aside with a wave of his cigar, "I've got the perfect ending. The camera, in the last scene, pans into the basement of a busy department store, with dozens of extras running around, buying things, and so on. It tracks in to a close shot of Grable, sitting at a piano, singing a number. She works there, see, and this is the happy ending: her singing a song for the customers."

Humberstone went out and shot the scene as Zanuck wanted it. It was spliced into the work print and screened again. Zanuck in those days at Fox customarily had his wife sit in on his screening sessions. After he returned from taking her to her car, he gloomily shook his head.

“Humberstone, Virginia agrees with me,” he said gravely. “You’ve got to be crazy to have Grable singing at the end of a picture like this. It’s a psychological picture. It doesn’t fit. Get a new ending.”

Humberstone did not bother to remonstrate. He went home and thought and thought about how to end the picture. Near dawn, he fell asleep. And he had a dream. The next morning he rushed into Zanuck’s office.

“I’ve got the ending,” he announced.

“What is it?” Zanuck asked.

Humberstone began: “Laird Cregar is a screwy cop. He has photos and ads of Carole Landis all over his apartment. Mature goes there, to the apartment, at the end of the picture, and he sees this. He meets Cregar, who’s coming home with some flowers to put beneath his shrine to Landis. Mature tells him that they’ve caught Elisha Cook, Jr., and that he’s confessed everything, including how Cregar had him cover up. Cregar takes poison and dies. That’s how the picture ends, with Cregar dying, surrounded by all the pictures of Landis. He was in love with her, but afraid to say anything once she became a celebrity.”

“That’s great!” Zanuck exclaimed. “Why didn’t you think of it before this? You’ve held up production for weeks on this picture.”

“Because I just dreamed it.”

“You dreamed it!” Zanuck said in disbelief.³⁰

Cregar went on to be featured in a number of *films noires*, which will be discussed in a later chapter. It is perhaps significant that one of the earliest films in the *noir* style should have found its resolution in a dream. In 1946 Laird Cregar went on a violent diet to lose weight and wound up hospitalized. It was his battle with weight and despair over his own ugliness, and possibly not his homosexuality, which drove him to suicide. Carole Landis committed suicide two years later, in 1948. The “trapped” feeling of *film noir* was, for them, more than a part they had had to play.

III

After reading the earlier chapter on tragedy, it will come as a surprise to no one who has seen a number of *films noires* that, as with tragedy, their principal narrative structures fall into two basic types: the *film noir* of error and the *film noir* of circumstance. A paradigm of the former, surely, is DOUBLE INDEMNITY (Paramount, 1944) directed by Billy Wilder, while THE BIG HEAT (Columbia, 1953) is a paradigm of the latter. French critics appear to have been more familiar with the classics of the German Expressionist cinema than have been American critics and, accordingly, Borde and Chaumeton could remark that “Fritz Lang n’oublia jamais les leçons expressionnistes de sa jeunesse,”³¹ and Georges Sadoul could note in his HISTOIRE GÉNÉRALE DU CINÉMA in Volume IV (1954) that Billy Wilder never forgot Expressionism and the KAMMERSPIEL [a private play production for a small audience]

in which a guilt complex and all powerful destiny bring about a catastrophe from which there is no escape. John Russell Taylor in *STRANGERS IN PARADISE* perceived that *DOUBLE INDEMNITY*, “for all its idiomatic local color, . . . remains in many respects very much in the black German tradition: it does not abandon expressionist lighting, the strongly dramatic use of shadows and such, but instead manages to persuade us to accept them as real, normal even, so convincing is the special world the film creates.”³²

Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg in their book, *HOLLYWOOD IN THE FORTIES* (1968), regarded *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* as “one of the highest summits of *film noir*, . . . a film without a single trace of pity or love. . . . The film reverberates with the forlorn poetry of late sunny afternoons; the script is as tart as a lemon; and . . . a notable scene is when the car stalls after the husband’s murder, the killing conveyed in a single close-up of the wife’s face, underlined by the menacing strings of Miklos Rosza’s score.”³³

The plot is essentially an invocation of the Klytaimnestra story, with this exception: neither in the Cain short novel nor in the screen adaptation, written by Billy Wilder in collaboration with Raymond Chandler,³⁴ are there any extenuating circumstances provided for the wayward wife. The names were changed somewhat in the screenplay. Barbara Stanwyck was cast as Phyllis Dietrichson, Fred MacMurray as the insurance salesman, Walter Neff. Phyllis shows no emotion after the murder of her husband, but, instead, begins to scheme on how to get rid of Neff. Her motivation is attributed, in the film as in the short novel, to a homicidal psychosis. The reason I find the film a superior narrative structure to the Cain original is that Wilder and Chandler, no doubt instinctively, followed the structure of the five-act tragedy as perfected by Shakespeare. Employing the flashback technique, the Situation is stated at once by MacMurray as he enters his insurance company office and begins his confession to Keyes, the canny head of the claims department played by Edward G. Robinson. The viewer can see that Neff is wounded and, as the camera occasionally cuts back to him throughout his narrative, the blood can be seen to be spreading and the wound soon appears to be fatal. “I killed Dietrichson—me, Walter Neff—insurance salesman—thirty-five years old, no visible scars—till a while ago, that is . . . I killed him for money—and for a woman . . . It all began last May.” The Conflict soon becomes evident. Phyllis wants to murder her husband and she wants Neff to help her do it. At first, Neff resists. His psychology is somewhat more complicated than is hers. In terms of the sexual politics of the plot, Phyllis is a woman fully in possession of her own sexuality and capable of using it to achieve her ends. While Neff is attracted to her sexually, the money to be gained through insurance fraud and the sexual possession of Phyllis are compounded for him by his boredom with his job, his rivalry with Keyes who symbolizes the “system” and, most of all, Neff has toyed with the idea of beating the system.

The Crisis section of the plot is concerned with the initial frustrations in kill-

ing Dietrichson and then the mishaps which occur after the deed has been done and Neff must impersonate Dietrichson in order to make it appear that he accidentally fell to his death from the observation deck of a passenger train. The Reversal for Neff comes when he realizes that Phyllis not only has no feeling for him, but that she is both promiscuous (she takes up with her stepdaughter's boyfriend) and intent on removing him as a hindrance to her bid for total independence; at the same time he learns that she has engineered other murders, including that of Dietrichson's first wife, and that he is only the latest in a number of victims to her sexuality and her ambition. The Reversal reaches its peak in its last scene where, quite literally, Phyllis and Neff murder each other. The Recognition scene comes when Keyes enters the office and Neff, still dictating his confession, becomes aware of his presence. Neff tells Keyes: "I know why you couldn't figure this one . . . because the guy you were looking for was too close . . . right across the desk from you." Keyes replies: "Closer than that, Walter." All through the film, Keyes has never had a match with which to light his cigar. At one point, in a jocular tone, Neff had quipped to him, "I love you, too." It is Neff who always lights Keyes' cigar. He lights Keyes' cigar at the most suspenseful moment in the film, when Keyes calls on him at his apartment, when the investigation of Phyllis is at its most intensive, and with Neff in the doorway, Keyes in the hall, Phyllis hiding in the shadows behind the door, the three form a tableau of crisis in which both Keyes and Phyllis seem to be in pursuit of Neff's soul. Phyllis wins, for a time, at least until the Reversal. In the Recognition, when Keyes bends over and lights Walter's cigarette, as a final, parting gesture, Neff quips again, "I love you, too"; but here the remark is poignant with irony. Trust and love can be found between men; they are impossible with a woman in possession of her sexuality and fired by ambition to break out of the system which, in terms of sexual politics, is the patriarchal society in which Jean Heather, as the stepdaughter, wants nothing more out of life than to live according to the traditional role of loving wife and mother (the right choice in a female companion, which Neff realizes too late). Neff has made all the wrong choices and hence his fate. As Barbara Deming put it in *RUNNING AWAY FROM MYSELF: A DREAM PORTRAIT OF AMERICA DRAWN FROM THE FILMS OF THE FORTIES* (1969), "so the hero asks for it, too; he, too, walks into the lady's arms, asking in that motion for all the rigors that follow."³⁵

As it stands, *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* is an outstanding example of the *film noir* of error and deserves the praise which critics have accorded it over the years. Yet, Wilder almost ruined it. He and Chandler had originally intended it to end with Neff in the gas chamber and Keyes as a righteous witness. It cost Paramount \$150,000 to build a replica of the Folsom gas chamber and Wilder shot the scene. He did not like it. It threw off the whole picture. And so, standing "alone against everyone," as Maurice Zolotow noted in his book, *BILLY WILDER IN HOLLYWOOD* (1977), Wilder scrapped the scene and, again in

Zolotow's words, "faded out on those two faces—the love of a father for his surrogate son."³⁶ Obviously, time has proven it to have been the right decision.

THE BIG HEAT is later *film noir* and, therefore, includes many more elements which had become conventions to the style than DOUBLE INDEMNITY which was an "establishing" film, much in the manner of an establishing shot. THE BIG HEAT also belongs grouped with a number of films similarly inspired in the early 'Fifties by newspaper exposure of police departments ignoring the activities of organized crime, another primary, albeit somewhat inferior, example of which would be THE PHENIX CITY STORY (Allied Artists, 1955) directed by Phil Karlson. Lang himself commented that THE BIG HEAT "is an accusation against crime. But it involves people—unlike other good pictures against crime which only involve gangsters. . . . Glenn Ford is a member of the police department and his wife gets killed. The story becomes a personal affair between him and crime. He becomes the audience."³⁷

The narrative structure is that of the *film noir* of circumstance which is modeled on that of the Tragedy of Circumstance as in Euripides' TROADES. The film opens with the suicide of a police officer. Ford, cast as homicide sergeant Dave Bannion, is assigned to the case; he is also told to lay off the case. Bannion is disinclined to listen, especially when he talks with the woman who was the dead man's mistress. She believes that the dead man's wife, played by Jeanette Nolan, is blackmailing gangster Mike Lagana played by Alexander Scourby. Lagana controls the city and it is he who wants all investigation quashed. The mistress' tortured body is discovered, another warning to Bannion to lay off; instead, it only encourages him to pursue his investigation. Bannion goes so far as to confront Lagana in his home, rough up his bodyguard, and threaten to tie him to the mistress' murder. Another, even more horrible action must follow this confrontation. A brief domestic scene showing the rapport between Bannion and his wife, played by Jocelyn Brando, concludes with Bannion staying with their two children in their bedroom telling them a bedtime story while Brando goes out to the car. Sounds alone tell us what she is doing and suspense is created because we half expect to hear the explosion which follows her turning on the ignition. Bannion rushes out to the car which is in flames and desperately tries to pry the door open; it is too late; his wife is dead. When Bannion accuses the police commissioner of deliberately dragging his feet on the investigation, he is removed from the force. Gloria Grahame was cast as hit man Lee Marvin's girlfriend. While playing cards with the police commissioner and other powerful political figures, Marvin throws scalding hot coffee in Grahame's face, permanently disfiguring her. For much of the film, half of her face is covered with bandages, which only serves to intensify the horror. Jocelyn Brando is the good woman of *film noir*, the attractive, loving wife and mother. She is destroyed by the forces of evil. Gloria Grahame is the *femme fatale* of *film noir*, although in this film her ire is turned against Marvin and Marvin's boss. She is attracted to Bannion and becomes an informer. Realizing that the

truth will come out if Jeanette Nolan should die, Grahame goes to her home and shoots her to death. Bannion, in the meantime, suspecting that the lives of his children will be claimed next, organizes his own protection squad made up of former servicemen. Marvin, entering his dark apartment, pauses to turn on the light, only to be hit in the face with scalding coffee by Grahame who has been hiding in the shadows. Grahame is shot. There is a savage fight between Marvin and Bannion in which Bannion stops himself just short of killing Marvin. Grahame dies. The evidence comes out and the police force has a change of heart, first aiding Bannion in his pursuit of Marvin and, after Marvin's capture, in arresting Lagana and restoring Bannion to the force.

The violence in each episode is seen to increase as the characters become more and more savage. Borde and Chaumeton recognized in this film one of Lang's favorite themes: "human solitude in a world of steel." They also were cognizant of the ambiguous character of both Bannion and the moll played by Gloria Grahame. "Disavowed by his cowardly and corrupt chiefs," they wrote, "Bannion is no more than a machine athirst for vengeance, literally propelled by his instinct for destruction. This fascination provides the narrative its tone. . . . Glenn Ford is sensational as the good cop without mercy and Gloria Grahame, with her face half destroyed, concretizes marvelously the duality of his 'soul.'"³⁸

Rudolph Maté, who had begun working in the industry as a cinematographer in Europe, where he did second unit work for Erich Pommer and was the cameraman on Carl Theodor Dreyer's *LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC* (French, 1928), worked in the same capacity on the melodrama *GILDA* (Columbia, 1946), and then became himself a director in the late 'Forties. He directed *THE DARK PAST* (Columbia, 1948), a melodrama about which I have something to say later in this chapter, before directing the *film noir*, *D.O.A.* (United Artists, 1949). In a way, this latter film, based on *DER MANN DER SEINEN MÖRDER SUCHT* [THE MAN WHO SEARCHES FOR HIS MURDERER] (German, 1931) directed by Robert Siodmak, is an existentialist *reductio ad absurdum* of the plot of *OEDIPUS REX*. Edmund O'Brien was cast as Frank Bigelow, an accountant in a small desert community in California. The film opens with Bigelow stumbling into a precinct station and he narrates to the desk sergeant how it was that he was murdered (by drinking a toxic chemical which slowly but inevitably kills) and how he went about finding out who did it to him and why. Bigelow's death, it turns out, was a mistake, a *hamartía* on the part of the murderer who thought he had been aware of a certain bill of sale in his possession whereas he had not even noticed it. Richard Dorfman in his article, "D.O.A. and the Notion of *Noir*," concluded that Bigelow's confusion about his fate "is an existential mystery, the imperious hand of an arbitrary order pressing down on him."³⁹ Jack Shadoian was even more outspoken in *DREAMS AND DEAD ENDS: THE AMERICAN GANGSTER/CRIME FILM* (1977). "If there is an order to the universe, a meaning to life and death," he wrote about the Bigelow character, "he aims to find it out.

Unfortunately, there isn't one. In D.O.A. everybody's a loser. Bigelow tracks down who has killed him and finds out why, but, being dead it does him little good. And the why involves no moral/metaphysical justice; it's unthinkably ridiculous."⁴⁰

Some of the dialogue in D.O.A. is so poor it is unintentionally funny. When Bigelow goes to a clinic to find out what is the matter with him, the attending physician enters the room and remarks, "Yep, you've got it," by which he means the toxic poison. Yet this is followed by a striking *noir* visual scene where the room must be made completely dark so Bigelow can see the toxic poison glowing in a vial: reality is sometimes best seen under conditions of darkness. It is the visual embodiment of the *noir* perspective. Because of such juxtapositions, Jack Shadoian argued that they were deliberate, that D.O.A. "is funny like Kafka is funny, or Thelonious Monk playing 'These Foolish Things,' or Nero fiddling. Its impertinences leave it wide open for abuse, but the joke would be on the viewer (and the critic) who fails to taste the film's peculiar seasoning and adds his or her own grain of salt. When Bigelow signs in at the desk of the St. Francis Hotel, the register includes the names of Ernest Laszlo and Russell Rouse, the film's director of photography and writer, respectively. The in-joke is a tip-off that D.O.A. is willing to laugh at its own absurdities. It's deadly stuff, but also a game—like Russian roulette with blanks."⁴¹

Bigelow's pursuit of his murderer brings him into contact with gangsters toward whom he is impervious because how can a man who is already dead be afraid for his life? Yet, he becomes, as a result, both pursuer and pursued. This is consistent with the ambiguity assigned to every character in the film. It also, in its narrative structure, rearranges the order of the five-act sequence. In D.O.A., Bigelow sets out on a well-deserved vacation to San Francisco, but experiences a Reversal almost at once: he becomes deathly ill and learns that he is literally dead. This Reversal constitutes simultaneously the Situation; and the Conflict is Bigelow's efforts to find out his murderer and the murderer's motive. The Crisis is his encounter with the gangsters. The second Reversal, and by far the most important one, is the discovery that his death was a mistake. The Recognition is that life is ultimately meaningless and absurd. Robert Siodmak, in filming PHANTOM LADY (Universal, 1944), tried to recreate on screen the vivid, marijuana-smoke-filled atmosphere Woolrich had described in the novel; Maté went him one better in D.O.A. and the jazz combo itself becomes a configuration of blaring, shadowed menace.

The *film noir* of error, as the Tragedy of Error, is far more commonplace than the *film noir* of circumstance. In THEY WON'T BELIEVE ME (RKO, 1947), directed by Irving Pichel, Robert Young is cast as a man on trial for his life. He explains to the jury via a series of flashbacks how he came to be innocently in his predicament. He had married a wealthy woman, played by Rita Johnson, for her money. He also tended to have affairs on the side. Every time one of these affairs comes to light, his wife moves, but Young follows her, because he has an obsessive need for access to her money. Finally he deter-

mines to leave her for an attractive secretary, played by Susan Hayward. The happy couple drive toward Reno only to be involved in a car crash. Hayward's body is burned in the process, Young having only minor injuries, and the authorities mistake the woman's body for that of Young's wife. The Crisis in this film is Young's decision to return to his wife's ranch and murder her, thus being in a position to inherit her money. Only it turns out that his wife committed suicide. "Fate had dealt me one from the bottom of the deck," Young remarks. The Reversal comes about when an investigation into Hayward's disappearance results in Young's being charged with her murder; it is for this that he is being tried. So far, this Reversal owes much to James M. Cain's use of it in *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE*. But the Recognition scene, while the jury is out deliberating, places a different construction on the narrative. Young is convinced that he will be found guilty and, feeling powerless to do anything else, he exercises his final option; he commits suicide. It is, of course, ironic when he is found to be "Not Guilty," but apparently the prescription embodied in Young's action is that he is punishing himself for moral, rather than legal, culpability.

In *films noirs* visual style can sometimes negate narrative structure and sometimes narrative structure can negate visual style. According to the definition we have adopted, a *film noir* cannot have a happy ending; if it does, it is not *film noir*: it may be either melodrama or *film gris*. This distinction will be further clarified later on in this chapter; but, for the moment, I would like to concentrate on two films in which the visual style and the narrative structure are at odds and which, therefore, almost border on being, respectively, melodrama or *film gris*. *PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET* (20th-Fox, 1953) is a *film noir* of circumstance. Richard Widmark was cast as a three-time loser, a pickpocket named Skip McCoy. In *THE BIG HEAT*, it is the police officer's suicide which sets off a chain of events; here it happens when Skip by mistake "lifts" some microfilm from Candy's purse. Candy, played by Jean Peters, is the mistress of a man she does not know to be but who is a Communist spy. "The only reason I put Communism in—well, naturally, he's going to steal something out of a purse," Sam Fuller, who directed *PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET*, once remarked, "If it has microfilm, it's got to have information. All right? So it becomes a reactionary picture. Everybody said, 'Oh, my, this is a political picture, an editorial on film.' I don't care about that. Listen, if I wanted to make a picture about a young fella who loves to eat glass ashtrays, it wouldn't surprise me if people said that's me, that I like to eat glass ashtrays, and that's why I made it. I'm just trying to show the stupidity of that critical approach."⁴² McCoy's enemy on the police force is Captain Dan Tiger, played by Murvyn Vye. Tiger learns from Moe, an informer played by Thelma Ritter, that McCoy has the microfilm. Moe sells ties for a living, ostensibly, but she also peddles information on the side to all bidders—almost to all bidders. She sells Skip's address to Candy. Before Candy arrives at the one room shack on the river where Skip lives, Tiger and a federal man show up. Skip refuses to

cooperate with the federal man who tries to appeal to his patriotism or with Tiger who promises to overlook the crime. Candy and Skip are immediately attracted to each other. He belts her in the mouth when she gets too pushy, and then caresses the bruise he made. She has sexual intercourse with him and then knocks him out with a beer bottle. Candy tells Moe about the fact that her boyfriend is a Communist. Moe will not sell information to a Communist, when the boyfriend comes to her, and is killed by him. Next Candy is savagely beaten and then shot by him. This action causes Skip to go after the boyfriend and beat him mercilessly to avenge Candy and Moe. The violence is orchestrated according to the rising crescendo pattern of the *film noir* of circumstance. In the final scene, Skip is cleared by the police and seems about to start a conventional life with Candy. But this is a Fuller picture. Four years later, he wanted to end his Western, FORTY GUNS (20th-Fox, 1957), with the chief heavy holding heroine Barbara Stanwyck in front of him as a shield against hero Barry Sullivan's gun: Fuller wanted Sullivan to shoot even if it meant killing Stanwyck. The front office would not let him do it. In PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET, the character of the relationship between Skip and Candy, Skip's character (he will not give up his "profession"), the *noir* lighting throughout, to say nothing of the fact that the only effective fighters against Communism in this film are, in fact, a pickpocket, a prostitute, and an informer means one must accept the vision of the *noir* style, not the conventional ending of the narrative structure.

THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE possesses a *film noir* narrative structure but has neutral lighting, i.e., almost the entire film takes place in a brightly lit roadside cafe. The screenplay retained Cain's narrative device and so it is Frank Chambers, played by John Garfield, who is shown in prison on death row and who tells via flashbacks how he wound up there. After Cain saw DOUBLE INDEMNITY, he wrote to Barbara Stanwyck that "it is a very creepy sensation to see a character imagined by yourself step in front of your eyes exactly as you imagined her."⁴³ He could not have said the same thing about Cora, played in the film by Lana Turner. Ellen Keneshea and Carl Macek observed in their commentary on this picture, following the plot synopsis in FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN STYLE, that, "as a *femme fatale*, Cora Smith is a far cry from Cain's cold-blooded Phyllis Dietrichson. . . . Cora is helpless, trapped in a world of abundant ironies. Her marriage to Nick in order to 'get away' leaves her bored and restless. The love affair with Frank ends with both parties dead. She offered Frank a world removed from the ordinary, but in so doing, Cora condemned each of them to a nightmarish existence."⁴⁴ This lessening of the insidiousness of the Cora character from what she appears to be in the novel, combined with Tay Garnett's sensitive direction of Lana Turner and the absence of the *noir* visual style, are such as to bring the film to the brink of being melodrama. The episode of sexual intercourse after the murder is also left out, again softening both of the protagonists and making their crime less hideous—that is, morally hideous to a

certain part of the movie-going public. I recall how Theodor Reik recorded in *THE UNKNOWN MURDERER* that in a “case where the wife and the servant had killed the peasant together, they received a bad mark for having had sexual relations immediately after. They had, so to speak, misbehaved in front of the corpse. People deplored the murderers’ lack of good feeling, and thought they should have observed a respectful interval after the act.”⁴⁵

On the other hand, Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg in *HOLLYWOOD IN THE FORTIES* found Lana Turner’s Cora character, “almost always dressed in ironical white, . . . is cleverly directed to suggest a soulless American ambition” and that “this is the perfect *film noir*, harsh and heartless in its delineation of character, disclosing a rancid evil beyond the antiseptic atmosphere of the roadside dinery.”⁴⁶ Despite its melodramatic aspects, the narrative structure of *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE* remains strictly *noir*, even to the five-act division of the plot. What I refuse to believe about the film is that it depicts reality. “The war had created a demand for patriotic films,” Roy Hoopes wrote in *CAIN: THE BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES M. CAIN* (1982), “but it had also helped push Hollywood into more adult films, if only for the returning GIs who had seen the world and would demand more realism in their movies.”⁴⁷ There are those who might feel that Higham and Greenberg—or Peter Morris who parrots them in calling *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE* “one of the best of the Hollywood *films noirs* of the ’Forties, perfectly bringing to life the atmosphere of the novel and its suggestion of soulless American ambition in the character of the wife”⁴⁸—have exaggerated somewhat the portrayal of the Cora Smith character in this film; but this is only a matter of degree. Where I cannot concur with Hoopes is in declaring this image of a woman to have been an answer to a “demand for more realism.” While sexual intercourse following a murder has been known to happen as has two lovers murdering the spouse of one of them, what is utterly *unrealistic* is to assume that, having committed a murder and gotten away with it, there is an ironic principle operative in the world which would fatefully bring the murderers low, killing one accidentally and falsely nailing the other for her death. Shakespeare, in positing a natural order, was appealing to a dramatic convention in effect since Antiquity, but Cain’s view of the universe, transposed into a *film noir*, is only a Hollywood fantasy *par excellence*. According to this fantasy, there is never any ambiguity about there being justice in the universe, only some question about the efficacy of the legal system to produce it. In such *films noirs*, there is certitude as to what is right or wrong. It is not until you come to a *film noir* such as *D.O.A.* that this certitude is seen to have crumbled, or *THE BIG HEAT* where Bannion becomes almost as vicious as the forces he is fighting (or quite as vicious), if we accept Borde and Chaumeton’s equation of the Gloria Grahame character as “la dualité de son ‘âme’ ”).

And while I am on the subject, there is a *film noir* in which the protagonist is even more vicious than the forces he fights, one of the very few films featuring a private eye as a protagonist that is a *film noir* and not a *film gris*. I am

referring to *KISS ME DEADLY*, based on the novel of the same title by Mickey Spillane. It was directed by Robert Aldrich from a screenplay by A. I. Bezzerides, who was blacklisted as a result of the HUAC investigation. Spillane, in his detective fiction, went a long step beyond Raymond Chandler in his misogyny and his taste for violence. When, in *I, THE JURY* (1947), Spillane's detective, Mike Hammer, exposes the murderess, she strips naked and stands invitingly before him. Mike shoots her, low, as low as he can. "When I heard her fall I turned around," Mike tells the reader. "Her eyes had pain in them now, the pain preceding death. Pain and unbelief. 'How could you?' she gasped. I only had a moment before talking to a corpse, but I got it in. 'It was easy,' I said."⁴⁹ *I, THE JURY* (United Artists, 1953) directed by Harry Essex is sometimes considered *film noir*, but it is quite definitely *film gris*. By the end, Mike Hammer, although the violence is far more muted than in the novel, kills the *femme fatale* and triumphs over the forces of evil. It is otherwise in *KISS ME DEADLY*. Ralph Meeker was cast in the role of Mike Hammer and he is quite as corrupt in the film as any of the other characters or the milieu in which he functions.

"Aldrich and A. I. Bezzerides imply that one of America's problems is that it has no cultural tradition," Jack Shadoian observed about this film. "Our 'respectable' culture is on loan—German music, African masks, Italian opera, Greek mythology, French painting—and our connection with it is superficial. America turns culture into a product, a consumer good. Its true culture is the automobile, the tape recorder, and the rest of its impressive technology. . . . Aldrich, unlike [Sam] Fuller, has no faith in America as the nation that unites all other nations, the great family-of-man government. The fear, intimidation, and brutality that permeate his film are an altogether different reading. . . . For Aldrich, America is destroying itself. There is no unity, even in personal relationships."⁵⁰

The plot is extremely simple, only the characters and milieu make it seem complex. Hammer learns about a box that contains an atomic device that is being sought by various agents. Velda, Mike's secretary/mistress, terms it "the great whatsit." She is played by Maxine Cooper and she is kidnapped by the agents. Gaby Rodgers was cast as Lily Carver who kills one of the agents to get possession of the box. Earlier in the film, Albert Dekker, cast as Dr. Sobrin, the character Lily kills, made a reference to Pandora and in dying warns Lily not to open the box. She will not listen to him. She opens the box and a series of explosions ensue, while Hammer and Velda stumble into the nearby ocean surf. As Alain Silver pointed out, "the hero of *KISS ME DEADLY* is more typically related to other characters in Robert Aldrich's work than in Mickey Spillane's."⁵¹ Aldrich himself commented in an interview that he intended the film to have political overtones. "It did have a basic significance in our political framework that we thought rather important in those McCarthy times: that the ends did not justify the means."⁵² In *KISS ME DEADLY*, this applies not only to the lengths to which the agents, Lily among them, are willing to go to

get hold of the box, but as well to Hammer's efforts to thwart them: slamming a character's fingers in a drawer, Hammer smiling while the character whimpers; Hammer's breaking a character's valuable Caruso records in a deliberate attempt to get him to talk. The world revealed in *KISS ME DEADLY* is truly a dark world and the end is definitely no triumph of justice.

I think we can agree with Borde and Chaumeton that many of the directors who initiated the *film noir* visual style were of German origin and that "l'on a pu parler. . . . de 'l'école allemande d'Hollywood.'" ⁵³ Moreover, I concur with them that "Orson Welles resumed in a certain sense the expressionistic tradition of *CALIGARI*. The setting is always, by contrast or by analogy, in rapport with the psychological situations." Referring to *THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI*, they noted that "we recall that brief pause in one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world: a magnificent wooded coast sprinkled with bright villas, reflecting the joy of life. Under an isolated butte dominating the bay, the group, gripped by an inexplicable fear, has a blunt discourse, dreadfully pessimistic and sardonic, about existence. As tourists pass them by, a single word detaches itself from their confused dialogue and recoils as a *leitmotiv*: 'money.'" ⁵⁴ In the film, Welles made sound as expressionistic as the visual style. "Throughout the film," Higham and Greenberg pointed out, "the feral shrieks and neurotic whispers or giggles of the cast, the sneezes, coughs, and chatter of the trial scene extras, give the listener the impression of being trapped in a cage full of animals and birds." ⁵⁵

Welles cast himself as Michael O'Hara, an aspiring author who is attracted to Elsa Bannister, played by Rita Hayworth. The two were married at the time and, in fact, on the brink of divorce. In the film, Hayworth is a *femme fatale* with short, blonde hair. "Rita looked different," William Castle, the producer on the film, recalled in his memoirs, *STEP RIGHT UP* (1976). "Her beautiful long red hair had vanished. Now blonde, her hair was closely cropped and clung to her lovely face. (Orson later explained that he gave Hayworth a completely new look by personally engineering the shearing of her locks . . .)." ⁵⁶ Elsa convinces Mike to take the job of being captain on her husband's yacht. Her husband, Arthur Bannister, played by Everett Sloane, intends to sail from New York to San Francisco with Elsa and his law partner, George Grisby, played by Glenn Anders. It is when they pull into Acapulco that the "blunt discourse" occurs, O'Hara comparing the three of them to sharks and telling them how, once, off the South American coast, he had seen sharks driven into a feeding frenzy by the blood of one of their number, until they had consumed each other. As he concludes this anecdote, he turns to leave, his motion corresponding exactly with a wave breaking on the beach.

O'Hara becomes involved in an elaborate plot with Grisby in order to make \$5,000 which, he hopes, will be enough money for Elsa to go away with him. The plot backfires. He is charged with Grisby's murder, with Bannister defending him. The court scene is a concentrated travesty of due process. When the verdict is about to be heard, Bannister whispers to O'Hara that this is one case

he will be glad to lose. O'Hara makes a break for it and escapes. The denouement is in the fun house of a deserted amusement park. In a scene with Elsa, Arthur, and O'Hara surrounded by what appears to be hundreds of mirrors, Elsa and Arthur shoot each other. While her motives remain obscure (albeit in the context of the film and its view of beautiful women and life, they do not much matter anyway), Elsa was behind virtually all of the wrongdoing. O'Hara, after a brief dialogue with her while she is dying, walks out into the sunlight.

Elsa (dying): You can fight, but what good is that?

O'Hara: You mean we can't win?

Elsa: No, we can't win. Goodbye. Give my love to. . . .

O'Hara: We can't lose either. Only if we quit.

Elsa: And you're not going to do that.

O'Hara: Not again.

Walking away from her and from everything, O'Hara reflects that his innocence will be proven. "But innocence is a funny word. Stupid's more like it. The only way to stay out of trouble is to grow old, so I guess I'll concentrate on that. Maybe I'll live so long that I'll forget her—maybe I'll die trying."

"The fetishistic, overheated romanticism of the *film noir* became one of the few sources of rebellious energy in the movies, although it was a fairly timid rebellion," James Naremore wrote in *THE MAGIC WORLD OF ORSON WELLES* (1978). "Welles, of course, was especially suited to work in this vein, bringing to it 'an intelligence and integrity of purpose that kept his films from becoming, like so many others, merely lurid.'" ⁵⁷ Naremore also made the claim in his book that Welles' world-view can be linked with that of Raymond Chandler. I cannot agree with this. When I worked with Welles—he was the host/narrator for a pilot I produced based on my book, *THE DETECTIVE IN HOLLYWOOD*—he had to narrate much of the background to the fiction of both Hammett and Chandler and in the conversation I had with him after the filming, he had perceptive remarks to make about both men, but remarks which also indicated how little he had cared to read of their works. More to the point, Naremore commented in his book that "Welles was in fact a major contributor to the misogynistic tone of 'Forties melodrama. In [THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI], made while his marriage to Hayworth was ending, he gives a rather bitter farewell to his wife and portrays her as a woman 'kept' by rich businessmen. Later he suggested *MONSIEUR VERDOUX* to Chaplin, and after *THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI* he turned to *Lady Macbeth*.'" ⁵⁸ I got the distinct impression from Welles that the inspiration for *THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI* came from his curiosity about having been attracted to a Hollywood sex goddess and glamour queen in the first place and what it was that the experience was supposed to teach him. The significance of blonde-haired heroines, in *CITIZEN KANE*, in this film, or in the later *TOUCH OF EVIL* (Uni-

versal, 1958), had its origin in his own personal experience (the idea of the *femme fatale* will be explored at length in a later chapter); and it was purely coincidental that Raymond Chandler's *femmes fatales*, or the Phyllis character in Cain's short novel and Billy Wilder's film, have blonde hair. Nonetheless, it did become a convention associated with the *femme fatale* in *films noirs*.

THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI certainly has the five-act structure of the *film noir* of error, as one might expect from a screenplay written by a man long familiar with staging and performing Shakespearean plays. The Recognition I have quoted at length. These are the words of a man perhaps permanently scarred by his encounter with a woman. This same Recognition, found in so many *films noirs*, is nowhere more dramatically realized than in GUN CRAZY (United Artists, 1949) directed by Joseph H. Lewis. Robert Aldrich in KISS ME DEADLY used Fritz Lang's device in SPIONE of showing only parts of the body; in GUN CRAZY Lewis used Peggy Cummins' entire body to eroticize the phallic gun she so often holds in her hand.

The film opens to a city street in the rain. A boy breaks a window to steal a gun. Morris Carnovsky, who ironically would soon be blacklisted as a Communist, was cast as the judge who sends young Bart to reform school to cure his obsession with guns. When Bart grows up, he is played by John Dall. He joins a carnival where Peggy Cummins is the female sharpshooter, Annie Laurie Starr. Laurie's boss does not approve of her attraction to Bart and promises to make big money for her. Laurie rejects him and she and Bart are fired. They drive off together and marry. A clown had told Bart that some men are born smart about women, others dumb: he's dumb. Dressed in cowboy togs, they commit a robbery. Adroit camera placement in the back seat of their car allowed Lewis to simulate their point of view as they prepare to pull a job. Essentially, this is the Bonnie and Clyde formula which Fritz Lang had used for YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE and which also serves as the basic plot structure of THEY LIVE BY NIGHT (RKO, 1949) directed by Nicholas Ray. Laurie told Bart when they first met: "I want action." And that is what they get. However, in the end, with the two having become fugitives hiding in a swamp—another link with the Lang film—it is the buddy system, and not Bart's passion for Laurie, which wins out. When she would plug one of their pursuers, a man he had known since boyhood, Bart shoots her rather than let her do it. We are back to that BLACK MASK story by Frederick Nebel where Beryl, the hit woman, pleads with the detective, Donahue, "'Say, let's have a gun. Let me blow those cops apart when they break in. Give me a break—before—I go.'"

The difference between GUN CRAZY and the gangster film cycle in the early 'Thirties is that the protagonists, instead of behaving in a fashion which proves self-destructive, behave *according* to self-destructive impulses. Exposing himself to kill Laurie, Bart is shot down by his invisible pursuers.

It is possible, I believe, to agree with the role reversal Jack Shadoian perceived in this film, but not with his final conclusion. "It is clear that woman is something other than what men have assumed and counted on her to be, and

what pre-war Hollywood pictured her as," he wrote. "Laurie is a much stronger character than Bart. Most of the time she's dressed in pants, and of the two she makes most of the decisions. Bart is compelled by her. She assumes the male role while Bart fusses, hesitates, and hangs back like a female. She is a psychopath, but so are a lot of male action heroes. Laurie stands at the crossroads of a muddled feminine identity, her behavior at explosive odds with the combined dictates of nature and nurture."⁵⁹ Nurture perhaps, but I would not say nature. Professor Shadoian seems to have confused what society has defined as masculine and feminine with what is biologically male and female. Borde and Chaumeton are similarly sexist, but they also discerned an important existential dimension in the film. "His companion, who plays a decisive role in this career of 'outlawry,' is a splendid specimen of bitch. She has a marked predilection for pants or cowboy dress and polarizes the aggressiveness of the couple. The final episode in the marshes becomes a vengeful execution of the woman by her companion: he prefers the life of a policeman to hers, a boyhood friend whom she is prepared to cut down. But rather than consider GUN CRAZY as a story with an edifying conclusion, together with pathological motives to support it—as it would seem we are invited to do—we ourselves prefer to justify it by seeing in it one of those rare contemporary illustrations of wild and insane passion [*l'amour fou*] (with all the meanings of the expression intended) which according to André Breton's notion 'applies' here: '*one is capable of anything.*' GUN CRAZY would thus appear to be an American *film noir* from a kind of 'Golden Age.' "⁶⁰ In my opinion, Bart is not so much seduced by Laurie, whatever their respective gender roles, as that she evokes his own latent destructive impulses, exceeding him for a time in her willingness to kill; but he finds robbing banks and encountering danger as sexually exhilarating as she does; and, in the end, she is destroyed by the very destructiveness which she brought to the surface in him. The script and the direction make no mistake about it, however. Woman is to be viewed as *primum mobile* of evil. As Myron Meisel remarked in his rather appropriately titled essay, "Joseph H. Lewis: Tourist in the Asylum," " . . . the characters express themselves exclusively through their actions . . . their competition at marksmanship and their robberies become their means of expressing their feelings toward one another. Lewis . . . centers his narrative around sexual tensions; he has said that he wanted to show that 'their love for each other was more fatal than their love for guns.' "⁶¹

The last paradigms of *film noir* I would mention are two *films noirs* which combine the narrative structure of the *film noir* of error with the circumstance that what happens to the protagonists is both fated to happen to them and which they have brought upon themselves through *hamartía* leading them to commit certain voluntary acts.

In his autobiography, AN OPEN BOOK (1980), John Huston narrated how, when in England, he bought a small wooden figure that he presumed was a Burmese goddess and how it suggested to him a story of how "three strangers purchase a sweepstakes ticket and sign it using the name of a goddess. The

ticket is drawn in the lottery but, meanwhile, it has become a clue connecting one of the trio with murder. Thereafter the goddess sees to it that nobody gets anything but his just desserts.”⁶² It was filmed under the title *THREE STRANGERS* (Warner’s, 1946) and directed by Jean Negulesco. The principal roles were assigned to Geraldine Fitzgerald, Sydney Greenstreet, and Peter Lorre. This trio meets during the Chinese New Year, Greenstreet and Lorre having been picked up in the street by Fitzgerald. In Fitzgerald’s apartment, they gather before a Chinese idol which is supposed to grant the wishes of three strangers should they meet in front of it before midnight. All three want the same thing: money. Fitzgerald wants money in order to win back her estranged husband, Greenstreet in order to become a respectable barrister and join an exclusive club, Lorre, who is an alcoholic, to buy liquor. A sweepstakes ticket, shared by them jointly, will be the means of realizing their wishes. Fitzgerald, however, ruins her chances with her husband (if she ever had any) by the tactics she uses. Greenstreet’s initial *hamartía* gets him into severe financial straits. Lorre is the victim of a false accusation and actually spends some time in jail for a murder he did not commit. When the ticket proves a winner, Greenstreet offers to buy out Fitzgerald’s share; she refuses and he kills her with the idol. Afterwards, he confesses. Consequently, Lorre cannot redeem the ticket without implicating himself in the murder. It is a fine instance of the Reversal and Recognition sections of the plot serving both to further the conclusion of the story and reveal to each his or her nature and the nature of the universe in which one lives.

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER (Paramount, 1948) directed by Anatole Litvak was adapted for the screen by Lucille Fletcher who based it on her radio play which had been produced for CBS by John Houseman and Nicholas Ray. Barbara Stanwyck was cast as Leona Stevenson. It opens with her, confined to her bed, overhearing a murder plot. Through a series of flashbacks, we learn that she pursued her husband, Henry Stevenson played by Burt Lancaster, with great determination and that she used the money she inherited from her father to make him totally dependent on her. In an effort to break free, Stevenson involves himself with the underworld in a drug scheme which backfires. Now he needs money desperately and he decides that having his wife killed, whose invalidism is actually a cardiac neurosis, is the only way out for him. Leona slowly becomes aware that the murder plot she overheard concerns herself. She is a prisoner in her own bedroom, helpless, with a window looking out on a crowded but indifferent city. On the radio is heard Schubert’s “Unfinished Symphony”—a work which also serves as a background to a scene in *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* when MacMurray is walking with Phyllis’ stepdaughter on the bluff above the Hollywood Bowl as well as in *KISS ME DEADLY*. Both Henry and Leona are destroyed, at once by themselves and by fate; but there is no sense of justice triumphant. The ideological prescription—which is an *unstated* premise in the film—was adduced by Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites in their book, *MOVIES: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY* (1970). “The hazards for the woman may thus be extreme,” they concluded, “if she tries to manip-

ulate her man's career in the wrong way. The destructively manipulative woman is apt to lack any skills of her own and to use emotional pressure rather than management as her method of control."⁶³ Taking a more sociological view, Stephen Farber observed in his article, "Violence and the Bitch Goddess," that "Henry and Leona are familiar American characters—the ambitious businessman on the make, the heiress of the *nouveaux riches*—portrayed very harshly; their values contain the seeds of violence."⁶⁴

Some of the *films noirs* which I have mentioned toy with the idea that innocence or guilt, reward or condemnation are purely a matter of circumstance, without bluntly stating it so. What they do have in common is a willingness to look at the dark side of life, to contemplate the possibility of negation, even total negation—as in *KISS ME DEADLY*. Also, in *KISS ME DEADLY* the sounds of traffic are constant, an experiment in sound no less dramatic than Welles' use of nature sounds in *THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI*, the din of the jungle and the noise of civilization, reminding us that the world of *film noir* is an urban world, so reminiscent of Rimbaud's imagery:

Assez eu. Rumeurs des villes, le soir, et au soleil, et toujours.
Assez connu. Les arrêts de la vie.

[Had enough. Up roars of cities, in the eventide, in the sun, and always.
Known enough. The impasses of life.]⁶⁵

IV

In her essay, "Women in *Film Noir*," Janey Place noted that "unlike genres, defined by objects and subjects, but like other film movements, *film noir* is characterized by the remarkably homogeneous visual style with which it cuts across genres: this can be seen in the *film noir* influence on certain Westerns, melodramas (even musicals), and particularly the detective genre. This style indicates a similarly homogeneous cultural attitude, and is only possible within an isolated time period, in a particular place, in response to a national crisis of some kind."⁶⁶ This is one of the most significant similarities between American *film noir* and German Expressionist cinema: not only did it have many of the same directors and writers and cinematographers in common, but it was also a response of sorts to a national crisis. At first, it was the cultural and psychological assimilation of the Depression; then it became a response to global war; finally, a response to the shattering realization that crime had become both widespread and organized within the United States while, from without, Americans were threatened by the spectre of global annihilation. For so long motion pictures had been preoccupied with convenient and conventional lies that such a movement was inevitable. And, from the beginning, this new visual style in American films combined itself with the misogyny and need to humiliate women which had first emerged in the gangster film cycle of the early 'Thirties.

Edward Dmytryk, who directed the first Philip Marlowe film, *MURDER, MY SWEET* (RKO, 1944) based on Raymond Chandler's *FAREWELL, MY*

LOVELY, once told me that what most appealed to him about filming the Chandler milieu was that it allowed him to break with a number of traditions. First, detective films had been formerly preoccupied with crimes committed among the rich; this story permitted the camera to venture among the lower levels of society where crime was far more commonplace, even a product of the milieu itself; second, where before right and wrong had always been black and white, now it was possible to conceive of the world as gray. If there was a Marxist element in any of this, he insisted—he was one of the Hollywood Ten, imprisoned and blacklisted for contempt by the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities—it was this notion of social evil as a gray area, culpability as being gray. Personally, I am not at all certain to what degree such a notion can be called Marxist. What is far more certain is that a number of films in the early and mid 'Forties invoked the *film noir* visual style while, themselves, belonging, in terms of narrative structure, clearly within the mold of other genres. It is this group of films which might best be distinguished as *films gris*, if they are to be discussed in terms of their relationship to *film noir*, while, generically, they remain detective films, Westerns, and so on. Since melodrama has traditionally been defined as a story including a romance and sensational incidents with a happy ending, I think we can distinguish between the *film gris* and the melodrama on precisely this basis. While neither has the narrative structure and ethos of *film noir*, they both may have, to an extent, the *film noir* visual style. However, the *film gris* may have a happy ending, whereas the melodrama invariably does. By a happy ending, I mean that the romance developed in the course of the narrative results in marriage. There may be a romance in the *film gris*, but one cannot be at all certain at the end if the two are going to be married and live happily ever after. Hence, while Dick Powell as Marlowe and Anne Shirley as Ann are seen to be together at the end of MURDER, MY SWEET, we cannot be at all sure that they will marry; and the same might be said for Humphrey Bogart's Philip Marlowe and the Vivian Sternwood character played by Lauren Bacall in THE BIG SLEEP; nor is the resolution such in either of these films that their endings could be termed "happy" even in prospect. The opposite seems to be the case in THE DARK CORNER, or LAURA (20th-Fox, 1944), or THE STRANGE LOVE OF MARTHA IVERS (Paramount, 1946) and, therefore, I would class them as varieties of melodrama.

Accordingly, those critics, Borde and Chaumeton among them, who rank THE MALTESE FALCON (Warner's, 1941) as an early example of *film noir* I believe to be mistaken. True, it does have a *femme fatale* in the Brigid O'Shaughnessy character played by Mary Astor, but this of itself would scarcely qualify it as a *film noir*. As Julie Kirgo concluded in the entry for THE MALTESE FALCON in FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIC REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN STYLE, the film in the end "suffers from its own contempt. As Spade deliberately lays out the pros and cons of letting Brigid 'take the fall,' he balances her murderous, lying nature against the notion that 'Maybe you

love me and maybe I love you.' Ostensibly, we should feel sympathy for Spade at such a crossroads, forced to make a painful decision between justice and love. But it all rings false as there have been no intimations of anything like love between Spade and Brigid, who are two manipulators *par excellence*. The thrill felt at the end of *THE MALTESE FALCON* is not a poignant one; it is something a little uglier. With Huston's Spade, the viewer is getting a thrill out of sending Brigid over."⁶⁷

Moreover, what criminal milieu there is to be found in the film originates in the greed of Gutman and his associates, among whom Brigid might be at least peripherally included. It is also a very focused greed: concentrated on the supposedly gold, jewel-encrusted falcon. Huston, in writing the screenplay, softened considerably the Spade character as he appeared in *THE MALTESE FALCON* (Warner's, 1931) played by Ricardo Cortez. In that film, Spade's office is decorated with nudes. Sam sleeps openly with Bebe Daniels, cast as Ruth Wonderly; and Thelma Todd, as the widow of Archer, Spade's murdered partner, asks Sam: "Who's that dame wearing my kimono?" Wonderly's response to this is: "You have a lot of trouble with your women, don't you, Sam?" Spade is an obvious exploiter. In the final scene, he visits Wonderly in prison and gloats over being made chief investigator for the district attorney's office. Whatever else he is, Bogart's Spade is no lecher.

THE GLASS KEY (Paramount, 1942), based on Hammett's novel of the same title and a remake of a 1935 film, starred the popular romantic duo of Alan Ladd and Veronica Lake. They quite obviously fall in love in the course of the film and, at the end, are just as obviously going to be married. This is romantic melodrama with only occasional suggestions of the *noir* visual style. The same might be said for *THE BLUE DAHLIA* (Paramount, 1946), based on an original screenplay by Raymond Chandler. The hero, played by Alan Ladd, returns home from the service only to find his wife a faithless alcoholic. Hatred, killing, infidelity are rampant in American society; these are *noir* ingredients, as is the fact that Ladd, as a veteran, trained to live in a violent world, proves a match for the violence he encounters after his discharge. What makes the film melodrama is that Ladd quickly discovers Veronica Lake and so finds a new love to replace the old one.

THE LADY IN THE LAKE (M-G-M, 1946) directed by Robert Montgomery and starring him in the role of Marlowe is melodrama, pure and simple. True, there is the nasty and crooked cop, made that way by love for a wicked woman, played to the hilt by Lloyd Nolan, but Marlowe is rescued by the Chief of Police and, in this case, one rotten apple has quite definitely not spoiled the whole barrel; in fact, the picture goes out of its way to make this point clear. Audrey Totter, when she first appears, is a cold, almost heartless, business executive, yet by the end she has moved from the office to the kitchen, is wearing an apron, and cooing with Marlowe about love being scary but wonderful. The last scene has her and Marlowe joined.

By way of contrast, *THE BRASHER DOUBLOON* (20th-Fox, 1947) di-

rected by John Brahm with George Montgomery as Marlowe is *film gris*, as are Brahm's two other notable films from the 'Forties employing aspects of the *noir* film style. *THE LODGER* (20th-Fox, 1944) and *HANGOVER SQUARE* (20th-Fox, 1945). *THE BRASHER DOUBLOON* derives what *noir* qualities it has from its "faithful reproduction of the 'Forties Los Angeles environment," to use Robert Ottoson's words, which relates it also to the pseudo-documentary police procedural film which also was in vogue at the time and incorporated *noir* lighting and milieu. Where I cannot follow Ottoson is in his ranking Florence Bates' Mrs. Murdock as "one of the most marvelously malevolent old bitches of 'Forties *film noir*; her determined, and successful, attempt to push her husband out of a window usually elicits chuckles from an audience."⁶⁸ Murder, in a true *film noir* such as *DOUBLE INDEMNITY*, usually does not elicit a chuckle!

Both *THE LODGER* and *HANGOVER SQUARE* will be discussed in a later chapter, since they both are built around a pathological murderer of women played by Laird Cregar, but, essentially, they share the same narrative plot structure of *films gris* such as *GASLIGHT* (M-G-M, 1944) and *THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE* (RKO, 1946), the latter directed by Robert Siodmak. In each case, a woman's life is being sought by a deranged male character. The culprit is caught, so to this extent the ending is a resolution, but in neither case is there a romance and the ordeal remains traumatic for the women who have passed through it, Ingrid Bergman in the case of the former, Dorothy McGuire in that of the latter.

PURSUED (Warner's, 1947) directed by Raoul Walsh is most often termed a *film noir* Western. This it is not; it is merely a Western melodrama employing *noir* visual techniques and the *noir* flashback structure. The film opens with Robert Mitchum, cast as Jeb Rand, waiting in the shadows for a lynch mob. Jeb was adopted by the Callum family, but buried deep in his psyche is the memory of how his real mother and father were murdered by Grant Callum, played by Dean Jagger. One of the most common narrative structures in melodrama has always been the pursuit of a truth that has been concealed; indeed, this is the essence of the Gothic tale. By the end, Grant is exposed and shot to death by his wife, and Jeb and Thorley Callum, played by Teresa Wright, are able to consummate their mutual love. This is the conventional ranch romance ending and none of the *noir* qualities of the film interferes with its occurrence.

In an Appendix to *FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN STYLE*, the editors discussed *PURSUED* and three other Western films, these three based on novels by Luke Short, that have *noir* overtones as well as "isolate a *noir* character in an alien environment." While the editors exclude these films from belonging to the *noir* canon, they feel that films such as *RAMROD* (United Artists, 1947) based on the Short novel of the same title center "on an archetype of the *noir* cycle: the *femme fatale*. Veronica Lake is cast as Connie Dickason, a predatory woman manipulating the men around her in order to achieve wealth and independence. Sex and violence are treated

with objectivity, almost as part of the environment.” They also concede that Connie’s rejection by the hero “does suggest that the Western hero, supported by a misogynistic generic tradition, is less likely than a *noir* figure to be depicted as falling prey to sexual impulses.”⁶⁹

Unfortunately, most, indeed all, of the narrative elements which the editors find suggestive of *film noir* are to be found in Short’s Western fiction and there he was influenced, to a degree, by the hard-boiled *roman noir*, but far more by Ernest Haycox. Beginning with his first hard-bound Western novel, *THE FEUD AT SINGLE SHOT* (1935), Short readily propounded an image of the old West as being in a constantly volatile colloidal state, made up of groups of armed, unstable, and potentially violent Fascist camps needing only the proper catalyst before exploding into hopeless chaos. Prior to him, this image had been set forth by Haycox, although, admittedly, Short considerably refined it. Short also borrowed the convention from Haycox (who, in turn, had borrowed it from Sir Walter Scott) of confronting his hero with two distinct heroines, only one of whom is the “right” one for him and whom he is to choose at the end of the story for the obligatory ranch romance conclusion.

Luke Short’s West is an invocation of the Calvinist world-view, a theological system in which human events are as rigorously determined by an outside agency as in that system where Fate is regarded as the sole agency of human destiny. But there is a profound difference between the two, and this is perhaps best illustrated by a later Short novel, *PAPER SHERIFF* (1966). By the time he wrote it, Short had refined his treatment of his basic plot and the hero, Reese Branham, is married to one of the two heroines, Callie Hoad, but in requited love with the other heroine, Jen Truro. There is very little difference, because she is a type more than a character, between Callie Hoad and the ambitious and deceitful Connie Dickason in *RAMROD* (1943) and, therefore, it ought not perplex the reader when Callie decides to indulge her personal will to power at the expense of the man she married but whom she does not really love. The reader has no idea why Callie is incapable of loving, save that this is a characteristic of her type, and so she can be shown to align herself with the forces opposing her husband.

Occasionally in one of his earlier novels, such as *THE MAN ON THE BLUE* (1937), the Short hero might be an outlaw, or as in *RAMROD* a man initially on a lower social plane because of some difficulty in his past; but this notwithstanding he is definitely upwardly mobile. Even more often the Short hero, as Reese Branham, is well established within the community; and, in all cases, after proving himself the hero is materially better off than he was at the beginning of the story. The Short hero is a hero by virtue of divine grace; he may bring about the fall of the villains and their schemes, but in so doing he is only acting as an instrument for an immutable predestination. “As God by the effectual working of his call to the elect perfects the salvation to which by his eternal plan he has destined them,” John Calvin wrote in his *INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION* (1536–1559), “so he has his judgments against

the reprobate, by which he executes his plan for them. . . . The supreme Judge. . . . makes way for his predestination when he leaves in blindness those whom he has once condemned and deprived of participation in his light. . . . Therefore, we shall always be confused unless Paul's question comes to mind: Who distinguishes you? [I Corinthians 4:7] By this he meant that some excel others not by their own virtue but by God's grace alone."⁷⁰

PAPER SHERIFF, as many formulary Westerns, illustrates both the tenet of predestination and that of distinction through grace. The genuine Hoads in the story—that is, those not related by marriage—are wicked beyond hope of reclamation. Reese Branham is married to a Hoad because of a youthful fall from the path of righteousness. Fortunately his sin has had no issue; Callie lost the child through miscarriage. Branham's punishment is to live for a time as Callie's husband. Divine grace finally separates him from her and rewards him with Jen Truro because, while Callie and all the Hoads are damned, just as Connie Dickason in RAMROD is damned, Reese is predestined to be one of the elect.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote in the SUMMA THEOLOGICA that the happiness of the blessed in Heaven would be enhanced by watching the punishments of the damned (*poenas damnatorum*). In the Calvinist world-view, this pleasure need not be postponed to the afterlife; already in this life the blessed, in Calvin's words, can witness "the wicked bring upon themselves the just destruction to which they are destined."⁷¹

I have spent this time on this point not merely to demonstrate that there is a gulf between a *film noir* and a Western film which might seem to be related to *film noir* through misogyny or *noir* lighting, but also to contrast the Calvinistic perspective with that found in many *films noirs* where the universe indeed may be a completely amoral one. There is no righteousness in the scene of Walter Neff's expiration—and Billy Wilder instinctively knew there could not be, which is why he changed the ending to the film. When righteousness does enter upon the scene, or Calvinism, as it occasionally does in a *film noir*, it is likely to be jarring, as it is in Byron Haskin's TOO LATE FOR TEARS (United Artists, 1949), where Don Defore pursues Lizabeth Scott, who has murdered two men, one of them her husband, to get possession of \$60,000, and witnesses Scott fall off the balcony to her death, the paper money floating around her as an evening rain—unless, of course, as in THE MALTESE FALCON, we derive special pleasure in seeing a female murderer humiliated, tormented, and finally (in this case literally) being "sent over."

GAS LIGHT, THE LODGER, and HANGOVER SQUARE are all set in Edwardian England (THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE seems also to be set during the same period, only in the United States). IVY (Universal, 1947) directed by Sam Wood is a *film noir* set during the Edwardian Age, although the pathological murderer in it is a female, and not a male as is the case with all the others. In an interesting attempt at off-beat casting, Joan Fontaine played Ivy Lexton, an ambitious and greedy woman who, at the beginning of the picture, visits a fortune-teller and learns of her fate which is to be a murderess. She does not learn

how it will end for her and so, much in the manner of Macbeth, she goes about working toward her goal, making all of the predictions come true. Using her false emotions to appear an innocent, she murders her husband and helps to frame her lover, Dr. Roger Gretorex, played by Patric Knowles, for the crime so she can marry Miles Rushmore, played by Herbert Marshall. Rushmore finds out the truth about her before it is too late and Ivy loses her life by falling down an elevator shaft in an effort to elude the police. IVY just narrowly escapes being a melodrama, whatever the contribution of the *noir* screen style to its photography, but for the fact that Ivy is the central character and her personal *moira* seems to be both voluntary and involuntary. As in the instance of THE LODGER, IVY is based on a story by Marie Belloc-Lowndes. "Ivy's visit to a fortune-teller, accompanied by the jangling of a harpsichord, is a *tour-de-force* of Russell Metty's photographic art," Higham and Greenberg noted in HOLLYWOOD IN THE FORTIES; "as the faces shift from shadow to light and back again, as tulle and lace and shabby hangings melt and refocus, the images achieve a rich beauty."⁷²

TEMPTATION (Universal, 1946) directed by Irving Pichel, released the previous year by the same studio that released IVY, has more than a few similarities with the later film. It is set during the same period, although for location it happens in Egypt and not in England. In an ironic twist, Merle Oberon decides to speed up the poisoning of her husband (who is being killed slowly) only to poison her lover by mistake. The events are narrated in flashback by Oberon's doctor, played by Paul Lucas, and, as Ivy, Oberon kills herself rather than turn herself in to the police. Here the narrative structure, with the *femme fatale* as the central character, is *noir*, but it is consistently contradicted by the visual style which is not *noir* in the least.

Perhaps the most effective and dramatic *film noir* of this kind is SO EVIL MY LOVE (Paramount, 1948) directed by Lewis Allen. It is set in the Victorian Era and Ann Todd was cast as a missionary's widow who falls under the evil influence of Ray Milland. "Once initiated by her lover into the world of schemes, lies, and the lure of a life of luxury," A. M. Karimi remarked about this film, "she follows the path of evil with an iron will and as uncompromisingly as she once followed the path of righteousness. . . ."⁷³ Higham and Greenberg, however, went farther and noted, I believe rightly, that "each gambit is plotted with care, each tiny victory marked up, until we are totally involved in her fate, and Ann Todd's portrait of the character is a masterpiece of the actress' art."⁷⁴ With an incredible degree of calculation, Todd poisons her employer, frames her best friend who is executed for the act, and finally stabs Milland to death in a jealous rage before turning herself in to the police. Suicide, or even accidental death, are not options for the Todd character because the prescription of the narrative is that she has come at last to realize just how evil she has become and so must refuse to flee from a reckoning.

IVY, TEMPTATION, and SO EVIL MY LOVE are all varieties of the inverted detective story: we know who committed the crime. We are, therefore,

more interested in how the crimes came about and, finally, how the *femme fatale* will be stopped. But other genres, or sub-genres, were influenced by the *noir* visual style and ethos besides Westerns and detective stories. Two primary examples would be “fight” pictures and spy dramas.

Fight pictures continue to be popular with audiences, something of a curiosity when you consider how limited they are in terms of plot lines. *THE SET-UP* (RKO, 1949) directed by Robert Wise and *CHAMPION* (United Artists, 1949) directed by Mark Robson are both melodramas which owe much to the *noir* visual style. In *THE SET-UP* Robert Ryan was cast as a fighter at the tail end of his career. He is married to Audrey Totter who does not want to see Ryan fight any more. “Don’t you see you’ll always be one punch away?” she asks him. Ryan tries to placate her by assuring her that he is going to fight his next match so he can invest in a beer hall or a cigar stand. What he does not know is that his manager has fixed the fight for him to take a fall; cynically, however, because he is certain Ryan does not have a chance anyway, he neglects to tell him about the fix. Totter rebels and refuses to attend the fight. The *noir* visual style is used with profound effect to photograph the city at night, filled with hucksters, corruption, and shadows that menace, as Totter walks the streets. Ryan wins the fight only to be met in an alley by the gangsters who had paid money for the fix. There is a jump cut to the reflections of a jazz band as silhouettes against a building wall. Ryan’s hand is broken for good; he will never fight again. But he and Totter, in true melodramatic fashion, find each other again as a result of the experience.

Ryan is a pathetic character. In view of what is meant by tragedy and tragic, it would be inappropriate, as some critics have done, to call him tragic. The same is also true of the arrogant and implacable character portrayed by Kirk Douglas in *CHAMPION*. The plot is essentially the same as that of *THE SET-UP*, but the visual style and Douglas’ energetic overacting belie the *noir* ending given to it. In brief, Douglas is an aging fighter who is to fight in a fixed match; he refuses, however, to throw the fight. Only in his case, instead of being done in by gangsters, Douglas dies in his dressing room from a cerebral hemorrhage induced by the vicious bout. Wise respected the three unities of the Renaissance in his film; *CHAMPION* resorted to the looser, flashback organization of *noir* narrative style. Insofar as Douglas loses his life as a result of his encounter with corruption, a *film noir* narrative structure is suggested; but the ending, however moribund, is nonetheless meant as a triumphant, if ironical, one. It is a case of Douglas’ portrayal working against the Ring Lardner plot, on which the film was based, and even against the character of Midge Kelley as Lardner drew him. In this film, it is the protagonist himself who undermines and even contradicts the *film noir* plot.

At varying points in *DOUBLE INDEMNITY*, Walter Neff evokes the atmosphere of the true *film noir* in what he says. “I couldn’t hear my footsteps,” he comments. “It was the walk of a dead man.” This conjures an image similar to that provided by Peter Lorre in his closing statements in *M*. And then

there are these words: "Yes, Keyes, those fates I was talking about had thrown the switch. The gears had meshed. The time for thinking had run out." It is the presence of these elements, combined with the *noir* visual style, which makes *THE KILLERS* (Universal, 1946) directed by Robert Siodmak a classic example of *film noir* and, as such, somewhat removed from the conventions of the fight picture sub-genre to which it belongs or the experiment in objective style in the dialogue short story by Ernest Hemingway on which it was ostensibly based but to which it bears only the slightest relationship. As John Russell Taylor wrote of it, ". . . the laconic prologue of *THE KILLERS*. . . in which the gunmen come to get their victim in a rundown diner. . . [has] much more to do with the tone and tempo of European cinema than the action-based narrative drive of classic American filmmaking."⁷⁵ In the screenplay of *THE KILLERS* written by Anthony Veiller and, uncredited, John Huston, we have the apogee of the *film noir* perspective: the narrative tries to account for a particular life through flashbacks and recall only to find it to have been meaningless. It is this element which perhaps most of all is *echt* Hemingway.

Kitty Collins, played by Ava Gardner, is the object of passion in *THE KILLERS*, the erotic obsession of Swede, played by Burt Lancaster in his screen debut. She is as Kirke was to Odysseus in her relationship with Swede; and she is first seen singing her siren song. But probably Professor Shadoian is correct in his surmise that, if she did not exist, Swede would have invented her. Certainly Siodmak's direction and the cinematography support this conclusion: Kitty is almost insubstantial and idealized when first seen; later she becomes more a person of flesh and blood. I would substitute the word "male" for "society" in what Professor Shadoian wrote about her, but I do agree that "Kitty Collins resembles many manipulative women of the period, women who seem cursed by their beauty, who cannot do anything but use it destructively. She is more a symbol than a character. *Film noir* is full of appallingly seductive women of deceitfully angelic appearance. The men always buy them a drink, and life suddenly becomes a nightmare. These women are signs of a collective male desperation about the world as something that can be understood and put to right. They appear out of nowhere and wreak instant or eventual havoc. They are destroyed like vampires or vanish like apparitions. They are society's misogynistic fantasy—woman as an object to be feared, woman as scapegoat for the world's ills. *Noir* films both celebrate these women as icons of idealistic fantasy and loathe them as incarnations of an insatiable and debilitating sexuality. They are also, like most extended characterizations of women in. . . [*films noirs*], indexes to male simplicity."⁷⁶

As the reporter in *CITIZEN KANE*, the role of the inquirer into Swede's life is given to another kind of investigator, rather than a private detective, in this case an insurance investigator, Reardon, played by Edmund O'Brien. Sam Levine was cast as Sam Lubinsky, Swede's close boyhood friend. When Reardon calls on him, Sam is a cop, married to Lily, played by Virginia Christine, the girl Swede rejected for Kitty. Sam knows he was second choice; Lily seems

rather bored by domestic life. Siodmak comments on their relationship with a lovebird in a cage dangling conspicuously in the frame. There seem to be two alternatives in life: live dangerously, as Swede did, battling his way up as a boxer and then, in his passion for Kitty, allowing himself to become involved in a robbery, only to be deceived by Kitty, to end up alone and waiting to be killed by the hit men sent by the head of the gang whom Swede is in a position to finger; or to live the drab, family-oriented, dull life of Sam and Lily. The robbery is interestingly photographed, from a high angle, in a single take lasting about three minutes. Lawrence Alloway may well be correct in concluding in *VIOLENT AMERICA: THE MOVIES 1946–1964* (1971) that, structurally, “the film is organized so that at the end past and present converge, maximum violence and final explanation arrive together, blood and knowledge support one another”⁷⁷; but, notwithstanding, as a film and as an example of *film noir*, the scenes of *THE KILLERS* are more satisfying than the whole, the parts more striking than the ensemble. Unlike the fighters in *THE SET-UP* and *CHAMPION*, Swede winds up with everything dead inside of him, alone, tormented, in a darkened room, waiting neither heroically nor stoically but passively for death to come.

The prescription in *THE KILLERS* would seem to be that greed for money leads to corruption and death; this same prescription can also be found in *BODY AND SOUL* (United Artists, 1947) directed by Robert Rossen with a screenplay by Abraham Polonsky. Polonsky clearly condemned the free-enterprise system as well as the American success ethic, something that did not go unnoticed by H.U.A.C. John Garfield was cast as Charlie Davis, the product of slum poverty who lets nothing and no one stand in his way to become a champion boxer. Both he and Polonsky would become victims to the Congressional investigation of liberalism which—to anticipate—was one of the factors which finally brought about the disappearance of the *film noir*. All of the fight pictures I have mentioned regarded boxing somewhat cynically as a business, perhaps *CHAMPION* most obviously, but few characters in any of them would be a match for the gambler Roberts, played by Lloyd Goff, with whom Davis allies himself in his bid for success. “It’s a free country,” Roberts quips. “Everything’s for sale.” For Roberts, life is just “addition and subtraction. Everything else is conversation.” “I just want to be a success,” Davis remarks at one point. “You know, every man for himself.” *BODY AND SOUL* even incorporates the theme of the two heroines from Western fiction. Alice, played by Hazel Brooks, is the social-climbing gold-digger familiar from hard-boiled detective fiction; she abandons Davis for a rich playboy when it no longer appears as if he will be a winner. Peg, played by Lilli Palmer, is the “good” girl, the one who inspires Davis, along with Davis’ mother, to reject the corruption of the fight game. As in all of these fight pictures, Davis is ordered by the underworld to throw a fight which, instead, he wins. Polonsky wanted a downbeat ending, one to equal *THE KILLERS*. Rossen refused to go so far. The last scene, as Rossen revised it, has Roberts confronting Davis. “What are

you going to do?" Davis asks defiantly, "kill me? Everybody dies." Rather than a downbeat ending, it is deliberately vague. Yet, we can agree, I think, with Richard Corliss that the "claustrophobic concentration of mood and dialogue, of character and characterization. . . . makes *BODY AND SOUL* not only the bleakest (and, perversely, the most exhilarating) of boxing movies. . . .,"⁷⁸ but it is not really a *film noir*.

FORCE OF EVIL (M-G-M, 1948) was the first film that Polonsky would direct before his blacklisting and it would be 1969 before he would direct again. He also collaborated on the screenplay with the author of the novel on which the film was based, Ira Wolfert. John Garfield was again the star, this time cast as Joe Morse, a lawyer working for a racketeer named Tucker, played by Roy Roberts. It is Tucker's intention to take over all the numbers operations in the city and Morse's job is to see that the law is held at bay. A conflict in loyalties occurs when Tucker tries to take over the small numbers business of Joe's brother, Leo, played by Thomas Gomez, and Leo resists. Tucker allies himself with another mobster played by Paul Fix and together they engineer Leo's death. After a period of anguished moral dilemma in which Joe must finally put aside his dreams for wealth and success, he kills both Tucker and his ally and walks down to the side of the river to retrieve his brother's body, a figurative descent into hell accompanied on the sound track by streetwise incantations of blank verse reminiscent of Greek tragedy. In fact, this similarity was readily discerned by Higham and Greenberg who commented that "the dialogue, with its Joycean repetitions and elaborate unpunctuated paragraphing, is unique in the American cinema, and at times achieves a quality of Greek drama, a poetry of the modern city."⁷⁹

In an interview with Eric Sherman and Martin Rubin for their book, *THE DIRECTOR'S EVENT* (1970), Polonsky discussed the conclusion to *FORCE OF EVIL*. "It was a mixture of cop-out . . . and significance," he said. "It was a gangster film, and in those days, censorship was much stronger. So, in a way, his last sentence had to say, 'I'm going to see that something is done to get rid of all this corruption.' People say that to themselves all the time, and I wouldn't consider that, as you must know, a significant remark then or now. That's not the way things happen. How much history do we have to have happen to know that? So, it was partly a cop-out. It was saying to the censor, 'Look. It's O.K. Don't worry about it. He had a change of heart.' But that was *completely* on the surface. I didn't mean it at all. What I really meant were all those words at the end and all those images: 'Down, down, down.' At the end of the picture, in Garfield's case, it's like being left back in school. I remember in Thomas Mann's *THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN*, when he talks about Hans Castorp's youth. Hans is in school, and he gets left back—and what a *relief* it was to get left back! Because *then* you don't have to get ahead any more. A kind of liberation and freedom comes from failure. . . . In general, that's what the ending was: vague."⁸⁰ The film opens with an extremely high angle shot showing people scurrying along city streets. The force of evil is American business

practices. As it turned out, political patriots felt that such an unAmerican attitude could not be permitted to go unpunished. But more of that later. . . .

The *noir* film style also affected the spy film, particularly those based on the works of Eric Ambler. JOURNEY INTO FEAR (RKO, 1943) was directed by Norman Foster with uncredited assistance from Orson Welles who was also cast in the picture as Colonel Haki of the Turkish Secret Police. "A film is a dream," Orson Welles once said. "A dream is perhaps vulgar, stupid, dull, and shapeless; it is perhaps a nightmare. But a dream is never an illusion."⁸¹ To the extent that JOURNEY INTO FEAR, at least pictorially, has an oneiric appearance, which also carries over into the plot and accounts for much of the plot (which is to say much is *not* accounted for in any other way), Welles' influence on the film is evident.

Colonel Haki, as in the novel on which it was based, is also a character in THE MASK OF DIMITRIOS (Warner's, 1944) directed by Jean Negulesco. Zachary Scott, a familiar face in *films noirs*, made his screen debut in this film, cast as Dimitrios. As also in the novel, the strongest scene in the film is the retrospective, "Belgrade, 1926," but otherwise, especially in its casting and execution, the film version falls short of the atmosphere and power of its source. For example, Peter Lorre is totally miscast as the protagonist; he simply does not look the part Ambler intended for his narrator and point-of-view character: the average man confronted by incarnate evil. Borde and Chaumeton were somewhat tongue-in-cheek in describing this film as "an inquiry in the manner of CITIZEN KANE concerning the personality of a redoubtable adventurer, Dimitrios Makropoulos, after his body is fished out of the Bosphorus. His personality is revealed partially by his victims only to be completed by learning after a tenebrous voyage to Sofia, Belgrade, and Paris that he is still alive. Not for a very long time, however. . . ." ⁸²

I would categorize both of these films as examples of *film gris*, but there is no question that both were tremendously indebted in their visual contents and their narrative techniques by those common to the *film noir* style.

Two other sub-genres were equally affected: the psychological melodrama and what has come to be termed the "caper" film. THE DARK PAST (Columbia, 1948) is a psychological melodrama directed by Rudolph Maté. It was a remake of BLIND ALIBI (Columbia, 1939) done in the *noir* style with the story, this time, backtold by criminal psychiatrist Dr. Andrew Collins, played by Lee J. Cobb. It was quite as simplistic in its approach to Freudian psychology as GEHEIMNISSE EINER SEELE (German, 1926) had been. William Holden was cast as Al Walker, a psychopathic killer who has escaped from prison and who hides out, with his gang, in Dr. Collins' house. Walker is haunted by a recurring dream. Collins manages in a matter of hours to interpret the dream as a manifestation of the Oedipus Complex hiding the memory of how Walker turned in his father to the police so he could have exclusive possession of his mother. This interpretation has such a profound effect on Walker that he is readily persuaded by Dr. Collins to turn himself in to the authorities. Of course, a reader

of psychoanalytic literature might well point out that Freud himself in his essay, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937), declared psychoanalytic therapy to be a lengthy business and opined that "if we wish to fulfill the more exacting demands which are now made upon therapeutic analysis, we shall not shorten its duration whether as a means or an end."⁸³ Unquestionably, the pacing of the analysis is typically American in *THE DARK PAST*, which is to say it has instant results; but it is also worth noting that in the German cinema, as in the American, psychoanalysis was employed as a means to bring about a "happy ending." *Veritas vos liberabit* [Truth will make you free], albeit in *THE DARK PAST* *veritas vos celer liberabit!* Freud would certainly not have endorsed the sentiment of the latter and, I suspect, he would have scoffed at equating liberation from neurotic symptoms with happiness. Frederick J. Hoffman in *FREUDIANISM AND THE LITERARY MIND* (1957) explored the impact of Freudian theory on modern literature and decided "if psychoanalysis contributed anything worth preserving or even studying in the literature of this period, it is not to be found in extravagant demonstrations of sensuality or adolescent attacks upon the mores, but rather in its sponsorship of, or at least its concessions to, introspection."⁸⁴ If analytical theory had any salutary effect via its use in psychological melodramas, it was in this similar emphasis on introspection, a perspective so alien to the American cinema prior to the advent of *film noir*.

CRISS CROSS (Universal, 1949) directed by Robert Siodmak is a seminal caper film that is also a *film noir*. As Tom Flinn observed in his article, "Three Faces of *Film Noir*," "the sharp, fluid, high-contrast photography and low-key lighting in *CRISS CROSS* are the work of Franz Planer, another old UFA colleague of Siodmak's and another link between Weimar cinema and *film noir*. Siodmak, himself, never lost a taste for the 'disguised' symbolism found in German silents. In one symbolic cut he juxtaposes his principals, appropriately clad in black and white, to form a visual pun on 'criss cross.'" ⁸⁵ The film opens to the planning of a robbery. Burt Lancaster then begins backtelling how he came to be in this predicament of being one of the principals in the caper. It all started . . . with a woman, of course. In this case, the *femme fatale* is played by Yvonne DeCarlo. When she dumps him to marry cheap hood Dan Duryea, Lancaster leaves town, figuring he will get her out of his system. When he returns eight months later, he says: "It went all one way that Sunday afternoon. It was in the cards." DeCarlo has now left Duryea. Lancaster tells her: "You always know what you want." It turns out that Stephen McNally, a cop and a friend of the family, was the one who forced DeCarlo to marry Duryea. "I know it when I see a bad one." Lancaster and DeCarlo resume their relationship even though she has supposedly returned to Duryea. When Duryea discovers the two of them, Lancaster proposes the robbery as a way they can all come out. Lancaster has second thoughts during the heist, tries to stop it, and is wounded. Duryea makes off with half the money. Waking up in a hospital bed, Lancaster finds himself a local hero; but McNally suspects the truth. He

warns Lancaster that now Duryea will try to kill him. When Lancaster is abducted, he talks to his abductor via the rearview mirror and convinces him to take him to DeCarlo instead. There will be more in it for him if he does. DeCarlo is not the least concerned about Lancaster; she wants to save her own skin. Duryea shows up and guns both of them as the police sirens sound.

While *THE KILLERS* might be classed as at least having a caper element in its plot, it is not the purebred type of caper film that *CRISS CROSS* is, or *THE ASPHALT JUNGLE* (M-G-M, 1950) directed by John Huston. I would tend to agree with James Robert Parish and Michael R. Pitts in *THE GREAT GANGSTER FILMS* (1976) that *THE ASPHALT JUNGLE* “is nearly the last really good film directed by Huston. . . .” It also went a long way in establishing all of the key stereotypical characters usually found in subsequent entries in this sub-genre of the gangster film: the mild-mannered ex con who is a mastermind, a trigger-happy gunman from the bush leagues, a crooked society lawyer who acts as a fence, the moll who loves him, and an assortment of emotionally and physically crippled grotesques who comprise the gang. Dore Shary had come to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer from RKO where he had won critical acclaim for the social realism of the films he produced. Louis B. Mayer was still, technically, in charge of production at M-G-M and his attitude toward the film was wholly characteristic: “That ASPHALT PAVEMENT thing is full of nasty, ugly people doing nasty, ugly things. I wouldn’t walk across the room to see a thing like that.”⁸⁶

Huston’s film opens with four shots establishing the urban milieu of *film noir*: the first shot, taken in Cincinnati, the next three in Los Angeles. This is not a particular city, therefore, but *the* city. The shots are of a desolate world occupied almost exclusively by criminals and the police. Suspense is created, first, by making the viewer keenly interested in the planning of the caper, and, second, by watching the execution of the plan. The Reversal, of course, comes in that nothing works out as planned; and, insofar as the criminals are all killed or captured, it would seem that the Recognition is that crime does not pay. Yet, as is the case with *SIDE STREET* (M-G-M, 1949), directed the previous year by Anthony Mann, Huston created sympathy for his criminals and he went Mann one better in generating respect for the way these criminals commit a crime. It is perhaps for this reason that what Borde and Chaumeton concluded about *SIDE STREET* also holds true for *THE ASPHALT JUNGLE*: “Le vol peut parfois payer.”⁸⁷ There is a definite thrill about it all, notwithstanding final defeat, which is also the dramatic *praxis* predominant in Ernest Hemingway’s fiction.

THE KILLING (United Artists, 1956) directed by Stanley Kubrick is visually a *film gris* but *film noir* in its narrative structure. Sterling Hayden, who had starred in *THE ASPHALT JUNGLE*, starred again, only this time instead of playing a murderous hayseed he is actually the mastermind behind a \$2 million heist at a racetrack. Kubrick did something interesting with chronology in the film. A character is introduced and then he is brought up to the time just before the heist; then time goes back again and another of the plotting felons is brought

to the same point in time. The *noir* quality in the narrative is in part due to Kubrick's intention of building the film toward the Recognition that human beings and their plans are eminently fallible. Here it is chance, in the sense of *rota Fortunae*, which does in the conspirators. The opposite seems to be the case in a caper *film noir* such as *PLUNDER ROAD* (20th-Fox, 1957) directed by Hubert Cornfield where the whole point of the plot is to watch the *moirai* destroy the conspirators. In this film, gold bound for the San Francisco mint is stolen. The gang, led by Eddie played by Gene Raymond, melts down the gold and fashions it into car bumpers for a Cadillac which are then chrome plated. A traffic jam snares the Cadillac at a bridge and a woman's car locks bumpers with it, revealing to the police the gold beneath the chrome plating. Eddie leaps off the bridge, trying to land on a moving truck on the freeway below, only to lose his grip and be crushed in the oncoming traffic. If, perhaps, the gold had been stashed in the trunk of the Cadillac, the gang might have gotten away with it; but the narrative structure would seem to imply that no matter what the plan had been, it would have been foiled by the fates.

DARK CITY (Paramount, 1950) directed by William Dieterle, *THE DARK CORNER*, which has already been mentioned, *THE DARK MIRROR* (Universal, 1946) directed by Robert Siodmak, *DARK PASSAGE* (Warner's, 1947) directed by Delmar Daves, and *DARK WATERS* (United Artists, 1944) directed by André de Toth are all melodramas that, because of their suggestive titles and their occasional use of the *noir* visual style, are usually cited by critics as important films in the *noir* canon. *DARK CITY* is a fine example of a *film noir malgré*. It opens to what seems to be *film noir*. Charleton Heston, as Danny Haley, is a college graduate drummed out of the Army for murdering his wife's lover. He is part of a seedy gambling ring which fleeces Arthur Winant, played by Don Defore, who then commits suicide. This action makes the gamblers apprehensive about cashing the check he wrote out to them. Then, one by one, they begin to be murdered. Elizabeth Scott was cast as Haley's girlfriend, but her role was confined to singing torch songs and "being" the love interest. Haley calls on the widow, feels compassion for her plight in trying to raise her children by herself, discovers that Winant's brother, played by Mike Mazurki, is a pathological murderer and behind the killings. He develops at once into a full-fledged hero and saves the day for everyone, rehabilitating himself in the process. This is quite obviously a transition film, between the *noir* of American life and the patriotic celebration of family life and values which were to become the dominant film prescriptions of the 'Fifties.

THE DARK MIRROR cast Olivia de Havilland as twin sisters, one of them the typical *noir femme fatale*, the other the prescription as to what the ideal woman should be: kind, loving, and passive, potentially a good mother. One of the two murdered a gentleman caller and it is up to psychologist Dr. Scott Elliott, played by Lew Ayres, to figure out who did it. The evil sister almost succeeds in killing her sister and assuming her identity, but Elliott, with his

Freudian acumen, saves the day and, of course, has fallen in requited love with the good sister. It is obvious that Siodmak, given this script, wanted to evoke all of the German atmosphere of the *Doppelgänger* typical of all the versions of DER STUDENT VON PRAG, but the results are quite mixed. The film works best as a prescription as to what is acceptable female behavior, and what is not; and how one must be extremely canny to tell the difference between females because the “good woman” and the *femme fatale* often look alike.

DARK PASSAGE is the story of a man wrongly imprisoned for the murder of his wife. He escapes from prison and undergoes plastic surgery, only to look exactly like Humphrey Bogart. Prior to his operation, the first person point-of-view camera is used; afterwards, the camera assumes the third person observer role. Lauren Bacall, cast as Irene Jansen, followed the trial and was convinced of the innocence of the Bogart character. It is she who helps him throughout the film in his effort to locate the real murderer. Agnes Morehead, cast as Madge Rapf, is the kind of woman, as the script puts it, for whom “causing unhappiness is the only thing that gives her happiness.” The Bogart character indirectly causes two people to die in his quest, including Madge who turns out to be the murderer, and somewhat more directly a third, but he feels no special remorse; he is not haunted by any guilt; and he is rewarded at the end by fleeing to South America—with Madge dead he cannot prove her guilt—where he is joined by the Bacall character. Richard Whitehall in an article on Delmer Daves in FILMS AND FILMING remarked that the “strange Teutonic undertones . . . [are] so remarkable that it is difficult to know why the film’s unique qualities have been so consistently overlooked.”⁸⁸ I would suggest that the film’s plot has had a lot to do with it, especially when combined with the rather lackluster performances of Bogart and Bacall which are such as to permit Morehead and Tom D’Andrea, cast as a sympathetic cab driver, to steal every scene they are in and completely overshadow the principals.

Joan Harrison came from England with Alfred Hitchcock as his personal assistant and script-writer on REBECCA (United Artists, 1940) and soon branched off on her own as a producer, beginning with PHANTOM LADY, which she produced at Universal, and then she moved over to Fox to produce DARK WATERS. In a way this latter film is as much a Gothic as REBECCA with Merle Oberon cast as a young heiress who comes to live in a large mansion in the Louisiana bayous. Of course, the people with whom she lives are imposters and she is the object of a plot to kill her so that her money can be seized. She is saved from this fate by Franchot Tone, a doctor who falls in love with her. The film also bears a similarity to GASLIGHT since the means of doing in Oberon is that of driving her insane. Oberon and Tone are too starched and clean to make anyone believe that the climate is sweltering and tropical. About the only truly *noir* aspect of this film is the ingenious use of jungle sounds, birdcalls, and the sighing cicadas which do tend to make the atmosphere seem oppressive and claustrophobic.

V

Louis de Rochemont made his reputation in the 'Thirties producing a series of short subjects with Roy E. Larsen, circulation editor for TIME magazine, which were titled THE MARCH OF TIME. Each one of these subjects was introduced by a narrator, and was closed by him, in what has since become a cliché but which, at the time, lent an appearance of verisimilitude. The U.S. government took over this narrative style for many of its own training and propaganda films and so de Rochemont probably had a valid point when he approached Darryl F. Zanuck at Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation and proposed producing a series of pseudo-documentary feature films which would combine this narrative reporting style with a dramatization of events.

Henry Hathaway was under contract to the studio at the time and had a long-standing preference for location shooting, rather than using studio sets, since he had directed outdoor dramas based on Zane Grey's novels. De Rochemont produced and Hathaway directed THE HOUSE ON 92ND STREET (20th-Fox, 1945) which was done with the full cooperation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation which even supplied the studio with actual footage of Fifth Column agents at work, filmed secretly by their own agents. De Rochemont convinced J. Edgar Hoover to permit him to make use of F.B.I. offices, personnel, and equipment in shooting the picture. The story, based on a true case, tells of how an American agent, working undercover, is able to expose thirty-three Nazi agents working in the employ of a master spy, called Mr. Christopher, who turns out to be a woman, played by Signe Hasso.

I have already quoted Borde and Chaumeton earlier in this chapter that "the American police procedural documentary is in reality a documentary glorifying the police" and that "there is nothing of this kind in *noir* films." It is wrong, therefore, to classify a pseudo-documentary such as THE HOUSE ON 92ND STREET as a *film noir*. True, it was filmed on actual locations in New York City and therefore has the look and the feel of a city; it does feature a wide variety of detection devices, from chemical analysis to spectrography; but anything approaching a *noir* mood is totally absent. In fact, most of these pseudo-documentaries, in terms of their narrative structures, are the very antithesis of *film noir*. "These impersonal records of crime, striking though they are, finally lack the magic of the black film," Higham and Greenberg wrote, "which depended on the recreation of a total imaginative world within the studio. Reality, disorganized and loose, broke up the perfect cohesion of a universe that once had—from UFA via Paris—unleashed itself without restraint from sound stage to audience."⁸⁹

Where confusion sets in is that sometimes these pseudo-documentaries employ the *noir* visual style which exists almost as a direct contradiction to the narrative structure. In T-MEN (Eagle-Lion, 1947) directed by Anthony Mann, for example, Dennis O'Keefe and Alfred Ryder were cast as Treasury agents tracking down a counterfeiting ring which is also responsible for the murder of

an agent. Reed Hadley opens the film with the documentary-style voice-over narration while visually the viewer is situated on a street just off Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles in the dark of night. The *noir* visual style becomes so pervasive at times that the criminal milieu, in which the film is set, seems to alter, or at least affect, the physical appearance of the heroes.

In *THE STREET WITH NO NAME* (20th-Fox, 1948) it was the purpose of the film to prescribe how pre-war juvenile delinquency in the criminal milieu following the war turned into professional criminality. The film was set in a fictitious Central City to make the point that it could happen in any city. William Keighly directed and sought to utilize many of the visual devices apparent in *T-MEN* and, before that, in *BOOMERANG* (20th-Fox, 1947) directed by Elia Kazan. The latter was produced by de Rochemont and it was a true story updated from 1924 concerning the murder of a clergyman on a street in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The face of the murderer was obscured. Only a gun coming out of the shadows pointed at the back of the clergyman's head while cutting to a woman's face when the shot is heard off camera is visible before a figure, perhaps that of the murderer, is seen running away down the ill-lit street. The citizens are mean, petty, and stupidly vengeful, but the integrity of the American way of life is upheld by courageous State Attorney Henry Harvey, played by Dana Andrews. The political corruption in the small town threatens at times to become as engulfing as big city crime in a film such as *THE STREET WITH NO NAME*, but in all cases it is only a momentary threat and one that can and will be dispelled.

The *film noir* influence is even more visible in *HE WALKED BY NIGHT* (Eagle-Lion, 1948) directed by Alfred Werker with some uncredited direction by Anthony Mann. Using actual Los Angeles exteriors, the story is concerned with a psychopathic cop killer. Richard Basehart was cast as the psychopath and, rather as the young couple in *GUN CRAZY*, his murderous conduct has no evident motivation. Basehart's use of the city sewer system allows for both some striking photography and a metaphorical view of the modern city from its dregs.

THE NAKED CITY (Universal, 1948) directed by Jules Dassin and produced by Mark Hellinger who himself supplied the voice-over narration is *noir* neither in plot nor style. It is merely a slow-moving police procedural film in which the only known actor is Barry Fitzgerald as a police lieutenant, but his penchant for Irish songs and eccentricities detract rather effectively from his performance. Hellinger set the film in New York. Robert Ottoson, comparing it with *THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS* (Republic, 1953) directed by John Auer, said of the latter that it "was Republic Studio's answer to *THE NAKED CITY*. Filmed on location in Chicago and taking place over the period of one night, *THE CITY NEVER SLEEPS* never becomes the homage to the big city that is found in *THE NAKED CITY*."⁹⁰ No doubt, but it is no more a *film noir*, whatever the use of *noir* visual style in certain sequences, and Mark Hellinger at his most sentimental would not have permitted himself the indulgence

of casting Chill Wills as a rookie cop's guardian angel who, appropriately, disappears at the end after all the corrupt figures are either dead or under arrest!

Truman Bradley was the narrator for *CALL NORTHSIDE 777* (20th-Fox, 1948) directed by Henry Hathaway. Filmed on location in Chicago, James Stewart was cast as a newspaper reporter who—in what is termed a true story—becomes interested in the case of Joe Majczek, played by Richard Conte. The picture begins with the shooting in a speakeasy in 1932 for which Majczek has been sentenced to ninety-nine years in jail. The tough and cynical persona of the Stewart character in the beginning is in distinct contrast to the high-key lighting; by the latter part of the film, Stewart becomes the impassioned man with a cause that he was in Frank Capra's *MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON* (Columbia, 1939) while the visual style has become increasingly *noir*, accompanying Stewart's frantic search for a key witness through the dives and low-life bars in Chicago's Polish section and concluding with an interview in a tenement building at night with the sounds of the overhead seeming to be menacingly near. Stewart, however, is successful and Majczek is released. It was the faith his mother had in him, and his wife, and Stewart, and ultimately the American way of life which have saved him.

CANON CITY (Eagle-Lion, 1948) directed by Crane Wilbur was more timely yet. Following a prison break from Colorado State Prison in Canon City, Eagle-Lion secured the rights to film the story, came on location with its cast and crew and integrated the actors with actual inmates, even naming them after the escaped convicts, and casting the warden to play himself. It has none of the *noir* atmosphere of *BRUTE FORCE* (Universal, 1947) directed by Jules Dassin and about which, with some justification, Alfred Appel, Jr., could write in his article, "The End of the Road: Dark Cinema and Lolita," that it "is the most *noir* of all prison movies because it focuses on personal obsessions as well as violent action."⁹¹

John Alton was the cinematographer on *T-MEN*, *HE WALKED BY NIGHT*, and *CANON CITY*, and, unquestionably, his camera work on *MYSTERY STREET* (M-G-M, 1950) directed by John Sturges contributed significantly to the *noir* appearance of many of the scenes in that film, whereas the story is basically a police procedural in which Edmon Ryan murders a bar maid to protect his reputation and is tracked down through the persistence of police investigator Lieutenant Peter Morales played by Ricardo Montalban.

Anthony Mann, in the meantime, co-wrote the original screen story for *FOLLOW ME QUIETLY* (RKO, 1949) directed by Richard Fleischer. As in *HE WALKED BY NIGHT*, the plot is concerned with a psychopathic killer, only in this instance he preys on those he considers to be social scum; and he is finally tracked down through expert police work, committing suicide as a result.

The most telling difference between the pseudo-documentary police procedural films and *films noirs* is in their prescriptions. The pseudo-documentary may readily admit to the prevalence of crime and criminals in post-war Amer-

ica, but in every case the duly constituted authorities are more than a match for them.

VI

Perhaps no author of suspense and mystery fiction inspired more *films noirs* through his works in the 'Forties than did Cornell Woolrich. *STREET OF CHANCE* (Paramount, 1942) was directed by Jack Hively and was based on *THE BLACK CURTAIN* from Woolrich's "Black" series. Frank Thompson, played by Burgess Meredith, is hit on the head by a falling beam. When he comes to, he finds himself carrying unfamiliar articles stamped with unfamiliar initials. He returns home only to find that his wife has moved. He traces her and, once they meet, his wife explains to him that he disappeared over a year ago. Thompson has no recollection of what happened during that year. Notwithstanding, he returns to his old job as an accountant and resumes his former existence. He notices that he is being followed by a suspicious man and this circumstance convinces him he must learn what happened during the missing year. He has his wife go to stay with her mother and then returns to the area where he first became aware of himself again. It is here that he meets Ruth Dillon, played by Claire Trevor. She claims to be his fiancée and insists that the two of them worked as servants for a wealthy man whom Thompson, in his other identity, murdered. The man following Thompson turns out to be Police Detective Joe Marucci, played by Sheldon Leonard, and it is Marucci who shoots Ruth just before she is about to plug Thompson. He also is able to hear her dying confession, that she had committed the murder. Theodor Sparkuhl, the cinematographer, was well trained in the German Expressionist school and it is to him probably, more than to Jack Hively, that the film owes its *noir* visual style.

However, *STREET OF CHANCE*, just as *PHANTOM LADY* (Universal, 1944) directed by Robert Siodmak, is melodrama and not *film noir* due primarily to its happy ending. Yet both films are notable for the effective use they make of jazz music on the sound track and jazz musicians as a grotesque and even threatening manifestation of big city life. John Russell Taylor wrote about *PHANTOM LADY* that "it takes place in a dark fantasy world, which is so powerfully projected that it never occurs to us to question it. In this it places itself very much in a European tradition, and there are a number of specific points where it seems to be making conscious reference to the silent German cinema. . . ." ⁹² Tom Flinn, in writing about the picture, singled out the jam session and felt that it "ranks as one of the most effective bits of cinema produced in the 1940s. Siodmak gives full rein to his expressionistic propensities in a rhythmically cut riot of angles that 'climaxes' in a drum solo that melds sex and music into a viable metaphor of tension and release." ⁹³ For Higham and Greenberg, this sequence and the shots of the city indicate that "at the gates of the respectable, the jungle is already thrusting upwards." ⁹⁴ Siodmak

also made a truly effective use of sound and *noir* visual menace when Ella Raines trails the bartender, her high heels echoing a persistent intimidation; whereas in the scene where Franchot Tone, as the real murderer, Lombard, is about to kill Elisha Cook, Jr., the camera focuses on his hands rather in the fashion of Robert Wiene's *ORLACS HÄNDE* [*ORLAC'S HANDS*] (German, 1925). What spoils the picture is its second half, which is strictly anticlimactic. Lombard's culpability is revealed far too soon so that Siodmak could indulge in his characterization, making him a Nietzschean with dialogue such as, "When you've got my gifts, you can't afford to let them get away." Raines is cast as Scott Henderson's secretary, Kansas, and so her holding the Dictaphone with Alan Curtis' voice, cast as Henderson, murmuring "every night. . . . every night," carries a prescription: the domestication of the working girl. Thomas Gomez, cast as the sympathetic police officer, is given a ridiculous bit of dialogue wherein he would convince the viewer that every murderer is insane and so, on this basis, ostracizes himself from the rest of society.

BLACK ANGEL (Universal, 1946) directed by Roy William Neill follows the Woolrich novel on which it was based more closely than the previous two films and perhaps as a consequence of this, coupled with the fact that it focuses on a protagonist who indeed is also the culprit while trying to discover the culprit, ranks as a notable *film noir*. Dan Duryea, too often typecast in films, was cast as Marty Blair, a composer who becomes an alcoholic when his wife, Mavis, leaves him to find her fortune by using her looks and her body. When Mavis is found murdered, Marty seems a logical suspect, but he has an alibi. In the meantime, Kirk Bennett is accused of the crime because he was known to have gone to Mavis' apartment to retrieve some incriminating letters which Mavis intended to send to his wife, Catherine, played by June Vincent. I could not agree with Blake Lewis more in his conclusion about this film that "certainly, the opening sequence with its complex boom shot from the street to the interior of Mavis' penthouse apartment and the expressionistic recreation of the murder through Marty's drunken consciousness effectively realize the potential of the material. Likewise, the Duryea character is so carefully drawn that the climax of the story has a feeling of genuine tragedy."⁹⁵

DEADLINE AT DAWN (RKO, 1946) directed by Harold Clurman has a very similar plot. A young sailor on shore leave finds himself a suspect in the murder of a nightclub hostess in whose apartment he had been earlier in the evening. He enlists the help of a taxi dancer, played by Susan Hayward, and a friendly cab driver played by Paul Lucas, in trying to prove his innocence in one night. The nocturnal world of New York City characters, whom Woolrich could draw with such sympathy, is marred in the film by Clifford Odets' screenplay which, in terms of dialogue, is totally out of keeping with the characters in this *film gris*, making, for instance, Lucas' cab driver sound more as a professor of philosophy than what he is supposed to be.

Peter Lorre was cast as Marko, a suspicious nightclub owner, in *BLACK ANGEL*. In *THE CHASE* (United Artists, 1946) directed by Arthur Ripley and

based on Woolrich's novel, *THE BLACK PATH OF FEAR*, he played the murderous assistant to a gangster. What is so disappointing about *THE CHASE* is how much the screenplay deviated from the original novel. In the film, Bob Cummings, cast as the *noir* protagonist, is a veteran down on his luck hired to be chauffeur to a gangster. He proceeds to fall in love with the gangster's wife. At this point, the deviation begins. Instead of going to Havana with the wife, Chuck Scott, the character played by Cummings, only dreams that he does, that Lorna, the wife, played by Michele Morgan, is stabbed to death there, and that he is framed for the crime. The cinematographer, Franz Planer, who had had his training in the silent German cinema, gave this dream sequence the proper expressionistic and *noir* visual style, but this is contradicted by the narrative structure which has Scott awake, only for the gangster and his henchmen to be killed while trying to stop his flight with Lorna. The melodrama ends with the promise of them living happily ever after.

THE GUILTY (Monogram, 1947) directed by John Reinhardt bears a *film noir* narrative structure because the Woolrich short story on which it was based has this structure, but the visual style is standard, low-budget fare. The coincidences and contradictions in the original story also could not be effectively filmed. The story opens with Mike Carr, played by Don Castle, sitting in a bar telling the bartender how a year ago he was in love with one of two twins. One of them, Estelle, is vicious; the other, Linda, is a "good" girl. Bonita Granville played the twins. Mike was in love with Linda and Estelle had tried to break them apart. Linda then was murdered and Mike helped capture her murderer. However, as it turns out, it was actually Mike who committed the murder, thinking that Linda was in fact Estelle!

FEAR IN THE NIGHT (Paramount, 1947) directed by Maxwell Shane was remade as *NIGHTMARE* (United Artists, 1956), also directed by Maxwell Shane. The former is the superior film, but that is not saying very much since both are melodramas suffering from the same ridiculous plot contrivances. In the earlier film, De Forest Kelley is dreaming about committing a murder in a room surrounded by mirrors and that there is a woman in the room who sees him do it. When he awakens, he finds he has certain items which he dreamt came into his possession in the murder room. With the help of his girlfriend and a friendly policeman, the plot is solved: Kelley committed the murder while in a state of hypnosis. Obviously, Woolrich knew as little about hypnotic suggestion as the people working on this film; the remake could and did do nothing to make this ridiculous plot more credible.

Another melodrama based on a Woolrich short story which fails as a film, as it fails as a *film noir*, is *FALL GUY* (Monogram, 1947) directed by Reginald LeBorg. In this picture, the protagonist finds himself innocently implicated in a murder. A cop who is his friend springs him from jail and together they try to catch the real murderer. In this case, it turns out to be the guardian of the protagonist's girlfriend who murdered his own mistress and then tried to frame the protagonist by injecting in him a drug which induced amnesia. Frankly, a

suitable punishment, I believe, for any writer or filmmaker who ever again resorts to amnesia for any reason in a plot would be to have to watch this film no less than 999 times!

A variation on PHANTOM LADY was the plot of I WOULDN'T BE IN YOUR SHOES (Monogram, 1948) directed by William Nigh. It is a melodrama in which a husband and wife dance team find, to their dismay, that a pair of custom-made shoes belonging to the husband has been implicated in a murder. When the husband is arrested, the wife joins forces with a police detective to expose the real murderer. With a screenplay by Steve Fisher, perhaps one ought to expect more in the way of dialogue and incident. Of these three characters, I shall leave it up to the reader to guess who the murderer turns out to be.

It is due to a combination of Edward G. Robinson's outstanding performance as John Triton, a fortune-teller who really does have the gift of accurate premonition, and John Farrow's direction which makes THE NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES (Paramount, 1948) almost a paradigm of the *film noir*. In the chapter on tragedy, I quoted Chrysippus as having said, "*vaticinato probat fati necessitatem*" [prophecy proves the necessity of Fate]. Because Triton does have the power of premonition, he is doomed to live a life of total torment. He knows what will happen and he is powerless to do anything to change it. Indeed, so convincing is Robinson's portrayal that, as the story unfolds, one indeed comes to prefer the illusion of free will even knowing it to be an illusion to knowing what will happen and being impotent. Triton even knows when it will cost him his own life in order to save the heroine, and that there is nothing he can do in any way to alter this from happening the way it must happen. When this fate-driven plot is evoked through the adroit juxtaposition of images of night, and smoke, and railway lines, the hopelessness and despair which colors so much of Woolrich's fiction is dramatically translated into film.

Neither THE LEOPARD MAN (RKO, 1943) directed by Jacques Tourneur nor THE WINDOW (RKO, 1949) directed by Ted Tetzlaff is a *film noir*, but rather they belong in a class of suspense melodramas. The latter title, however, does have a few scenes done in the *noir* style showing how oppressive is the big city slum atmosphere on the psychology of a young boy played by Bobby Driscoll. He sees a murder committed and then is pursued by the murderers, while his parents refuse for a long time to believe him. What these two films illustrate, as do several others mentioned above, is that a film is not automatically a *film noir* just because it is based on a Woolrich story; indeed, many of Woolrich's stories are melodramas or *romans gris* rather than *histoires* or *romans noirs*. Yet, when the elements were right and effectively combined with the *noir* visual style, as they are in THE NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES, a truly extraordinary *film noir* was the result—one might almost say inevitably the result.

Noir Women

What there is to be said concerning *films noirs* from the traditional viewpoints of *mise-en-scène*, lighting, and narrative structure, I believe has been said. In this chapter, I intend to concentrate on the efforts of *films noirs* to “locate” women in the social perspectives embodied within them.

Not all *films noirs*, as should perhaps be evident from the preceding chapter, have *femmes fatales*; but many of them do. In those that do, the male protagonist in the film is usually alienated from his environment and one of the principal factors behind this alienation is the fact that the *femme fatale* is in possession of her own sexuality. As a consequence, she is, or behaves as if she is, independent of the patriarchal order. In the course of the film, therefore, or at least by the end of it, the *femme fatale* must be punished for this attempt at independence, usually by her death, thus restoring the balance of the patriarchal system.

An excellent example of a *film noir* of this kind is DEAD RECKONING (Columbia, 1946), about which Borde and Chaumeton wrote that “the direction of John Cromwell, brilliant and expressive, is valuable above all for the rapport between the hero and [Coral] Chandler, a bitch to whom Elizabeth Scott lends her finely edged visage and her singular gaze.”¹ The film opens with Humphrey Bogart backtelling the story to a priest. He tells how he and Johnny Drake, played by William Prince, went through the war together. On a train *en route* to Washington, D.C., where Johnny is to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor and Bogart the Distinguished Service Cross, Bogart accuses Johnny of thinking about “that blonde” again. Johnny admits it: “Remembering how low her voice was, how bad her grammar.” “Didn’t I tell you,” Bogart as Rip Murdock responds, “all females are the same with their faces washed?” And he adds: “Sometimes, chum, you go soft-headed. I’d like to see any blonde do that to me.” Johnny learns of the honor about to be bestowed upon him and flees. Murdock goes after him, the trail leading to Gulf City. Sitting in a hotel

room alone, smoking and drinking, Murdock comments: "What to do on a hot night, wind smelling of night-blooming jasmine and nothing to do but sweat, and wait, and prime the body to sweat some more." Looking through back issues of the newspaper, he learns that Johnny was involved in the murder of an old man who was married to Coral and then, at the morgue, he discovers Johnny's body, burned to a crisp. He sets out to find Coral and goes to the nightclub where she used to sing. "Maybe she was all right," he remarks, "and maybe Christmas comes in July, but I didn't believe it." He invites Coral to dance so he can have her in his arms when he tells her about finding Johnny's body in the morgue: "She tested pure so far, but so did another girl I knew, right up to the dollar point—and it wasn't four million, either." "I don't trust anybody," Murdock tells Coral, "especially women."

The nightclub is owned by a gangster named Martinelli, played by Morris Carnovsky who, as mentioned, would be blacklisted for his Communist affiliation. It turns out that Martinelli is married to Coral, that he was married to her when she married Chandler, and that it was Coral, and not Johnny, who killed Chandler. Martinelli has his henchman, Krause, played by Marvin Miller, work over Murdock, but Murdock escapes. He hides in the church, talks to the priest, and the rest of the narrative is direct action. Murdock has given Coral a pet name. She was Dusty to Johnny; she is Mike to Murdock. Murdock goes to her penthouse. "I'm not the type tears do anything to," he tells her. "I'm the brass knuks in the teeth to dance music type." By the end, the two of them are in a car together. Murdock knows that Coral/Mike killed Chandler and that now she has killed Martinelli, thinking the gangster was he. "You're going to fry, Dusty," he tells her, significantly reverting to Johnny's pet name for her. Earlier in the dialogue Murdock had told Coral/Mike that women should come pocket-sized and only be allowed to become full-sized when men wanted them to be that way; all other times they should be kept in a man's pocket. Now Dusty pops the question to Murdock: "Don't you love me?" "That's the tough part of it," Murdock tells her. "But it'll pass in time. Those things always do. Then there is one more thing. I loved him more." At this point, her back against the wall, Dusty, who will not be pushed, pulls a gun. Murdock steps on the gas. She lets him have it.

The closing scene is in a hospital. Coral/Dusty/Mike is reclining on a bed, the priest standing over her muttering the last rites in Latin. Rip comes in to say farewell. She does not want to die alone, but all Rip can say to her is the parachutist's jump call: "Geronimo, Mike." "And the final image, completely in documentary fashion," Borde and Chaumeton wrote, "is that of a parachute which opens and then diminishes as it falls. For the first time in the cinema, we have seen death in the first person. The film achieves it by means of a fall into nothingness."²

A poetic image, to be sure, but more importantly, as Janey Place put it in "Women in *Film Noir*," "the *femme fatale* ultimately loses physical movement, and is often actually or symbolically imprisoned by composition as con-

trol over her is exerted and expressed visually. . . . The ideological operation of the myth (the absolute necessity of controlling the strong, sexual woman) is thus achieved by first demonstrating her dangerous power and its frightening results, then destroying it.”³ It will be noted that Rip Murdock is a survivor. Yet this motif would seem to be peculiar to the American cinema. Wolfenstein and Leites in *MOVIES: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY* noted that “where continued attachment to a loved one would involve serious trouble, feelings become detached. This may happen where the hero has fallen in love with a woman who later turns out to be a criminal (*FRAMED* [Columbia, 1947], *DEAD RECKONING*). This pattern contrasts with one which is frequent in French films. The lover may be thrown into self-destructive despair on learning that the previously idealized loved one is criminal (*LA PASSIONNELLE* [French, 1948]) or be provoked to murder by her infidelity (*QUAI DES ORFÈVRES* [French, 1947]). But love once committed to this woman cannot be detached.”⁴ I think the significance of the conclusion of *DEAD RECKONING* is not a homosexual overtone—“I loved him more”—but the invocation of the buddy system: that men can at least have their buddies even though their relations with women, and above all with independent women, can only end unhappily. The challenge of life is thus how to learn to live without loving a woman.

Christine Gledhill, approaching *film noir* from the perspective of feminist criticism, put it this way, since so often priority is given to the male voice (as is certainly the case in *DEAD RECKONING*): “. . . the question the feminist critic asks is not ‘does this image of woman please me or not, do I identify with it or not?’ but rather of a particular conjuncture of plot device, character, dialogue, or visual style: *what is being said about a woman here, who is speaking, for whom?*”⁵ What is being said about women in *DEAD RECKONING* is (1) women are all the same; (2) they are not to be trusted, especially when it comes to money; (3) they will use their sexuality, which they control, or even murder to get money; (4) if you get involved with them, be prepared to detach yourself from them as soon as you learn what they really are. The dominant speaker throughout the film is the Bogart screen persona in the character of Rip Murdock—whatever his personal popularity, Bogart in all his roles in the ’Forties and ’Fifties projected the persona he had acquired acting in films early in the 1940s for John Huston and Howard Hawks. As such, the Bogart persona is speaking for all men who wish to be survivors. Johnny Drake, who does not buy into Rip Murdock’s worldly cynicism, pays for that oversight with his life, nor is his death a pleasant one. One ignores the prescription about women in *films noirs* only at his own peril. Who lives and who dies in *films noirs* makes this quite evident.

According to Gledhill, “there are five main structural features of *film noir* that together produce a specific location for women and somewhat ambiguous ideological effects.” In her opinion, “these are: (1) the investigative structure of the narrative; (2) plot devices of either voice-over and flashback, and frequently both; (3) proliferation of points of view; (4) frequent unstable charac-

terization of the heroine; (5) an 'expressionist' visual style and emphasis on sexuality in the photographing of women."⁶ All of these structural features are present in *DEAD RECKONING*. The investigation begins to learn why Johnny fled and then becomes a question of who caused his death. Both voice-over and flashback are used to set the scene. Because Murdock is told various versions of what happened in the past, both in connection with Chandler's death and Johnny's role in it, there are a number of points of view which are not resolved until near the end with the exposure of the *femme fatale*. For most of the film, the Coral/Dusty/Mike character vacillates between seeming intimidated and being self-assertive, all of which tends to confuse her image in the mind of the viewer. Finally, not only is the *femme fatale*'s sexuality emphasized, but there is a revealing moment just before her exposure. Murdock tells Mike to leave by the back door to Martinelli's office while he holds Martinelli and Krause at gun-point and intends to force the truth out of them with napalm hand grenades. Mike moves slowly through the open door, her face and figure falling into dark shadow so that she is barely visible. "Geronimo, Rip," she whispers, before disappearing. She has moved into the dark world; visually she has become possessed by the dark, chthonic, murderous forces which led to Johnny's death and, before him, to Chandler's. There is a struggle among the voices heard in the film, from Martinelli to Coral with Rip always as a reference point once the narrative returns to him through the reassurance of his backtelling.

There are two basic kinds of women in *film noir*, with a third, subsidiary type only occasionally present. The two basic types are the *femmes fatales* and the loving wives and mothers. The *femmes fatales* are interesting, intelligent, and often powerful, whereas the wives and mothers are dull and insipid. Notwithstanding, it is this latter variety which is the ideal role prescribed for women. The *femme fatale* is best characterized by her self-interest, while her opposite is capable of total devotion to a man. In a *film noir* of error, such as *PITFALL* (United Artists, 1948) directed by André de Toth, it is the protagonist's *hamartía* blinding him to the fact that in his middle-class marriage to Jane Wyatt he has all that a man should ever ask from life and it is this misperception which occasions his affair with Elizabeth Scott and embroils him in danger and murder. In a way, this is the American version of the German street films, although without the characteristic resolving gesture of maternal forgiveness and re-acceptance.

"She gives love, understanding (or at least forgiveness), asks very little in return (just that he come back to her) and is generally visually passive and static," Janey Place wrote of the *noir* wife and/or mother whom she aptly termed the "nurturing" woman. "Often, in order to offer this alternative to the nightmare landscape of *film noir*, she herself must not be a part of it. She is then linked to the pastoral environment of open spaces, light and safety characterized by even, flat, high-key lighting. Often this is an idealized dream of the past and she exists only in memory, but sometimes this idealization exists as a real alternative."⁷ Joseph H. Lewis in setting up the visual contrast between the cor-

rupt environment in which government agent Glenn Ford must work in *THE UNDERCOVER MAN* (Columbia, 1949) and secluding Ford's wife, played by Nina Foch, on a farm whom Ford occasionally visits would appear to have evoked the *ne plus ultra* of this dichotomy between the *noir* world and the pastoral world of the idealized female. The problem with *THE UNDERCOVER MAN*, of course, is in the narrative structure, since the *noir* world is strictly deterministic, whereas the alternative is not! As Myron Meisel wrote of this film, "Lewis' forte does not lie in argument, and he cannot reconcile the *noir* determinism of his style with his brief for family ties as the root of social responsibility. It's a case of a personal credo elaborated through the emotional texture of a genre film, with unstressed juxtapositions discreetly made under the cover of imaginative turbulence. It therefore qualifies as a highly effective, personal work by a minor artist."⁸

The third type of *noir* woman is the beautiful neurotic. She is not found as often as the *femme fatale*, but when she is, as in *SORRY, WRONG NUMBER* (Paramount, 1948), she is still the *primum mobile* which brings both herself and the *noir* male protagonist to catastrophe. As in tragic drama, the first and third kinds of *noir* women, because they lack the selfless devotion of the nurturing kind of woman, reduce the male protagonist; they weaken him, at the same time as they exert their strength.

In the quest for the nurturing woman, Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites in their psychological study of movies in the 'Forties found a parallel between this situation and what Margaret Mead termed "conditional love." "American children," they wrote, "are often weighed and measured and awarded Mother's love to the extent that they compare favorably with others. The fantasy of the immediate and unconditional award of love by the movie heroine seems related to the suspense and uncertainties of this childhood experience."⁹ But just as the nurturing woman is a repudiation of the conditional love of the mother, the male protagonist in a *film noir* might also identify with the mother and withdraw love. "The hero," they wrote, "who withdraws his love from the woman who turns out to be bad is exercising the principle of conditional love which he learned from his mother: you have to be good if you want to be loved."¹⁰

It is very important, I think, to remember that being good, in *film noir* as elsewhere in American films, is to be a nurturing woman. Why, then, is the nurturing woman so little seen in *film noir* and, when she is, why is she so lackluster by comparison with the self-directed woman? What is at the root of this horror and fascination with the *femme fatale* in *film noir*? The obvious answer, to be sure, is the same for the post-war United States as for ancient Athens: the fear of women. The fear of women by men would seem to be older than even our cultural representations of it. But the changes in the United States that triggered this increase in fear and its consequence, misogyny, in American films would seem to have been caused, as Majorie Rosen pointed out in *POP-CORN VENUS*, by the fact that "the industrial world was shocked—and occasionally dismayed—that women, now 36 percent of the labor force, worked

faster than men, required less supervision, had fewer industrial accidents, and did less damage to tools and materials. On 16 May 1942 BUSINESS WEEK reported that airplane plants considered women 50 to 100 percent more efficient in wiring instrument panels. That they could perform 80 percent of all war-industry jobs (but only held 8.5 percent) and all but 80 out of 937 jobs in civilian industry.”¹¹

Accordingly I cannot but agree with Stephen Farber in his article “Violence and the Bitch Goddess” that “during the war years and immediately afterward, strong women flourished in American films, and were often presented as monsters and harpies, hardened by greed and lust, completely without feeling for the suffering they caused. These films undoubtedly reflected the fantasies and fears of a wartime society, in which women had taken control of many of the positions customarily held by men. Fear of the violence that may attend success is a recurring anxiety in American films, but during the war years another psychological dimension was added to this anxiety—fear of the evil, overpowering woman with a shocking ability to humiliate and emasculate her men.”¹² I think, however, it is absolutely necessary to keep in mind what the historical reality was, how really little power and economic independence women were allowed—8.5 percent out of 80 percent of all war-industry jobs—and that the *femme fatale* was a deliberate fantasy reflecting at once a fear and embodying a prescription and a warning. The prescription was that *femmes fatales* do not succeed: they are killed. The warning for men was to avoid them, for women never to be one. American films prior to *film noir* had usually divided women into victims and vamps when a criminal milieu was part of the background; *film noir* added a new dimension: women who were intent on acquiring money and power.

While viewing Western films for THE AMERICAN WEST IN FILM, I noted that there has long been a “dress code” for women in Westerns. It did not surprise me, therefore, to find that there is also a dress code for women in *film noir*. Stephen Farber noticed that Mildred undergoes quite a change in MILDRED PIERCE (Warner’s, 1945), that “in true Hollywood fashion, the change in her appearance defines her moral transformation. Her hair is now piled on top of her head, and her clothes become more severe and more mannish, her face haughtier and colder. In the opening scenes Mildred looks soft and womanly; at the height of her success, she has the harsh glint of a frigid career woman.”¹³

I mentioned in discussing the Cain novel that it had to be altered in its plot before it was filmed in a *noir* style. Cain himself objected strenuously to what was being done to his story in a letter he wrote to the film’s producer, Jerry Wald. “There was one basic element in MILDRED PIERCE,” he wrote Wald, and “when I remembered it, it made the book go, and when I forgot, it let me in for the dreariest headaches I ever had in connection with anything I wrote. This was it: O.K., says God, you think this girl is talented. You want her to be a concert pianist. But if you want an artist in the family, why not a real one, a coloratura soprano? ‘Thanks, God,’ says Mildred, ‘you sure are treating me

swell.' But, says God, are you sure you want an artist at all? They're kind of queer, you know. Maybe Glendale is not the place for one. Maybe you're not the mother for one. I can't even hear what you say. So God says, O.K., here she is—I hope you like what you ordered.'" ¹⁴

On the basis of this view of *MILDRED PIERCE*, the novel as well as the film, Cain must have been one of the least self-conscious artists working in the *noir* movement. He could not see that for almost everyone who read the novel, the point was not what a fine artist Veda was, but rather how self-assertive women needed to be humiliated and brought obediently back into a subservient role in the home, as happened to Mildred, and how, when this could not be done, as in the case of Veda, this conditional mother love must be withdrawn, as it is from Veda. The film takes this prescription one step further: Veda is to be punished, probably by death, for her wanton self-assertiveness, her independence, her selfishness, and her promiscuity. Even Monte in the film, before Veda kills him, calls her a "dirty little tramp."

In the film, Mildred tries to conceal Veda's culpability, only for the truth to come out in spite of her efforts. As Pam Cook detected in her essay, "Duplicity in *MILDRED PIERCE*," the *noir* visual style is used to illustrate the unnatural ascent of matriarchy and to herald the "natural" return to patriarchy. The film has three major flashbacks. "The first flashback ends at the point where Mildred is at the height of her economic success and Bert gives her the divorce she wanted. We return to the present in the police station, and the lighting (shadows) on Mildred's face suggest her guilt in the present when she has just been seen as successful in her own right in the past. The function of this interruption seems to be to encourage the audience to anticipate the fate of independent successful career women, and to force a separation or distance between audience and any sympathy or identification with Mildred's success. . . . In [the] final cleaning-up process all power is seen to return into the hands of the Law. The paternalistic detective, who has secretly always controlled the progress of the narrative because of his foreknowledge of the truth, dispels duplicity by throwing light upon the scene: his assertion of the Truth is supported symbolically when he opens the blinds to let in the dawn: light is the masculine principle which heralds the dawn of patriarchal culture and the defeat of matriarchy.'" ¹⁵

MILDRED PIERCE is interesting and instructive from yet another perspective. It is one of the few films in *noir* style in which there is a semblance of a family—and that family is the center of the plot. Most *films noirs* either evade family issues by shoving them into the background or do not have a family at all. I suspect this is because the family is an antithesis to the *femme fatale*. In the words of Charles Baudelaire:

Resplendit à jamais, comme un astre inutile,
La froide majesté de la femme stérile.

[Resplendent as ever, as a barren star the cold majesty of a sterile woman.]

Sylvia Harvey in her essay, "Woman's Place: The Absent Family of *Film Noir*," wrote that "the absence or disfigurement of the family both calls attention to its own lack and to its own deformity, and may be seen to encourage the consideration of alternative institutions for the reproduction of social life."¹⁶ This strikes me as so much wishful thinking, or at least viewing *film noir* through the perspective of the contemporary women's movement. For women in the 'Forties, the message was scarcely to contemplate alternatives to the patriarchal family, but rather a prescription of what happened to those who dared to do so.

Another aspect of the dress code in *film noir* is that the *femmes fatales* often use a cigarette (usually a long, just-lit cigarette) and a handgun as phallic symbols, as menacing extensions of their bid for masculine power. Janey Place provided a brief catalogue of some of the manifestations of the kinds of ambitions which are inappropriate to women as stereotyped by patriarchy, ambitions which therefore must be beaten down and confined. "She wants to be the owner of her own night club, not the owner's wife (NIGHT AND THE CITY [20th-Fox, 1950]). She wants to be a star, not a recluse (SUNSET BOULEVARD [Paramount, 1950]). She wants her husband's insurance money, not her comfortable, middle-class life (DOUBLE INDEMNITY [Paramount, 1944]). She wants the 'great whatsit,' and ends up destroying the world (KISS ME DEADLY [United Artists, 1955]). She wants independence, and sets off a chain of murders (LAURA [20th-Fox, 1944]). She wants to win a disinterested lover, and ends up killing him, herself, and two other people (ANGEL FACE [RKO, 1953]). She wants money, and succeeds only in destroying herself and the man who loves her (GUN CRAZY [United Artists, 1949], THE KILLERS [Universal, 1946]). She wants freedom from an oppressive relationship, and initiates events that lead to murder (THE BIG COMBO [United Artists, 1955], THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE [M-G-M, 1946]). Whether evil (DOUBLE INDEMNITY, GUN CRAZY, KISS ME DEADLY, NIGHT AND THE CITY, THE MALTESE FALCON [Warner's, 1941], THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE), or innocent (LAURA, THE BIG COMBO), her desire for freedom, wealth, or independence ignites the forces which threaten the hero."¹⁷ In other words, whether intentionally or innocently, women outside traditional roles in the patriarchal system in *films noirs* are *prima mobilia* which unleash the havoc which befalls the male protagonists. There is much talk in the dialogue about Fate, and many of the narrative structures are close enough to Classical tragedy to present the workings of Fate imaginatively and yet effectively, but behind Fate is a shadow and that shadow is a woman who refuses, in Rip Murdock's metaphor in DEAD RECKONING, to come pocket size, to exist solely for a man's pleasure. It must also be added that all of the roles of women in *films noirs* are defined by their relationship to men; even in the case of a *femme fatale*, her solitary significance to the plot is the relationship she has with men. It is truly a man's world and women occasionally dare to question their assigned place in it.

There is an especially notable exception in this context and, again, it was

made by Fritz Lang, *THE BLUE GARDENIA* (Warner's, 1953). Lang in so many of his films sought to question or upset conventions in a hundred subtle ways, but you must view his films carefully to see what it is that he was about and how he accomplished it. One such careful viewer was E. Ann Kaplan and in her essay on *THE BLUE GARDENIA* for *WOMEN IN FILM NOIR* she pointed out how Lang altered the *noir* perspective by brightly lighting the female scenes and using *noir* lighting in male-dominated scenes. Norah, Crystal, and Sally, played respectively by Anne Baxter, Ann Sothorn, and Jeff Donnell all share an apartment. Norah's fiancé is in Korea and she prefers to celebrate her birthday alone, preparing a dinner and eating it with his picture on the table. During the meal, she will read the letter she has just received from him. The other two prefer to go out for a night on the town. To Norah's amazement and then anguish, the letter breaks off their engagement; her soldier has chosen to marry a different woman. At this point, Harry Prebble, played by Raymond Burr, calls Crystal, asking her for a date. Norah takes the call and accepts. When she arrives, he is taken aback for a moment at the switch, and then goes along with it. One woman is as good as another for what he has in mind. They have dinner and wind up at Prebble's apartment. He forces his attentions on Norah. At first, she goes along with it, then changes her mind, resists, and strikes out at Prebble with a poker, passing out before she can see what damage she has done. When she comes to, she flees his apartment, leaving behind her shoes.

The next morning Norah can remember nothing that happened to her. As Kaplan pointed out, "the first scene in the women's apartment demonstrates the threatening aspect of the male world for Norah in the dramatic change that takes place once the other women have left, and Norah discovers her soldier's betrayal. . . . Norah is dressed in a black taffeta dress, and has darkened the room, supposedly to create a romantic candlelit atmosphere, but as she sits down the shadows loom ominously. She sits opposite to her fiancé's picture almost as if before an icon, the candle light adding to the sense of something unnatural going on. Lang seems to be deliberately exposing the excessive nature of Norah's devotion here, as if to increase the shock of the soldier's infidelity. Once his voice is heard, Norah translating the letter to her lover's spoken speech, the scene becomes even more sinister and ominous, the shadows darkening to the point of seeming almost to invade the light. When the phone rings, and Norah crosses the room to answer it, the music becomes sinister and the screen is almost black. The women's apartment, thus, is seen to change dramatically, to become sinister and threatening, once men symbolically invade it."¹⁸

Because the viewer identifies with Norah's point of view, the dominant patriarchal male viewpoint is undermined. Casey Mayo, a journalist played by Richard Conte, is himself at the bar with a pickup when Prebble makes the call to Crystal and they joke together about women. Later, when Mayo is assisting the police in their investigation of Prebble's murder, together they come up with a theory that Prebble's assailant was obviously a prostitute because a decent

woman would refuse to be seen with him. The male investigators never so much as consider that Prebble's character and his attitude toward women could have contributed in any way to what happened. The viewer, as a consequence, is able to see the male investigators create the stereotypical image of a *femme fatale* to account for Prebble's death, to see them uphold a double standard, indeed to see them practice sexual power politics. In the section on Shakespeare, I mentioned how often in his plays Shakespeare would concentrate on this tendency of men to create false illusions about women and then to act on the basis of taking the illusion to be a reality. This is the other side of Pushkin's observation about Othello quoted in the General Introduction: yes, Othello's image of woman was shattered, but the shattering was as a result of falsification, Othello's naive willingness to accept the image of women projected by Iago and affirmed in his own unconscious. In *THE BLUE GARDENIA*, Lang seems to have been preoccupied with this same phenomenon. Men are seen to be victims of their own stereotypes.

While it turns out that Norah did not kill Prebble, and that Mayo is responsible for uncovering the real murderer, in Kaplan's words, "Lang's achievement remains. In turning *noir* conventions upside down, *THE BLUE GARDENIA* has revealed the place that women usually occupy in these films. We see that the view men have of women is false in that the set of implications about Norah generated from the male world turns out to be invalid. While the male discourse tried to define Norah as a *femme fatale*, we see rather that she is a victim of male strategies to ensnare her for something she did not do."¹⁹ Lang was no doubt under pressure to supply a conventional ending to this film and, for that reason, he had Mayo and Norah get together at the end; but here both the character of Norah, as developed in the screenplay, as that of Mayo, who never really becomes wholly sympathetic, when combined with the contradictory *noir* visual style contrasting male and female perspectives, undermines the ending the viewer sees. It is only another instance of a multitude of narrative voices vying for control of a film, a melodrama that actually so undermines itself that it becomes *film noir*. The scene of Norah reading the letter from her soldier and Mayo's joking with Prebble at the bar and helping the police conjure up the image of a *femme fatale* are too powerful for one to accept the ending as happy, any more than one can really do this at the conclusion of *PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET* (20th-Fox, 1953). However, it must also be noted that films so dominated by contradictory elements lack organic unity almost by definition and, therefore, may fail ultimately as works of film art. Lang made *THE BLUE GARDENIA* at the wrong time; Hollywood conventions proved insurmountable. After all, what would be our regard today for *OTHELLO* if Shakespeare had been forced, at the last moment, to show Desdemona resuscitated and, upon regaining her faculties, were she to forgive Othello and sink lovingly into his ready arms?

Another, and somewhat more successful, *film noir* in terms of visual and narrative organic unity is *IN A LONELY PLACE* (Columbia, 1950) directed by

Nicholas Ray. The film's working title was BEHIND THIS MASK and I suspect that Andrew Solt, the screenwriter, and Ray had their own ideas of a plot even though they were ostensibly filming a screen version of Dorothy B. Hughes' IN A LONELY PLACE (1947). The novel is a *roman noir*, a study in subjectivism and insanity filled with a nightmarish atmosphere at times more real than reality. The Laurel Gray character in the book, when we first meet her, is a truly original creation. "He didn't move," we are told of Dix Steele's reaction. "He stood and watched her, his mouth still open. She walked like a model, swaying her small buttocks. She had exquisite legs. She knew he was watching her and she didn't care. She expected it."²⁰ In the book, Dix Steele is a psychopathic murderer and Laurel comes to have legitimate reasons for being terrified of him. Ray cast his wife at the time, Gloria Grahame, as Laurel Gray. They were divorced soon after the picture was made and Grahame married Ray's son by his first marriage, Tony, a marriage that also did not work out. Humphrey Bogart was cast as Dix Steele and the screenplay made him a dissatisfied screenwriter. "They live in the same apartment building," David Thomson wrote in his article, "In A Lonely Place," "and Ray's use of the courtyard, the rooms, and the stairways as a grid on which the lovers fail one another is more tragically felt than any of Fritz Lang's geometric enclosures. The affair is blighted by Steele's pathological temper—part talent, part depression, and part a wilful intransigence. He despises most of his Hollywood work, and the self-hatred sometimes lashes out at others. Steele is a baleful hero regarded with caution and sadness by the film itself. . . ."²¹

Dix and Laurel are attracted. Dix, however, suffers from paranoia. He has a violent and explosive temper. When asked to write an adaptation of a popular novel, he has a hatcheck girl from a local restaurant read the novel for him and invites her to his apartment to tell him the story. He gives her cab fare home. Later that night, or rather early the next morning, a man who served under him during the war but who now is a police detective, Brub Nicolai, played by Frank Lovejoy, wakens Dix. The girl has been murdered and Dix becomes a suspect. Laurel provides him with something of an alibi and the occasion at the precinct station allows them to meet. A relationship develops, but Dix's suspicions about Brub's insincere friendship and his own inner doubts about the faithfulness of women and the lastingness of love consistently cast a cloud over it. Peter Biskind in an article on Ray's THEY LIVE BY NIGHT (RKO, 1949) found that in this film, "as in Ray's later films, the function of women is to steady the erratic and potentially violent male."²² In earlier films Ray was also capable of embracing a notion that love might produce a domestic utopia. Obviously, that notion had decayed considerably by the time of IN A LONELY PLACE. Dix does seem menacing at times, perhaps even capable of having committed the murder, but the way the character was drawn and the way Bogart played him, in Gordon Gow's words in SUSPENSE IN THE CINEMA (1968), "there is extreme vulnerability, the feeling of a man in danger, and hardly aware . . . that the danger lies within himself."²³ When Dix discovers that instead of mar-

rying him Laurel plans to leave him, he confronts her and, in his rage, starts to choke her, before a call comes from the police informing them that the real murderer has been found. The relationship has been destroyed. In a way, circumstances were as much to blame as Dix's temperament; yet, Ray did introduce one incongruous element into Laurel's character. Martha, her masseuse, played by Ruth Gillette, definitely interjects a lesbian undertone into the relationship the two have and Laurel, for her part, has just run away from a previous relationship at the time she meets Dix. Even before their breakup appears inevitable, Dix says in the screenplay he is writing: "I was born when you kissed me. I died when you left me. I lived a few weeks while you loved me." Dix is a prisoner to his temperament and to his perspective on life. His violence and his malaise are self-destructive and he is held captive by them. Viewed in terms of our present context, *IN A LONELY PLACE* is a *film noir* about male delusions which can destroy happiness, even life itself, as effectively as any external agency.

Richard Dyer in his contribution to *WOMEN IN FILM NOIR* pointed out that "the *femmes fatales* of *film noir* were not usually played by major stars. Crawford as Mildred Pierce belongs to the 'woman's film' emphasis of that film; only Barbara Stanwyck in *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* and Lana Turner in *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE* compare with [Rita] Hayworth as major stars playing *femmes fatales*."²⁴ Yet, of the women who did come to prominence in *film noir*, it would seem that the kinds of roles they had to play exerted a debilitating effect on their subsequent careers. Gloria Grahame is a prime example. Borde and Chaumeton praised her work in *CROSSFIRE* (RKO, 1947) and in *IN A LONELY PLACE*, going so far as to comment that "one loves the ambiguity of her visage and of her character, a curious combination of cold calculation and of sensuality. If producers would have accorded her a chance around 1946, Gloria Grahame could have been, indubitably, one of the principal figures of *film noir*."²⁵ Marjorie Rosen went further, not limiting her praise to *noir* films, writing that "Grahame especially, with a wry sense of humor and a persona as soft and motherly as it was cynical and sexy, deserved more than the blowsy-gangster's moll in *THE BIG HEAT*. . . ."²⁶

"Whenever I worked on a picture like *PITFALL*," Lizabeth Scott once told me, "I would set up the character I was playing in my mind. I wrote down in a notebook how I felt such a character would act in various circumstances. I had to reason out the person I was portraying." When I asked her about the scene in *DEAD RECKONING* where she shot the Humphrey Bogart character, she reverted almost instinctively to the feelings of the *femme fatale*. "I had to," she said. "The character I was playing had to. More and more between them would stand in the way. She had to shoot him." When she told me about addressing a film class at UCLA, she remarked that the students had said all of her films were *films noirs*. I asked her what a *film noir* meant to her. "There's got to be a woman," she responded. "She's driven to do the things she does, driven to it by other people, and by something inside herself."

Much of what I have written so far in this chapter about women in *film noir* has been written from a contemporary perspective and has been inspired, surely in part, by what female critics themselves have written about the portrayal of women in *film noir*. It is a perspective that the actresses themselves who played *femmes fatales* in these films, such as Lizabeth Scott, never for a moment possessed when they were making these films. They tried their best to make these characters, created for the most part by male screenwriters, in films directed by men and in which the male voice was almost always dominant, behave as they felt such women would behave in real life. In *THE FILE OF THELMA JORDAN* (Paramount, 1949), Barbara Stanwyck was cast as the *femme fatale*. When she is exposed as a murderer in front of Cleve, played by Wendell Corey, the man who has loved her and defended her throughout the film, she scoffs at him: "You were the fall guy, Cleve, from the beginning." Then, on her way to escape in a car with her male accomplice, she thrusts the hot cigar lighter into his eye so he loses control of the car and it crashes. Her last words are: "You don't suppose they could let just half of me die?" Stanwyck interpreted this role as a woman who is a victim to contrary impulses within herself, much after the fashion of Bogart's portrayal of Dix Steele. It did not occur to her at the time, any more than it occurred to Lizabeth Scott, that no matter how much sympathy she might try to engender for the character she was playing, the context, the narrative structure, the *noir* visual style were all working hand-in-hand to locate her as a female rebelling against the patriarchal society prescribed as inviolable and that, accordingly, she must be punished.

If, in *films noirs* generally, the *femmes fatales* are quite as evil as they appear to be, it is also true that the *hamartía* of the male protagonist is only rarely manifested as an error in judgment but rather is most often the consequence of a fatal obsession, usually with the *femme fatale*. There are, accordingly, two ways in which this situation is presented. In *noir* films such as *DEAD RECKONING* or *THE FILE OF THELMA JORDAN*, the man obsessed the most by the *femme fatale* meets his death, but he is *not* the major male protagonist; the major male protagonist escapes her clutches; he is the survivor and a witness at her death. In a *noir* film such as *OUT OF THE PAST* (RKO, 1947) directed by Jacques Tourneur, it is the major male protagonist who suffers from the fatal obsession and it is this obsession which, as *ate* in the ancient Greek scheme of things, takes possession of his soul. Unlike the major male protagonist in *DEAD RECKONING*, this character, played by Robert Mitchum in *OUT OF THE PAST*, cannot overcome his obsession and, therefore, can only destroy himself and her with him. The film opens in the small town of Bridgeport, California, where Mitchum runs a gas station and pays court to Ann, played by Virginia Huston, who quite properly wants and expects a traditional role out of life for herself, that of devoted homemaker and mother. Her *hamartía* is that she cannot see that this end can best be achieved with Jim, played by Richard Webb, who is looking for precisely this in a woman, and not with the Mitchum character, Jeff, who is summoned to a meeting with a crooked gambler. Jeff takes

Ann along and, via a flashback, explains how he came to be involved with the crooked gambler and his murderous mistress. Kirk Douglas was cast as the crooked gambler, Whit Sterling, and Jane Greer played Kathie, the murderous mistress. Jeff was once a private detective hired by Sterling to find Kathie. He found her. They fell in love and decided to go into hiding with the money she had stolen from Sterling, only for Kathie to leave Jeff when it proved convenient, taking the money with her. Jeff insists to Ann that he no longer loves Kathie. If Ann were not a victim of *hamartía*, she would be able to perceive already at this point that a man attracted to a woman such as Kathie, no matter how far back in his past, is corrupted by desires which must vitiate his ability to be a good husband and provider. To this extent there is often a Calvinistic slant in *film noir*: a person's actions will reveal whether or not that person is a reprobate or one of the elect. The prescription in these *films noirs* would have a viewer believe one is predestined to be destroyed or to prosper. It is a slant found primarily in those *films noirs* where the major male protagonist is in the grips of a fatal obsession with a *femme fatale*. This kind of *film noir*, therefore, is to be distinguished from that kind where it is an external fate, or *moira*, which is operative. A person's fate is determined by the fact that the obsession reveals that that person is a reprobate. As happens to the Burt Lancaster character in *CRISS CROSS* (Universal, 1949) when he meets his ex-wife once more, when Jeff meets Kathie, who has returned to Sterling, the old obsession again takes possession of him and it becomes increasingly obvious to him, and to the viewer, that he is doomed. Just before the fade, when both Jeff and Kathie are killed trying to run a roadblock, Jim is able to bring Ann to her senses. Her *hamartía* thus dispelled, Ann is able at last to see that her ambition to assume the traditional role prescribed by the patriarchy can best be achieved by loving Jim and she readily makes this new commitment.

The orientation of a *film noir* such as *OUT OF THE PAST* stands in stark contrast to one such as *DETOUR* (PRC, 1946). Both have major male protagonists destroyed by a conspiracy of events, but in the latter the major male protagonist, a man called Roberts, is incapable of coping with this conspiracy and, unlike Jeff, he is passive almost from the beginning: things happen to him and they are not things he caused. I tend to agree with John Belton in his career study of Edgar G. Ulmer that in this film "Roberts' hard-boiled cynicism and subjective perception of the action create a weird sympathy between himself and the nightmarish world around him that binds him to its logic, not his own. He becomes its prisoner, caught up helplessly in its flow like a man in a dream."²⁷

What, then, of Walter Neff in *DOUBLE INDEMNITY*? Is he a reprobate or a victim of *hamartía*? I regard him as a victim of *hamartía*, just as Rip Murdock is for a while in *DEAD RECKONING*, but unlike Murdock, once Neff, in the Recognition following the Reversal, realizes the truth and his misperception of it, he cannot save himself. As Jeff, he realizes he is a prisoner, but unlike Jeff he is no longer obsessed. In shooting Phyllis, Neff is trying to save

his own life, killing her before she succeeds at killing him. The obsession is gone for Neff at the moment of Recognition, whereas for Jeff, he can only destroy the obsession within himself by killing both himself and the object of his obsession. These may seem to be very subtle distinctions and, while no less real on that account, from a perspective of *noir* women they are not especially significant: because in *OUT OF THE PAST*, *DETOUR*, *DEAD RECKONING*, and *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* the fate of the *femme fatale* is identical: she loses her life.

The determining factor in *film noir* is always the prescription. It is the prescription alone which decides whether or not the female protagonist in a *film noir* will survive. In *THE ACCUSED* (Paramount, 1949) directed by William Dieterle, Loretta Young was cast as a spinster psychology professor. When one of her male students attempts to seduce her, she accidentally kills him, and then proceeds to try and conceal her crime. The prescription here is that a woman should not totally repress her sexuality, but rather should have sense enough to realize that her sexuality exists so she might fulfill the traditional role assigned to women in patriarchy. Because she had completely denied her sexuality, the Young character, Wilma Tuttle, found her response to seduction overdetermined and excessively violent. Wilma is fortunate during the subsequent police investigation that she finds a man she can love and to whom she can devote herself, namely Warren Ford, played by Robert Cummings, who acts as her defense attorney. He manages to win her acquittal by proving that her only crime was her attempt to conceal an accidental death. The Recognition for Wilma, as for the viewer, is that any effort to avoid the traditional role can and probably will lead to a dangerous and painful ordeal.

In the section on Seneca, I quoted Epictetus to the effect that one must learn to resign oneself to the role in life chosen for one by chance and that one's object in life must be to play the role chosen for one to the best of one's ability. Rarely is this the prescription in a *film noir*, but it is in *THE DAMNED DON'T CRY* (Warner's, 1950) directed by Vincent Sherman. Joan Crawford, cast as Ethel Whitehead, after the death of her son leaves the poverty and squalor of the life of her parents and her own life with her husband, Roy. Her ambitions are for money and power. It is not too long before she becomes involved with a gangster, in fact becomes his mistress, only to fall in love with another gangster. The first gangster kills the second gangster and wounds Ethel, who flees home to hide, before he himself is killed. Having become disillusioned with domestic love and fidelity, Ethel tries alternatives only to become thoroughly disillusioned with herself. The *noir* world is present insofar as there is criminality and deception everywhere, but in terms of the female protagonist the prescription for her is exceedingly harsh. Unlike the male protagonists in numerous German Expressionist street films and American melodramas with *noir* overtones, there is no returning home for forgiveness and a second chance for Ethel. Two reporters, talking at the end of the film, suggest that Ethel will only try again to escape from poverty. This part of the prescription is intended for the male viewer.

If a woman must learn to abide her lot in life, the male must—not apparently bound by the same fatalism—do his best to improve his lot and, therefore, the lot of his wife and family. These are contradictory prescriptions unless the sexual distinction is kept in mind; when it is, they are wholly consistent with the double standard of patriarchy, transferred to the economic sphere.

It is my opinion that *I WANT TO LIVE* (United Artists, 1948) directed by Robert Wise is one of the most brilliantly conceived and executed *films noirs* ever made and one completely lacking in sexual bias. Indeed, this latter quality may be one of the reasons it has been neglected by so many of the male critics writing about *film noir*: its victim is a woman. Stylistically, it has all the traditional characteristics of visual *noir*: angle shots, sleazy pickup bars, marijuana smoke and hot jazz, a protagonist, Barbara, played by Susan Hayward, whose character is established through a series of flashbacks showing her background as a hooker and her underworld associations. Her third marriage is violent, sordid, and unhappy. She is arrested and charged with a murder she could not have committed, is crucified by an ambitious district attorney supported in his zeal by judgmental newspapers, sentenced, and executed. Barbara is left-handed. She could not have committed the murder for this reason, but this evidence is disallowed at her appeal because it was already a fact in evidence at her trial, albeit one mishandled by her incompetent attorney. It is a compelling *film noir* precisely because it shows how a combination of accidental events combined with a corrupt milieu can destroy a human being. The Recognition attains that of Greek tragedy in that it is a recognition of the injustice, and perhaps ultimately the irrationality, of a certain principle operative in life over which men and women have no real control.

Noir Men

In view of how women are “located” in the majority of *films noirs*, it might seem, on the surface, that most male viewers would be pleased, or at least reassured, at the way men are portrayed. It is actually a mystery to me how little men have objected over the decades to the stereotypes through which they have been portrayed. This insensitivity may be due to a collective *hamartía*, induced perhaps in the case of *film noir* by the vicarious pleasure to be gained by the reduction of independent women and the reinforcement of patriarchal values. Yet, patriarchy is a double-edged sword. For men, it prescribes that they must perform in order to be loved, and part of that performance must include subscribing to the success ethic. Keeping women in their “place” means for men that they, too, must keep to their place: they must go it alone, with only the buddy system to sustain them; they cannot show too much emotion; above all, they must find the meaning of life in activity, never contemplation. Most intellectual, artistic, spiritual, or emotional proclivities must be held firmly in check. It is their purpose in life to work, to provide, to protect, and to serve without ever questioning in the preservation of the way of life of their culture and their government. No less than women, they must constantly be on guard against socially unacceptable impulses and obsessions. Saddest of all, they must pass through life without ever experiencing a deep and abiding friendship with the women they might love, never permitting themselves to explore a woman’s soul or allowing a woman to explore their souls, closing themselves off, confining themselves to a role in life which they have had no part in creating and which was not created to accommodate their own idiosyncracies. There are no more alternative life-styles for men in the world of *film noir* than there are for women. In *DOUBLE INDEMNITY*, Walter Neff would beat the system, so the prescription is that he must be destroyed. The dominant male image in the film is not that of Phyllis’ husband: he dies. It is rather the role assigned to Keyes, a

man who is single, who has no sustaining relationships of any kind, who exists solely for his job and supporting the system of which he is a part.

Essentially, the existence men lead in *film noir* is one of toil and loneliness. If they live according to the prescription and choose to be family men, as Victor Mature in *KISS OF DEATH* (20th-Fox, 1947) or Dick Powell in *PITFALL* (United Artists, 1948), they are doomed to a mundane domestic life with a dull, domestic woman. A woman can have no excitement about her, no independence of mind which might reveal to them new perspectives on life and emotion and meaning; instead, they must slavishly do the thinking for everybody and be surrounded by a deadening conformity. Because a woman can never be an equal in the world of *film noir*, there can be no equality in a relationship with them. As Narkisos in Greek legend, *noir* men are doomed to staring at a female who can only reflect what is in them; in these terms, truly, all women are alike with their faces washed. A proper relationship with a woman for a *noir* man means by definition a relationship with a nonentity. Can such a relationship ever be satisfying? This is a question that none of the male critics of *film noir* has ever asked, and yet it is, as far as I am concerned, the most obvious question which ought to occur to one upon seeing a *film noir*.

There is no possibility for personal spiritual growth for the *noir* male. As soon as he has come of age physically, he must fit himself into the role assigned to him by the patriarchy. It is here, rather than from the viewpoint of *noir* women, that what Epictetus said about accepting the role provided for you comes most into play. *Noir* men who choose to live dangerously, which is to say, who choose to live outside the traditional role assigned to them by the patriarchy, are subject to destruction no less than is the *femme fatale*. It is, in short, as much a closed world for men as it is for women; it is claustrophobic, but not for the reasons provided in the prescriptions in the film; indeed, it is most often claustrophobic precisely because of those prescriptions, which act as the severest of limitations to human possibility and the possibility of human experience.

The male actors who came to prominence through *film noir* were usually cast against type, portraying characters whose sole reason to exist is in order to be manipulated by the plot. Dick Powell, Fred MacMurray, Robert Cummings, Henry Fonda found new careers via the *film noir*, and all engaged in portrayals which, taking Burt Lancaster and Humphrey Bogart as the ideal type of *noir* men, condemned them to personae in which the anguish they might feel inside could only be manifested by means of the physical postures they might assume in a given scene, or, especially with Lancaster and Bogart, in the lost, vacant sadness expressed through their eyes. These actors in their roles were not an energizing, generating, propulsive force; rather they were passive receivers of the actions of outside agencies and their responses, instead of being initiative, were strictly reactive. As Mitchell S. Cohen observed in his article, "*Film Noir: The Actor, Villains and Victims*," rarely in *film noir* "did we see the vibrant Lancaster: flashing teeth, expansive gesture. Instead, he played close to his body,

keeping his potential fury under control for fear, it seemed, of what its result might be. The picture of Lancaster at that time is a rumpled one: his shoulders slouched, his brow furrowed with anguish, Miklos Rosza strings and some unknown element hovering in the background. In contrast to Powell or Cummings, he cuts an impressive slice of the screen out for himself by virtue of size alone, and yet seems ill at ease because of his inability to manipulate the forces around him. Later in his film career Lancaster began to harness his strength and charge the entire film with it. . . . But in *film noir* he was another displaced person. . . . Only once, and briefly, in *THE KILLERS* [Universal, 1946] is there any liberation in the character. Having fallen in with racketeers, Lancaster has become prosperous, and in a restaurant he attempts to protect his girlfriend from a cop who wants to arrest her for shoplifting. He turns on the charm: a gregarious, fast-talking, top-of-the-world, invincible Star. Obviously, any self-confidence of this sort is out of place in *film noir*: Lancaster is soon put in jail. Throughout the film, he alternates between defensive suspicion and somber defeatism as he staggers under the kidney punches of Fate and *femmes fatales*. Lancaster was introduced to the world as a cornered animal, too stunned—or maybe just too accepting—to use his considerable strength to fend off the hunters. It's an image that remained attached to him for quite some time."¹

Robert G. Porfirio had much the same observation to make about the actors who played male leads in *films noirs*. "Critics have reminded us," he wrote, "that the Hemingway hero is a person 'to whom something has been done'; that most central to this hero is the loss, and an awareness of it, of all the fixed ties that bind a man to a community. This is an apt description of the *film noir* hero, as well, and a real strength of Hollywood's studio system was to cast to type. Vulnerability and a sense of loss were suggested in Humphrey Bogart's lined face and slightly bent posture; in Alan Ladd's short stature and a certain feminine quality about his face; in the passivity and the heavy-lidded eyes of Robert Mitchum; in the thinly veiled hysteria that lay behind many of Richard Widmark's performances; in Robert Ryan's nervous manner. But this vulnerability was perhaps best embodied in the early screen persona of Burt Lancaster, whose powerful physique ironically dominated the cinematic frame. Unlike the expansive and exaggerated characterizations of later years, the Lancaster of *film noir* kept his energy levels under rigid control, rarely extending himself and then only to withdraw quickly like a hunted animal. Fittingly, his first screen role was in the Robert Siodmak version of *THE KILLERS*. . . . as the Hemingway character Ole Anderson who passively awaits death at the hands of the hired assassins. Throughout the 1940s Lancaster was adept at capturing the pathos of a character victimized by society (*BRUTE FORCE* [Universal, 1947], *KISS THE BLOOD OFF MY HANDS* [Universal, 1948]) or by a woman (*THE KILLERS*, *SORRY, WRONG NUMBER* [Paramount, 1948], *CRISS CROSS* [Universal, 1949])."²

I have mentioned previously those films in which Lancaster is victimized by a woman. *KISS THE BLOOD OFF MY HANDS* is set in post-war London for

which there was no better justification than that the studio had to film it there in order to make use of frozen funds. Lancaster was cast as an American veteran who was a German prisoner of war. The experience has definitely affected his personality and he also suffers from a rather ungovernable temper. The latter causes him to kill a man accidentally in a pub. He finds refuge in the room of a shy nurse, played by Joan Fontaine, a rather interesting characterization when contrasted with all of the *femmes fatales* the *noir* protagonists played by Lancaster generally meet. Shortly thereafter, Lancaster is arrested for fighting with a policeman. Although he got the exact duration of the sentence confused, Mitchell S. Cohen found there is one moment in this picture "that sums up the inner torment of the *noir* 'hero' as interpreted by Lancaster. He battles with the police and is sentenced to a year of hard labor and a whipping. As he is receiving his mandatory eighteen strokes, the camera captures his face in a tortured, but silent, cry of pain. Held down, being brutally abused due to factors beyond his control, he reveals through physiognomy what he is unable to express verbally. Even his shrieks of agony are choked back."³ A rather interesting ideological situation develops once Lancaster is released from jail. He resumes his relationship with Fontaine and she gets him a job as a delivery driver for the hospital where she works. Robert Newton, cast as Harry, recognizes Lancaster for the man who had run from the pub brawl and blackmails him into stealing drugs for the black market. Lancaster does not go through with the planned heist because of Fontaine. When Harry goes to Fontaine to find out what went wrong, he tries to seduce her and, resisting, she accidentally kills him. In a Lang film, such an incident would indicate that anyone might become involved in a murder; in this film, however, I have more the impression that what the incident is intended to demonstrate is that females, given provocation, are as basically violent as males. The lovers contemplate flight until Lancaster unilaterally decides this is the wrong way. He determines to give himself up, confess, and thus, at least, exonerate the Fontaine character since she killed in self-defense. The plot is somewhat convoluted and the portrayals, as well as the characterizations, are a bit inconsistent; in terms of the role of the *noir* protagonist, the film would appear to indicate that even though a man might be a total victim in a war-torn world, there is still some masochistic pleasure to be derived from behaving in a self-sacrificing manner where a woman is concerned. In the inevitable conflict between an individual and society, despair is the only option, basically a passive despair in which even the experience of pain is to be assiduously suppressed.

BRUTE FORCE is the other notable *film noir* in which Lancaster appeared in which society, and not a woman, victimizes the male protagonist. Unlike so many prison pictures, BRUTE FORCE is not concerned with condemning prison conditions, and it is certainly no more realistic about the subject than any other film using prison life as its subject. The prison is overcrowded. Six men are in one cell. In a series of flashbacks, the viewer learns how each got his sentence; the portraits are all sympathetic in order to stress the insidiousness of the for-

mer captain of the guards who becomes the warden, Munsey, played by Hume Cronyn. However, I would not be honest were I not to mention that each of these six men ended up in prison because, on the outside, he had been betrayed by a woman. In this confused metaphor for society, Cronyn obviously represents Fascism; as Hitler, he listens to Wagner: he even beats a prisoner to TANNHAÜSER. Lancaster stages an absolutely stunning break which proves futile and which costs him his life, but not before he finishes off Cronyn. A male viewer identifying with this prescription must accept the fact that women are treacherous and that the best thing one can do with one's life is to lose it killing a tyrant.

In addition to *IN A LONELY PLACE* (Columbia, 1950), Humphrey Bogart appeared in two genuine *films noirs*, *CONFLICT* (Warner's, 1945) directed by Curtis Bernhardt and *THE DESPERATE HOURS* (Paramount, 1955) directed by William Wyler. If Dostoyevsky's characters, so haunted by obsessions and inexplicable compulsions, live in a *noir* world above which their creator never seemed able to rise, the opposite was true of Ivan Turgenev who subtly undermined the dark romanticism of his age. In "Clara Milich" (1882), the last story Turgenev wrote, he remarked of Aratov, the protagonist who had fallen in love with a woman who was dead: "No, he was not in love, and how could he be in love with a girl who was dead and whom he had not particularly liked even while she was alive, whom he had almost forgotten? No! But he was in the power of—in *her* power; he did not belong to himself any more. He was *taken*. So much so, that he did not even attempt to free himself by sneering at his own idiocy or by arousing, if not a feeling of confidence, then at least some hope in himself that it would all pass, that it was only his nerves, or by looking for some proofs, or by anything!"⁴ How much healthier would have been much of Nineteenth-century literature had a number of influential authors followed George Sand's advice when she remarked to Turgenev: "Maitre, nous devons aller tous à votre école!"⁵

In *CONFLICT*, we find just such a case of obsession. In *THE SUSPECT* (Universal, 1944) directed by Robert Siodmak the previous year, Charles Laughton played a man driven to murder by a shrewish wife and then to murder again when he is blackmailed by an alcoholic neighbor, only to give himself up when the alcoholic neighbor's wife is charged with murder. The situation in *CONFLICT* is that the character played by Humphrey Bogart is hopelessly in love with his young sister-in-law. As the character played by Laughton, he cannot leave his wife, nor will she give him his freedom. The only way out is to murder her. Instead of an alcoholic neighbor to blackmail him, in this film Sydney Greenstreet was cast as a psychiatrist who, with the cool omniscience of the psychiatrist in *THE DARK PAST* (Columbia, 1948), suspects Bogart at once and manipulates evidence so as to make Bogart think that his wife is still alive. He is finally trapped. What makes the film especially *noir* is the sympathy the viewer instinctively has for the Bogart character, so much so that his apprehension is almost resented.

THE DESPERATE HOURS is a transition film. It is *film noir* when viewed from the perspective of the Bogart character, one of three escaped convicts who hole up in a middle-class, suburban home and keep the family hostage. It is a transition film, and not *noir*, if viewed from the perspective of the middle-class family because they are seen to rise up and resist the *noir* world which intrudes into their comfortable, American-dream way of life; and, by the end, they triumph over that world.

I have already spoken of the empty life to which the Keyes character, played by Edward G. Robinson, is doomed in DOUBLE INDEMNITY. In THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW (RKO, 1944) directed by Fritz Lang, Robinson was cast as a professor of psychology who becomes involved with a *femme fatale* and murder only to have the delusion explode at the end when he wakes up and learns that it was only a nightmare. "Years before, Erich Pommer offered to me THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI, which I was unable to do," Lang later recalled in an interview. "It was really the work of three painters who wanted to make a kind of an expressionistic picture; the whole story had been written, and the only contribution I made was that I said to Pommer, 'Look, if the expressionistic sets stand for the world of the insane, and you use them from the beginning, it doesn't mean anything. Why don't you, instead, make the Prologue and Epilogue of the picture normally; then when the story is told from the viewpoint of one of the inmates, it becomes expressionistic; and at the end it becomes normal again and we see that the villain of the picture, Dr. Caligari, is the doctor of the asylum. Now what else is the ending of CALIGARI—when we meet people we've seen in 'the dream'—but the ending of WOMAN IN THE WINDOW? And this was unconscious—I didn't even *think* I was copying myself at the time I had the idea for WOMAN IN THE WINDOW.'"6

Robinson was cast as Professor Richard Wanley, a strong family man. He meets a woman in the street played by Joan Bennett who invites him up to her apartment. They are broken in upon by one of her lovers and, in a scuffle with the man, Robinson kills him. He then undertakes to hide the body and conceal his culpability. However, he is observed by Dan Duryea, cast as the dead man's bodyguard, who proceeds to blackmail both Robinson and Bennett. With the investigation getting closer to him, Robinson decides to kill Duryea, only to fail. Feeling himself at his wit's end, Robinson is about to take poison when suddenly he wakes up. Here, again, Lang was reworking his basic themes. "If I had continued the story to its logical conclusion," he commented later, "a man would have been caught and executed for a murder because he was one moment off guard. . . . I rejected this logical ending because it seemed to me a defeatist ending, a tragedy for nothing brought about by an implacable Fate—a negative ending to a problem which is not universal, a futile dreariness which an audience would reject."<7

What makes this observation particularly interesting is that Lang reversed the situation in SCARLET STREET (Universal, 1945) which also starred the same

principals, Edward G. Robinson, Joan Bennett, and Dan Duryea. A remake of *LA CHIENNE* [*THE BITCH*] (French, 1931) directed by Jean Renoir, Robinson is cast as Christopher Cross in the film, a timid, henpecked cashier who saves a prostitute from a beating. The prostitute, played by Bennett, and her pimp/assailant, played by Duryea, con Robinson into setting up Bennett as his mistress, embezzling money so she might live in luxury. All his life, Robinson's only outlet has been amateur paintings and Bennett persuades him to allow her to sell his paintings under her name. "Of all the degrading things the *film noir* male did," Robert Ottoson wrote, "few stand out as the scene in *SCARLET STREET* where Bennett has Robinson paint her toenails. Asked if she wants him to do this, she seductively utters to him, 'They'll be masterpieces.'"⁸ It is not too long after this that Robinson fatally stabs Bennett with an ice pick, a crime for which Duryea is tried, convicted, and executed. Robinson is left to wander the streets, a derelict and a madman. Yet, it ought to be noted that "Lang's presentation of violence is equally instructive. Here, too, he is a classicist, an artist who often observes the proprieties of the Greek theatre. The scenes of murder and torture in *M* [German, 1931] and *MAN HUNT* [20th-Fox, 1941] are either staged in the wings, as it were, or telescoped by literally stunning visuals. Peter Lorre's shadow falls upon a child, her balloon sails up and away, and already we've seen enough." This is no less the case in a film such as *SCARLET STREET*, inspiring Alfred Appel, Jr., to the conclusion in "Fritz Lang's American Nightmare" that "Lang respects human life."⁹

Notwithstanding, in both of these films, the prescription is the same as in the German street films: a man ventures into the outer world (i.e., the world outside the family unit) only at his own peril. The prescription is quite the same in *NIGHT EDITOR* (Columbia, 1946) directed by Henry Levin. In this film, William Gargan was cast as a police detective who is having an affair with Janis Carter. While at a rendezvous, they witness a brutal murder which they cannot report for fear of exposure. Gargan is willing to keep his silence, but Carter is ambitious. She begins to blackmail the murderer and, enjoying her independence, discards Gargan. When an innocent man is arrested for the murder, Carter's comment is characteristic: "He's just a little nobody. No one'll miss him." Gargan proceeds to build a case against the murderer and when he goes to arrest Carter for concealing evidence she stabs him with an ice pick. He does not die, however. He ends up selling cigars and narrating his story. "Every guy who gets mixed up should hear it." The lack of compassion in the film is a distinct contrast with Lang's *films noirs* incorporating these themes and this extends even to Carter's morbid curiosity, wanting to see the corpse of the murder victim that has been repeatedly beaten with a tire iron. *NIGHT EDITOR* in 1946 is what was then possible when a director had no respect for human life. It would be surpassed in the post-*noir* films done in the *noir* mode by Don Siegel and others. As degrading as the scene with Robinson painting Bennett's toes might be, to regard virtually everyone with contempt, as is the case in *NIGHT EDITOR*, is even more so.

Victor Mature was cast as the protagonist in several *films noirs*, but always ambiguously; a viewer is never able to be completely in sympathy with him. This is so in *I WAKE UP SCREAMING* (20th-Fox, 1941) where his callous exploitation of Carole Landis inclines one to respect the hopelessness of Laird Cregar. The same opening music from the earlier film was used again in *KISS OF DEATH* (20th-Fox, 1947) where Mature was cast as a stool pigeon; and it was used yet again in *CRY OF THE CITY* (20th-Fox, 1948) directed by Robert Siodmak. Recognizing that filming on location actually ruined many of the effects a director strove for in establishing the claustrophobia of *film noir*, Siodmak remarked "I hate locations—there's so much you can't control."¹⁰ *CRY OF THE CITY* opens to Richard Conte in a hospital, badly hurt. While he is recovering, both the police and a crooked lawyer try to get at his girlfriend. Mature is a cop, dressed in black in contrast to Conte who is dressed in white, stressing the ambiguity of their roles; Mature tells Conte that he is a cop so he can "sleep good nights." In a suspenseful scene, Conte escapes from the prison hospital so as to get some diamonds he stole. While the police pursue him, he kills the crooked lawyer. Conte gets Shelley Winters to drive him to a hideout operated by Hope Emerson, an actress who was usually assigned to heavy roles in *film noir*. Siodmak was able to film this sequence at night on wet, dark streets, but the effect is scarcely as dramatic in terms of lighting as that at the hideout where Emerson walks down a hallway lit from a glare outside, she herself a moving shadow, ominous and menacing. In the final scenes, Mature is able to talk Conte's girlfriend into leaving him and, although wounded himself, shoots Conte in the back as he walks away from him down a wet street. Conte's younger brother rushes to Mature to help him. The roles are so ambiguous that this action can be interpreted as selling out one's family in order to win favor with the Establishment. In fact, I am not sure that a viewer is not far more sympathetic with Conte throughout the film than with Mature. This is because Conte's life is seen to be exciting, whereas Mature's life is pedestrian and the family scenes between Mature and Conte's family are made deliberately dull. However, the narrative prescription remains that crime, while exciting, is also self-destructive. Such alternatives signify a closed universe; ultimately, neither option is satisfying.

THE BIG COMBO (Allied Artists, 1955) directed by Joseph H. Lewis carries this kind of unfavorable comparison between hunter and hunted a step further. Again, Richard Conte was cast as the principal hoodlum; Cornel Wilde was cast as the police lieutenant on his trail. Wilde is motivated mostly because he and Conte are in love with the same woman, played by Jean Wallace. In a way, the Wilde character is but an extension of the lovesick cop played by Dana Andrews in *LAURA* (20th-Fox, 1944) and, before him, that played by Laird Cregar in *I WAKE UP SCREAMING*. In Wilde's case, Wallace used to be his girlfriend until she left him to take up with Conte. Conte's refrain is: "First is first. Second is nobody. The difference is hate. Hate the guy who tries to beat you." Brian Donlevy was cast as Conte's right hand, although he used to be

Conte's boss. Donlevy wears a hearing aid which, at one point, Conte plugs into Wilde's ear in order to torture him with loud music. Wilde continues to hound Wallace with his neurotic love and to keep the heat on Conte. He is convinced Conte murdered his wife, only to discover that it was someone else Conte killed. While waiting for Wallace to come back to him, Wilde has taken up with a chorus girl who is mistaken for Wilde and murdered by Conte's thugs. Conte reveals some of his motivation when he admits that he worked so hard at crime to please his first wife, while his activities only earned her contempt. Yet, at no point is Conte as limited and obsessional as is Wilde. At the end, Donlevy is machine-gunned. He is not wearing his hearing aid so only the flashes of the shots are seen, not heard. Wilde was married to Wallace while this picture was in production and he particularly resented one scene Lewis filmed in which Conte proceeds to make love to Wallace, Conte's head moving out of the frame and down her body, while the camera remains on Wallace's face which slowly begins to register ecstasy. Conte is finally killed in a shoot-out with the police.

"It is virtually a cliché of the criticism of *film noir* to hail a director for creating a consistent vision of the world, however perversely bleak and dark the urban image depicted might be," Myron Meisel concluded about Lewis' *films noirs*. "Lewis, on the contrary, takes care *not* to suggest that all this murky ambience constitutes any vision of the world at large, although his apprehension of this stylized piece of it is certainly admirable in its unwavering integrity of vision. Instead, Lewis inserts startling open-air linkage shots that indicate the presence of a normal world existing completely beyond this seamy underlife (contrast Anthony Mann, who could shoot high noon as if it were midnight). Again, Lewis' style stresses the conventions of the form while his attitude stays unimplicated in the material itself. He insists on preserving his reasonableness for all his fascination with dementia."¹¹ I would admit that, from the viewpoint of the integrity of *film noir* as a visual style and narrative mode, this criticism may well indicate a flaw in Lewis' approach; but, in terms of debilitating male images, it is a welcome tendency, an admission that options are never as limited and compromising as they might seem. And it is here, given the male bias of Greek and Roman tragedy, that their most significant contrast with *film noir* can be made; and still more so in connection with Shakespearean tragedy which has no such bias at all and, therefore, tends to expand the possibilities of both male and female characters. Only occasionally, as in the instance of Fritz Lang's *WOMAN IN THE WINDOW*, is a certain respect for male dignity and character maintained, as it is concerning the great protagonists of Greek drama; usually, in *film noir*, the reduction and humiliation of the male protagonists is unrelenting and, however much they might win our sympathy, they almost never can be accorded our respect or admiration.

Anti-intellectualism is a continuing theme throughout *film noir* and it is against the prescription for either a man or a woman to be interested in books or music. When a man is, he most often turns out, as Clifton Webb in *LAURA*, to be a

savage murderer unloved and unwanted by beautiful women. Gene Tierney, as Laura, clearly prefers the dull cop, played by Dana Andrews, to Webb's intellectual art critic. In *FALLEN ANGEL* (20th-Fox, 1945), Dana Andrews, although he admits himself to be a total washout, nonetheless can criticize Alice Faye, with whom he is in love, for liking books and music. To like such things means only one thing: she is afraid of life. Similarly, in *A DOUBLE LIFE* (Universal, 1948), Ronald Colman, cast as a sensitive Shakespearean actor, becomes possessed by his role onstage, playing Othello, and is compelled to carry the role over into life, where he murders Shelley Winters with a "kiss of death." True, there are many stunning visual sequences in this film directed by George Cukor, such as that where Colman stands before a mirror in darkness, a light outside flashing on and off, as he rehearses his lines about his being black; but, in the end, we suspect that it is Colman's very sensitivity which is responsible for his demonic possession. Ostensibly he is a victim of unfounded jealousy toward the play's press agent, portrayed by Edmund O'Brien, but little is done with this aspect of the plot—how fine it would have been to have provided a *true* parallel between Othello as Shakespeare conceived him and a modern actor; instead, it is the extroverted, superficial press agent who comes to suspect Colman and who manipulates his capture.

Otto Preminger directed *FALLEN ANGEL* and he also directed *WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS* (20th-Fox, 1950), a film first of all notable because of its use of the *I WAKE UP SCREAMING* theme music without featuring Victor Mature in the cast. Dana Andrews was cast as a tough cop who uses his fists liberally on suspects. He is in love with Gene Tierney, who falls into the *noir* woman category of the girl next door. Occasionally, in *films noirs*, especially those dealing with brutal cops, the girl next door role had to fulfill the stereotype of the female as a gentle tamer. In *WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS*, Andrews beats up and kills a suspect in making an arrest. He tries to conceal the crime. Ben Hecht did the screenplay. Andrews' father was a thief and this has made him what he is: "I've worked all my life to be different from him." In conversation with Tierney, he reveals the *noir* view of the world: "One false move and you're in over your head." Andrews tries to frame hoodlum Gary Merrill with the crime, but his superior tags Tierney's father for it instead, and so Andrews, assured that Tierney loves him, confesses. At the last minute, this *film noir* is changed into a melodrama; although, realistically, such a brutal man in life would be more inclined to turn that brutality against the woman who loved him than to let himself be tamed by her.

I suspect this would also be the fate in store for the blind heroine played by Ida Lupino in *ON DANGEROUS GROUND* (RKO, 1951) directed by Nicholas Ray. In this film, Robert Ryan was cast as a tough cop who so brutalizes people that he is virtually a criminal himself. "Garbage," he mutters. "That's all we handle. . . . garbage." He drives upstate to work on a case and, as at the opening of *IN A LONELY PLACE* where Bogart's face is reflected in his rearview mirror, his face is similarly reflected—Martin Scorsese made an equally

adept use of this technique in filming TAXI DRIVER (Columbia, 1976). The murderer he is hunting turns out to be Lupino's brother, whom she is shielding. Bernard Hermann, who did the score for CITIZEN KANE (RKO, 1941) as well as for TAXI DRIVER, provided the score for this film, a combination of Vaughan-Williams' SINFONIA ANTARCTICA (also composed for a film) and Hermann's score for MYSTERIOUS ISLAND (Columbia, 1962), music suitable for the frozen wastes where most of the story takes place. "To get anything out of this life you have to put something in it. . . . from the heart," Lupino tells Ryan. The picture ends with the brother dead and the two principals touching hands. Let it be noted on Ray's behalf, as Colin McArthur wrote in UNDERWORLD U.S.A. (1972), that "Ray wanted to end the film on the ambivalent image of Jim Wilson [Robert Ryan] returning to the bleak city, but as the film now stands, he goes back once more to Mary Walden [Ida Lupino]." ¹² I do not believe I need comment on the overt significance of the Lupino character's name!?

If *films noirs* tried to engender sympathy for brutal cops—and Glenn Ford in THE BIG HEAT (Columbia, 1953) is only another incarnation of this image—they also tried to make a viewer sympathetic with a man compelled to murder women. Alfred Hitchcock was the first to film Marie Belloc-Lowndes' novel about Jack the Ripper; John Brahm in THE LODGER (20th-Fox, 1944), if anything, brought it even more effectively to the screen. The murders occur *in camera*, although the viewer can hear the women screaming and the murderer's heavy breathing. Laird Cregar appears to have been perfectly cast in this role. As Higham and Greenberg observed, "the killer's psychotic insolation is cleverly conveyed: he is continually looking at passers-by from behind lace curtains whose criss-cross patterns are like the meshes of a cage. When he is at last trapped in the flies of a theatre, Laird Cregar brilliantly suggests the tension and agony and fear of the character, a huge animal dodging like the Phantom of the Opera through a spider's web of steel ladders. As he crawls along a catwalk, successive shadows of the rungs ripple across his face like the bars of a cell while he occupies one of the great close-ups of the screen, his eyes starting with terror. And at the climax, he is caught in the corner of a room, panting bestially, plunging through a glass pane into the dark river below, eyes black and shining as the water which carries him to his doom. It is a motif that has been beautifully sustained from the beginning, when a dead prostitute's hand trails in a water-filled gutter, through the Ripper's speech to his friends about the cleansing powers of dark waters, to the crouching figure of the murderer on a pier, rinsing fresh blood from his hands." ¹³

Brahm followed THE LODGER with HANGOVER SQUARE (20th-Fox, 1945) which was also set in Victorian London with Cregar again in the lead, this time as a young composer who murders double-dealing women during periods of blackout. At one point, Cregar takes the dead body of Linda Darnell, whom he murdered for being unfaithful to him, and piles it atop a huge bonfire during a Guy Fawkes demonstration. This kind of delightful male misogyny is

still to be found treated with sympathy in a more recent film such as NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN (Warner's, 1983) in which James Bond blows Barbara Carrera to smithereens. What makes HANGOVER SQUARE *noir* in its treatment of this theme is that the Cregar character behaves in this fashion due to a psychotic fixation and, therefore, deserves a viewer's sympathy, although he must be destroyed, unlike Bond who is to be accorded a viewer's approval.

If there was a real victim in *film noir*, it was in all probability John Garfield. In discussing FORCE OF EVIL (M-G-M, 1948), Jack Shadoian remarked that "it is not too farfetched to suggest that it was Garfield's own guilt that was being conveyed in roles like this. Garfield retained his leftist ties and sympathies throughout his career. Being a leftist in theory and a wealthy film star in actuality must have been a hard line to walk. His old friends disowned him as a sellout, and he was too much of a maverick, an individualist, to survive in the movie industry. At last hounded and persecuted by HUAC, he died of a heart attack in 1952, at the age of thirty-nine."¹⁴

In October, 1947, when HUAC was only beginning its investigations of the film industry and had subpoenaed John Howard Lawson and eighteen other Hollywood artists to testify, John Garfield put his signature to the following statement issued by the Hollywood branch of the Committee for the First Amendment: "We, the undersigned, as American citizens who believe in constitutional democratic government, are disgusted and outraged by the continuing attempts of the House Un-American Activities Committee to smear the motion picture industry. We hold that these hearings are morally wrong because any investigation into the political beliefs of the individual is contrary to the basic principles of our democracy. Any attempt to curb freedom of expression and to set arbitrary standards of Americanism is in itself disloyal to both the spirit and the letter of our Constitution."¹⁵

Garfield had just appeared in the *film gris*, BODY AND SOUL (United Artists, 1947), directed by Robert Rossen with an original screenplay by Abraham Polonsky, who were themselves to be blacklisted by the industry as a result of HUAC. Garfield then appeared in the *film gris*, FORCE OF EVIL. As mentioned in a previous chapter, this was to be Polonsky's last directorial assignment before his blacklisting. By the time Garfield appeared in the *film noir*, HE RAN ALL THE WAY (United Artists, 1951) directed by John Berry, his reputation had been so shadowed because of his supposed political beliefs that exhibitors refused to screen the film until he testified before the Committee. Garfield, under this pressure and other coercive influences, agreed to appear as a cooperative witness. "I have always hated Communism," he told the Committee. "It is a tyranny which threatens our country and the peace of the world. Of course, then I have never been a member of the Communist party, or a sympathizer with any of its doctrines."¹⁶ Garfield had played Harry Morgan in the melodrama, THE BREAKING POINT (Warner's, 1950) directed by Michael Curtiz. It came no closer to the Ernest Hemingway novel on which it was based than Howard Hawks' earlier version, TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT (War-

ner's, 1944), in which Humphrey Bogart played Harry Morgan and the story ended happily, with Bogart united with Lauren Bacall. In *THE BREAKING POINT*, as in Hemingway's novel, Harry Morgan is threatened by the force of events, but again he survives. In one of the more graphic scenes in the novel, Hemingway described a tycoon contemplating how some of the men he had broken used one of "those well-constructed implements that end insomnia, terminate remorse, cure cancer, avoid bankruptcy, and blast an exit from intolerable positions by the pressure of a finger; those admirable American instruments so easily carried, so sure of effect, so well designed to end the American dream when it becomes a nightmare, their only drawback the mess they leave for relatives to clean up. The men he broke made all these various exits but that never worried him. Somebody had to lose and only suckers worried. No he would not have to think of them nor of the by-products of successful speculation. You win; somebody's got to lose, and only suckers worry."¹⁷ In the novel, Harry Morgan's last words, as he is dying from gunshot wounds, are: "'A man,' Harry Morgan said, looking at them both. 'One man alone ain't got. No man alone now.' He stopped. 'No matter how a man alone ain't got no bloody f——ing chance.' He shut his eyes. It had taken him a long time to get it out and it had taken him all of his life to learn it."¹⁸ In the remake version, Harry Morgan does not die at the end. No doubt Garfield was sympathetic with this desperate character; after all, he had been playing desperate characters for most of his career.

In *HE RAN ALL THE WAY*, Garfield was cast as a man victimized by his slum environment and a harsh mother. He becomes involved in a payroll robbery and hides out with Shelley Winters' working-class family, holding them as hostages. This is not the well-to-do middle-class family that would be seen later in *THE DESPERATE HOURS*; they live in a tenement building in cramped quarters. Garfield becomes increasingly confused as he witnesses the obvious affection this family has toward each of its members, but he resists showing affection himself. Even though Winters is in love with him by the end, he callously uses her as a shield in his attempt to escape, an attempt which results in his being shot down—and it is Winters holding Garfield's gun who does the shooting!

Garfield was not convicted of any crime by the Committee. He was black-listed because he had the wrong friends—Elia Kazan, Clifford Odets, Robert Rossen, and Abraham Polonsky—and because he refused to provide any information about them which might be used to obtain a conviction. His last work was on Broadway, in Odets' play, *GOLDEN BOY*, a role which had been denied to him fifteen years earlier. He suffered a mild heart attack in 1949, and a second one in 1951. He was warned to take better care of himself, but he refused.

Hildegard Knef reported in her autobiography, *THE GIFT HORSE* (1972), a meeting with Garfield the night before he died. Prior to stopping in New York *en route* to Germany, she had been at a Hollywood gathering where she had

heard someone say, "Garfield's finished." Marlene Dietrich was present. She "glanced first over her left shoulder, then over her right and said, 'He refused to give names. . . .' She caught her breath and added loudly, 'We're all whispering as though we were living under Hitler.' " While spending ten days in New York on the publicity circuit, she encountered a man in a hotel bar,

a chain smoker with a suit like an unmade bed.

"Name's Garfield," he mutters, "saw you in DECISION BEFORE DAWN. Liked it."

The sudden smile retreats, creeps behind clouds of smoke and a glass of gin-and-tonic. . . . "You doing anything? I'd like to talk. Haven't worked for a while, feel alone. You know what's going on here?"

"Yes."

"It's not good to be seen with me."

. . . Garfield's deep-set eyes over the flame of a match: "How long you staying?"

"I'm flying to Germany tomorrow morning."

"I'd like to go along. I don't have a passport. . . ."

"To Germany?"

"You still got a lot of Nazis? I'm a Jew."

"Don't know, they're quiet for the moment."

"Ours are deafening, it evens things out. Can't you stay in New York a few days?"

"No."

"Come on, let's have a drink."

"Skouras is throwing a party for me at nine at '21'."

He rubs his stubbled chin. "You're on the way up, eh? How long you have to listen to his bullshit?"

"Why don't you come along?"

"Me? I'd love to see their faces."

"What about after?"

"I'll call you, we'll meet someplace. I gotta talk."

Champagne caviar smoked salmon white wine red wine fish meat cognac. Skouras gets to his feet. Oxlike package, voice like a child's rattle. "We have a great actress with us tonight, gonna make a great career in our great land. I'm a little Greek, started with nothing in this great country and look at me now." He plops back onto his chair, tears in his eyes. The waiter comes and whispers, "Urgent call."

"Can you get away? I feel like the ceiling's coming down around my ears."

"It'll take one or two hours."

"Jesus. O.K., I'll call back."

"If you've got a friend have him come over," Skouras shouts and winks.

Garfield's voice is thick at one o'clock: "I have to see you, gotta talk, walk, speak. Hurry it up."

"Another hour."

I call him at two. There's a click but nobody answers; another click: disconnected. I try again, let it ring for several minutes. The Pan Am flight leaves for London at seven. I write him a note but I have no address, only the telephone number. I dial again. No answer. The plane flies via Boston, I buy a morning paper. The headline: "John Garfield dead! The well-known actor was found this morning in his apartment. . . ." ¹⁹

Only it was not at his apartment that Garfield was found. Garfield had gone to visit a friend, Iris Whitney, at 3 Gramercy Park. The next day she told THE NEW YORK TIMES that Garfield had been very ill and that she had let him spend the night in her bedroom, while she slept on the couch. When she could not wake him in the morning, she summoned a private physician, Dr. Charles Nammack, who pronounced him dead. The Medical Examiners Office said that Garfield had died of a cardiac condition and that there was “nothing suspicious” about his death. At his funeral, the New York police estimated that a crowd of 10,000 people, mostly women, lined the streets outside the chapel. Garfield left his wife, Robbie, and two children. He was buried at Westchester Hills Cemetery in Mount Hope, New York.

As Higham and Greenberg pointed out in HOLLYWOOD IN THE FORTIES, there were a spate of films toward the end of the decade which sought to explore “the Negro question.” It is to this circumstance that we owe the only *film noir* to feature a Black male protagonist, NO WAY OUT (20th-Fox, 1950) directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Richard Widmark established himself through the *films noirs* in which he appeared, usually playing a psychopathic killer—he empties his gun into Victor Mature in KISS OF DEATH, was cast as a thief and murderer in THE STREET WITH NO NAME (20th-Fox, 1948), got shot down while in a jealous frenzy by Ida Lupino in ROAD HOUSE (20th-Fox, 1948)—but also sometimes as a desperate man on the run, as in NIGHT AND THE CITY (20th-Fox, 1950), a shot of his panic-stricken countenance from this picture having been used as the cover illustration for Borde and Chaumeton’s PANORAMA DU FILM NOIR AMÉRICAIN. As the effects of HUAC began to be felt throughout the industry, Widmark’s portrayals were altered accordingly: in the melodrama, PANIC IN THE STREETS (20th-Fox, 1950), which Elia Kazan directed and in which Widmark was cast as a courageous physician fighting a plague (read: Communism) brought to this country from outside that takes him into the seamier parts of American society; or PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET (20th-Fox, 1953) in which Widmark, although a thief and low-life, fights the Red Menace. NO WAY OUT was his last role as a psychopathic killer before his pseudo-rehabilitation. Sidney Poitier made his film debut as a Black intern at a large metropolitan hospital. Two wounded hoodlum brothers are brought into the prison ward. When Widmark, one of the hoodlum brothers and a racial bigot, learns that his brother is dead, he blames Poitier and vows to kill him. He rejects Poitier’s claim that he died of a brain tumor and refuses to permit an autopsy. Widmark instigates a race riot. Poitier confesses to murder in order to force an autopsy and the autopsy confirms his supposition about the brain tumor as the cause of death. Widmark in the meantime escapes and is intent on killing Poitier. In this Widmark is frustrated and recaptured. Poitier, standing in the midst of the devastation racial intolerance has created, says to Widmark: “Don’t cry, white boy, you’re going to live.” Perhaps what makes this picture *film noir* instead of *film gris* is the hopelessness of its presentation of the racial plight of Blacks in the United States, although Mankiewicz was

careful to portray both sides as occasionally vicious and thus elude any suspicion about the film being “un-American.”

“ . . . *Film noir* is characterized by a certain anxiety over the existence and definition of masculinity and normality,” Richard Dyer wrote in his essay in *WOMEN IN FILM NOIR*. “This anxiety is seldom expressed and yet may be taken to constitute the films’ ‘problematic,’ that set of issues and questions that the films seek to come to terms with without ever actually articulating. . . . To illustrate this. The heroes of *film noir* are for the most part either colorless characterizations (cf., the parade of anodyne performers in the central roles—Dana Andrews, Glenn Ford, Farley Granger) and/or characters conspicuously lacking in the virtues of the ‘normal’ man (e.g., John Garfield, immigrant, loner, red; Fred MacMurray as a weak insurance salesman in *DOUBLE INDEMNITY*; Ralph Meeker, plain nasty and unattractive). The exceptions are the characters played by Humphrey Bogart and Robert Mitchum, and it would be interesting to analyze whether it is these characters as written or only as played that makes them seem to be positive assertions of masculine norms. The fact that most *film noir* heroes are rootless and unmarried, and the implication of quasi-gay relationships in certain instances (*DEAD RECKONING* [Columbia, 1946], *THE BIG COMBO*, *DOUBLE INDEMNITY*, *GILDA* [Columbia, 1946], *inter alia*), all serve to rob them, as they are substantially constructed, of the attributes of masculinity and normality.”²⁰

John Kobal in an essay titled “The Time, the Place, and the Girl: Rita Hayworth” in *FOCUS ON FILM* noted, concerning *GILDA*, that “according to [Glenn] Ford the homosexual angle [between Johnny (Ford) and Manson (George MacCreedy)] was obvious to them at the time; they could see the implications in the relationship between the men in the early part of the film—nothing stated, just mood—and they didn’t emphasize it because it was obvious to them that when Hayworth came onto the screen what was just an interesting hint of other things had little chance to become more than that—for, with Rita around, what man would prefer another man?”²¹ Notwithstanding, I tend to agree with Marjorie Rosen that “what *GILDA* explores so exactly is not just the blinding fires of passion, but the need for humiliation and subjugation that has been so much a part of our sexual mythology on-screen and off.”²² It is this ingredient which embodies the repressed homosexuality implicit in the film. Ford asks Hayworth: “Doesn’t it bother you that you’re married?” to which she responds: “What I want to know is, does it bother you?” Hayworth’s character is made to deprecate herself: “If they’d made me a ranch, I’d be the Bar-Nothing”—a *double entendre*, surely. Ford’s passion is manifested, for the most part, not as love or lust but as hate, as when he tells the Hayworth character: “I hate you so much that I destroy myself to take you down with me.”

STRANGERS ON A TRAIN (Warner’s, 1951) directed by Alfred Hitchcock combined Hitchcock’s interest in the notion of the *Doppelgänger* from the German cinema with the idea of complicity in a murder with a homosexual overtone. Farley Granger played Guy Haines who meets a psychotic playboy, Bruno

Anthony played by Robert Walker, on a train and Haines suddenly finds himself involved in a murder plot where Anthony will murder his wife if Haines will murder Anthony's father. Based on a novel by Patricia Highsmith, as Gordon Gow pointed out in *HOLLYWOOD IN THE FIFTIES* (1971), "Hitchcock transmuted into purely filmic terms the essence of Patricia Highsmith's concept: the intermingling of the good (Guy) and the bad (Bruno) until one tendency of human nature takes precedence over the other."²³ Donald Spoto went even further, stressing that Hitchcock "also gave the homosexual angle a wider reference, making it serve the theme of two aspects of a single personality. Walker is Granger's 'shadow,' activating what Granger wants, bringing out the dark underside of Granger's potentially murderous desires."²⁴

John Kobal, in his essay on Hayworth, also recorded the fact that Hayworth, and not Lizabeth Scott, was originally intended to play opposite Bogart in *DEAD RECKONING* and that contractual problems prevented her from doing so. "It is interesting to speculate on what Hayworth might have made of the equally female role opposite Humphrey Bogart . . .," he wrote. But perhaps we have already come to the point where it has become clear why the *noir* man is humiliated, emasculated, reduced: it is because of the role reversal of the *noir* woman. As she took on "masculine" characteristics (as opposed to biological male characteristics), i.e., characteristics assigned to the gender role of masculine by the patriarchy, so it led, covertly if not overtly, to the attribution of "feminine" characteristics to the *noir* male. The psychosexual dilemma of the *noir* male is that the surrounding patriarchy has made homosexuality taboo, and yet, with the persistent misogynistic attitude toward women, females were also excluded as suitable objects except in those cases where they willingly assumed the narrow roles prescribed for them: hence condemning the *noir* male to a dull, insipid, and unrewarding life without any deep emotional and sexual commitment.

There is no telling where this ultimate dilemma of *film noir* would have led, to what new forms of human relationship. *Film noir* came to an end, not because of the nature of the dilemma itself, but because the political influence of HUAC became such that the motion picture industry had to return to its pre-war role of optimism and affirmation. Again, the nuclear American family took the forefront and the habituation to falsehood, so long the staple of American films, once more became predominant in the industry. To question the *status quo* became radical, even revolutionary, and *films noirs* and their makers seemed, increasingly, to imply feelings and attitudes which the new political climate had judged un-American.

Noir Directors

Having regarded *film noir* now in terms of its literary and dramatic antecedents, from the perspectives of visual style and narrative structure, in light of the ways in which men and women are treated within its conventions, it only remains for something to be said about the contributions of certain directors who made notable *films noirs*. One of Robert Siodmak's characteristic innovations was to invert, in a film such as *THE KILLERS* (Universal, 1946), the values usually associated with light and dark. "The effect is one of a hellish environment against which the actors cannot compete," Jack Shadoian wrote. "There seems to be a conscious attempt to dislocate the audience by subverting traditional associations connected with light and darkness. Traditionally, light is positive, darkness negative; light is security, darkness insecurity. Dark is evil, stifling, terrifying, deadly; light signifies life, hope, and growth. Darkness is falsehood, light truth. In *THE KILLERS* light hurts and terrifies. The eye is assaulted and the characters endangered by light. To move or rest in darkness is never to get anywhere, but *noir* choreography and framing imply there is nowhere to go anyway. Darkness meanwhile can be protective, comforting, a safe region in which to brood and endure."¹

I have already had more than one occasion to point out how Fritz Lang manipulated the conventions of *noir* narrative structures. The first film John Sturges directed was *THE MAN WHO DARED* (Columbia, 1946). George Macready is on trial for his life. While the jury is out, he tells his fiancée and his attorney how he framed himself with circumstantial evidence and talked his editor, played by Forrest Tucker, into helping him with the scheme. Tucker is unable to testify because the real murderer has run over him in an automobile and Tucker is unconscious. Macready escapes, brings Tucker to, and solves the case, catching the real murderer. Lang remade this film as *BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT* (RKO, 1956). How the plot was altered is an excellent illustration of what John Gabree meant when he remarked that "running through Lang's films

is a deep strain of paranoia. His obsession with the mechanics of plot mark him as a man of his century; he does not build careful sequences of action to illuminate characters, he builds traps, horrible boxes from which his characters cannot escape. He is like a designer of very abstruse and pessimistic games.”² In *BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT*, Dana Andrews was cast as a rising young novelist. Together with his publisher, played by Sidney Blackmer, who is also the father of Andrews’ fiancée, they concoct a scheme to discredit capital punishment in cases involving circumstantial evidence. Andrews frames himself for the murder of a woman and is put on trial. Unfortunately, Blackmer is killed in an automobile accident and Andrews is convicted. His fiancée, Susan, played by Joan Fontaine, works furiously in his behalf to uncover new evidence to win him an appeal. All the emphasis is on Susan’s efforts until, just on the brink of being pardoned, Andrews inadvertently reveals to her that he *is* guilty. The murdered woman turns out to have been his wife whom he killed because she was proving an obstacle to his projected socially advantageous marriage.

Most of Nicholas Ray’s forays into the *noir* style, with perhaps only the exception of *IN A LONELY PLACE* (Columbia, 1950), are flawed by his excessive sentimentality. Ray’s *THEY LIVE BY NIGHT* (RKO, 1949) is structurally a *film noir*, but here the screenplay is constantly undermining and subverting the *noir* plot. Farley Granger is the youngest of three holdup men. He meets a shy young girl named Keechie, played by Cathy O’Donnell, and they fall in love. Granger wants to escape from his life of crime, but he is always pulled back into it. Finally, he and Keechie elope and, hiding out, share a moment of bliss before the police learn of his whereabouts, surround the cabin where they are staying, and kill him from ambush. Contrasting this film with Fritz Lang’s *YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE* (United Artists, 1937), Peter Biskind observed that “unlike the gargoyles presented in *YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE*, the analogous figures in *THEY LIVE BY NIGHT* are innocuous or comic. Lang’s cowardly hotel owner who evicts Eddie and Joan is matched by Ray’s friendly eccentric who welcomes Bowie [Granger] and Keechie to their rustic retreat, or the kindly landlady who later treats them to sweet potato pie. While Lang’s police are bloodthirsty and trigger-happy, Ray’s police are paternal and understanding men who present a reasonable case for informing, and readily admit that society is responsible for its own ills. The utopian aspirations of Bowie and Keechie for community and social wholeness are embodied in normal everyday life. The film cherishes the values of mainstream America; its pathos arises from Bowie’s and Keechie’s failure to realize the simple pleasures we take for granted.”³ When Robert Altman remade the film under the title of the novel on which it was based, *THIEVES LIKE US* (United Artists, 1973), he felt he had to treat the story in a *comédie noir* vein. The film opens with the national anthem playing under the credits, makes use of old radio programs such as “Gangbusters” playing during a bank robbery, and it ends with Father Coughlin ranting against the New Deal. Altman’s remake is better than the original precisely because it

avoids Ray's sentimentality and his commitment to middle-class American values.

Alfred Hitchcock's contributions to *film noir* are limited by his own concern for generating and sustaining suspense, rather than presenting an interpretation of life and the world. In *THE WRONG MAN* (Warner's, 1956), Henry Fonda is mistakenly accused of being a holdup man. "An innocent man has nothing to fear," the police tell him, but, as it turns out, he has a great deal to fear. As a result of his ordeal, Fonda's wife goes insane. When Fonda resorts to prayer, the real criminal attempts another robbery but is caught. This sets Fonda free, but his wife's condition still remains. The implication, however, is that two years hence the wife will have been completely cured. Stated baldly in this fashion, this might seem a compromise ending, or even smack of sentimentality. Yet this judgment is wrong if we bear in mind, as Blake Lucas pointed out, that "THE WRONG MAN, one of the bleakest films in the history of the cinema, betrays no cynicism and makes no recourse to facile melodramatics. This film's story of the near destruction of a man through a merciless quirk of fate, which becomes the actual destruction of his more fragile wife, describes a cruel and uncaring universe with a humanism found in few classical *film noir*. Here the characters do not choose to suffer like the crippled beings of other films in the cycle but are enmeshed against their will and because their limitations are turned against them by the caprices of circumstances. . . . THE WRONG MAN, with its final tragic irony, becomes an unrelenting depiction of the desolation of existence."⁴ In these terms, holding out the hope of an eventual respite is a titillation, not a reassurance.

SOMEWHERE IN THE NIGHT (20th-Fox, 1946) directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz is one of two notable films in the *noir* style which he directed—*HOUSE OF STRANGERS* (20th-Fox, 1949) was the other one. In the former, John Hodiak played a veteran with amnesia who is searching for a certain Larry Cravat. He enlists the help of a nightclub singer, played by Nancy Guild, in his quest. It is not too long before the viewer finds out that this Cravat was a dishonest detective involved in concealing Nazi war booty and whose fiancée committed suicide after he jilted her. Hodiak starts off as a somewhat sympathetic character. "Do you know what it's like to be alone in the world?" he asks Guild. But, then, he discovers that he is himself Larry Cravat. This revelation makes the Hodiak character ambiguous, to say the least, although Guild attributes it to circumstances beyond his control: "Three years of war change a man." However dubious Hodiak may be, Richard Conte, as a vicious murderer, is worse, and so the darkness of the post-war world in Mankiewicz's view is one of degrees—but no one escapes culpability entirely. A rather related situation is to be found in *HOUSE OF STRANGERS* in which Richard Conte played the youngest son of an Italian-American banking family just out of prison for bribing a juror and intent on avenging himself on his brothers, one of whom double-crossed him. The family was based somewhat too closely

on the Giannini family—Giannini *pater* was the founder of the Bank of Italy which became the Bank of America—and so the film seemed to strike too close to home. Spyros Skouras was affronted by the story and saw to it that the film received only limited distribution. Notwithstanding, as a *noir* director, Mankiewicz was concerned with the greed which the war had released and which became, in his opinion, increasingly widespread.

Greed was present, but only of secondary importance, in *films noirs* directed by Otto Preminger and Billy Wilder where the most basic emphasis was on *femmes fatales*. Indeed, in a Preminger film such as *ANGEL FACE* (RKO, 1953) greed plays no role, but rather obsession: Jean Simmons' obsession with her father which compels her to plot her stepmother's murder and Robert Mitchum's obsession with Simmons which makes him a fellow conspirator. At the end, Simmons kills them both by throwing the car into reverse and crashing backwards over a cliff. Greed plays a stronger role in *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* (Paramount, 1944) and *SUNSET BOULEVARD* (Paramount, 1950), but here Billy Wilder was more concerned with the destructiveness of the Amazons he had created. Gloria Swanson in the latter film played a murderous has-been who goes insane in her destructiveness. Ironically, it is narrated by William Holden who is seen to be dead at the beginning of the picture. Louis B. Mayer, after attending the official Paramount screening of the film, came up to Wilder afterwards. "You bastard," he shouted at him, "you have disgraced the industry that made you and fed you." Then he shook his fist at Wilder. "You should be tarred and feathered and run out of Hollywood." Wilder's answer was succinct. "Fuck you," he snapped. Mayer turned his back and strode away. In the meantime, Barbara Stanwyck, who had also attended the screening, approached Gloria Swanson, tears in her eyes. She knelt down, took Swanson's gown in her hands, crushed it in her fingers and kissed it. Then, rising again, the two women embraced. It was probably an emotional reaction for the photographers present, but it is also an interesting commentary on the actresses who portrayed two of the most memorable *femmes fatales* in all of *film noir*.⁵

Edward Dmytryk, consistent with his optimistic liberalism philosophically at odds with the darkness of the pure *noir* perspective, used the films he directed in the *noir* style to impart a message of social action. In *CROSSFIRE* (RKO, 1947), the original prejudice which occasioned the character played by Robert Ryan to become a murderer was not anti-Semitism but homosexuality; however, it was no doubt prudent to change this in the film, since the viewer of that time (and probably to an extent still today) can more easily hate the Ryan character for his aversion toward Jews than toward sexual deviation (or what at least American middle-class attitudes regard as sexual deviation). In *THE SNIPER* (Columbia, 1952), the argument is that sex offenders should be caught early and that they can be cured by modern psychiatry. The central character in the film is a homicidal psychotic who is compelled to kill brunettes. The presence of this underlying optimism in these films—and I, for one, am not a believer that psychiatry is a science, much less able to cure anyone—would

tend to classify them as *film gris*, whereas, as already mentioned, Dmytryk's Philip Marlowe opus, *MURDER, MY SWEET* (RKO, 1944), is a *film gris* almost bordering on melodrama.

Michael Curtiz, who directed *MILDRED PIERCE* (Warner's, 1945) and *THE BREAKING POINT* (Warner's, 1950), the latter as noted in the previous chapter having been based on Hemingway's novel, *TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT*, could never bring himself to a true *noir* perspective either. *THE BREAKING POINT* instead of ending, as does the novel, with Harry Morgan's death, finds him reconciled with his wife, played by Phyllis Thaxter, who remarks at the end: "You're more of a man than anybody I ever met." Garfield played the Harry Morgan character as the hopeless loner he is in the novel, but here the narrative structure of the film obviated his performance.

Orson Welles, perhaps more tenaciously than any other director, persisted in embracing a *noir* perspective in his films, so much so that such a late film—late in terms of the *noir* cycle—as *TOUCH OF EVIL* (Universal, 1958) in its uncut version still evokes all the most basic icons of the style, both in visual and narrative terms. Welles cast himself as a detective in a border town who has earned his reputation as a policeman by framing those he suspects. Charlton Heston was cast as a Mexican detective, married to an American, played by Janet Leigh. Heston keeps interfering with the way Welles wants to run his investigation of a double murder. Leigh is first gang-raped and then Welles tries to frame her as a drug addict. Leigh is unconscious, in a hotel room with the head of the drug ring, played by Akim Tamaroff, when Welles strangles him to death. When Leigh regains consciousness, she becomes aware of the corpse as a light outside the window flashes on and off, intermittently and grotesquely illuminating it. Welles goes to Marlene Dietrich, cast as a Gypsy fortune teller, and asks her: "Read my future." "You haven't got any," she tells him. The net closes around Welles who may be a good detective but who is a bad cop. In the night, the camera rises and falls with the motion of an oil pump. Welles' wife was killed and her murderer is the last killer ever to get away from him. Heston hates his work and he hates gringos. Leigh hates Mexicans, which makes her gang-rape by them twice as repulsive. Welles ends up losing his life, but the kinds of lives led by the other characters are scarcely desirable.

Most directors who made *films noirs* abandoned the style as the 'Fifties proceeded, either because their interests turned to other types of films, or because political pressures combined with factors to make the style inappropriate to the prescriptions with which American films were preoccupied. Orson Welles was one of the few who held out, but even in his case *TOUCH OF EVIL* was severely edited prior to its initial release. All of which brings us to the legacy of *film noir* which occasionally results in the production of a more modern color film which attempts to invoke the *noir* perspective, but with varying results. The more successful of these attempts are usually done as period pieces, as, for example, Roman Polanski's *CHINATOWN* (Paramount, 1974); but there have been efforts with a contemporary setting, such as *TAXI DRIVER* (Columbia,

1976) directed by Martin Scorsese or *BODY HEAT* (Warner's, 1981) directed by Lawrence Kazden which do effectively bring off the *noir* mood, at least as concerns the narrative structure. *CHINATOWN* shows the private detective impotent to prevent the triumph of evil. *BODY HEAT* presents a *femme fatale* who succeeds at her conspiracy to murder her husband and who retires comfortably to a tropical paradise while her accomplice is seen to take the fall. Both Polanski's film and Kazden's follow to perfection the five-part *film noir* structure, with the Recognition scene coming explosively at the end with great dramatic impact. *TAXI DRIVER*, despite its violence, embodies the ambiguity of the *noir* protagonist in Travis Bickle, played by Robert DeNiro, yet it is not really a *film noir*. For one thing, Scorsese himself was too concerned with John Ford's mythology in his Western films: Travis Bickle dresses as a cowboy until he turns violent, at which point he has his head shaved in a Mohawk haircut. Beyond this, the film incorporates an ideology peculiar to Paul Schrader, whose career as a screenwriter and then director began via a study of *film noir*, namely that a woman from a sexually repressive home will find the life of a prostitute eminently attractive. Scorsese and Schrader also seem to agree that violence is the inevitable consequence of social and psychological feelings of oppression; and, while this is a *film noir* theme, the way in which it is treated in this film is definitely not *noir*.

In *SHOCK CORRIDOR* (Allied Artists, 1963) Sam Fuller, who was already then a widely acclaimed director in France if not in the United States, tried to make a deliberate *film noir*—something that the *films noirs* of the 'Forties and early 'Fifties are not because the directors making them, however aware they may have been of German Expressionism, were not cognizant that they were developing and contributing to a new American film style. When Fuller directed *SHOCK CORRIDOR* the term was already established among European film critics—Borde's and Chaumeton's book was already eight years old—and he was quite conscious of what he was doing. He selected to open and close the film a well known epigram attributed to Euripides and which has been said to have been translated into Latin by Plutarch. It is commonly given in Latin as "Quos deus vult perdere, prius dementat"; however, *demento* has no authority as either an active or neuter verb and, grammatically, it ought to read: "Quem Iupiter vult perdere, prius dementat." The original Greek is to be found in a fragment of Euripides: "Ou theos thelei apolesai, prot' apophrenai" [He who Zeus wants to cast into the void, is first driven out of his mind]. If this all seems rather abstruse, Fuller's picture is more so. The quotation as he used it reads: "Whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes mad." There are pictures of Freud and Jung on the walls and busts of Beethoven and Nietzsche. We must presume, because of this juxtaposition, that the former are the healers and the latter the insane. The story concerns a reporter who wants to pretend to be insane so he can get inside an asylum in order to solve a murder. Peter Breck was cast as the reporter. Constance Towers played his girlfriend, who tells him, in a portentous bit of dialogue: "I'm sick of playing Greek chorus to your rehearsed nightmare." This line and all the other literary allusions she makes be-

come rather mind-boggling once we learn that she is a professional fan dancer. At one point she even engages in a long and sensuous strip number, a visual reference to *GILDA* (Columbia, 1946). The scenes in the asylum are appropriately lunatic and the film concludes with a typical Fuller ending: the reporter solves the case but becomes himself a catatonic. A reviewer in *FILM QUARTERLY* wrote of *SHOCK CORRIDOR*: "In one of the most preposterous and tasteless films of all time, a newspaper reporter who desperately wants to win a Pulitzer prize has himself incarcerated in a mental institution, in the guise of a sexual deviate, with the intention of solving a murder committed there. . . . I am reasonably sure that we will soon find Fuller's latest effort hailed by the *CAHIERS/MOVIE* crowd, as 'Fuller's testament' or 'A Masterpiece—symptomatic of our age.' The film is, in fact, a cheap, nasty, lurid melodrama with artistic pretensions, viz., hallucinatory color shots of the Orient and Africa cut into the monochrome print, a sententious quote from Euripides, and forced reminders of social responsibilities."⁶ I would perhaps agree with most of this assessment, but a melodrama it is not: for better (or surely for worse) it is a *film noir*. Above all, it has the kind of sensationalist/journalistic plot one can expect in a Fuller *film noir*.

In essence, then, the majority of film directors who contributed to *film noir* endowed their pictures with their own perspectives and outlooks, as well as took advantage of a new set of conventions the roots of which can be traced back to German Expressionist cinema and beyond it to Classical tragedy. It has not been my objective in this book, in tracing the cultural influences which were shaped and reshaped in American *films noirs*, to comment at length on the movement; but perhaps an observation or two in closing would not be out of order. What I feel was healthy in the *film noir* perspective was the new awareness it gave viewers that our convictions about life and our certitudes about human society are really without foundation. *Film noir* attacked the very basis for smugness and optimism which had infested the ideologies of so many American films prior to its advent. This was necessary and even culturally hygienic; and, in truth, the American cinema has never been quite the same since *film noir*. On the negative side, however, the misogyny and the reduction of our idea of a human being were unpleasant and unfortunate side effects. Women were being hated because they rejected their traditional roles while those traditional roles, in reality, denied them their right to be human. Men were reduced and destroyed, not because of the Delphic invocation that one must know oneself, one must know what it means to be human; but rather the reduction most often occurred because the male protagonists, too, were uncertain as to the desirability of traditional roles and, here again, those roles denied them their humanity. All too seldom did the Recognition in a *film noir* have anything to do with cognizance of what is human, as opposed to what is socially prescribed as generic. But for those few *films noirs* which did address this issue, we can be grateful, for in these films the film style produced a human art which, as Classical tragedy at its finest, we experience not for amusement or instruction but for what it can tell us about human life.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Hemingway, Ernest, *FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS* (New York: Scribner's, 1940), p.428. In my translation, it reads: "We are fucked. Yes. As always. Yes. What a pity. Yes."

2. Troy, William, in *WILLIAM TROY: SELECTED ESSAYS* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1967), edited with an Introduction by Stanley Edgar Hyman, p.263.

3. Silver, Alain and Elizabeth Ward, editors, *FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN STYLE* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1979), p.3.

4. Quoted by Reik, Theodor, in *THE SEARCH WITHIN: THE INNER EXPERIENCES OF A PSYCHOANALYST* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956), p.x.

5. Nietzsche, Friedrich, *WERKE IN DREI BÄNDEN* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1954–56) edited by Karl Schlechta, volume three, p.860.

6. Hollingdale, R. J., *THOMAS MANN: A CRITICAL STUDY* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), p.4.

7. Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970) translated by Andrew R. MacAndrew, pp.459–460. In my opinion, MacAndrew's translations of Dostoyevsky are definitive; I only regret that he has not translated more of Dostoyevsky's work—especially now that most readers no longer seem in need of the prudish censorship true of the Constance Garnett translations which, incredibly, are still in print and widely used in classrooms.

8. Nietzsche, Friedrich, *WERKE*, op.cit., volume three, p.881.

9. Nietzsche, loc. cit., volume two [*GÖTZEN-DÄMMERUNG*, Chapter IX, section 5], p.993.

10. Idem, loc. cit., p.900.

11. Rahv, Philip, "Dostoevsky in *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*," in *DOSTOEVSKY: A COLLECTION OF CRITICAL ESSAYS* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962) edited by René Wellek, p.34.

12. Nietzsche, op.cit., loc. cit., "Sprüche und Pfeile" ["Maxims and Arrows"], p.943.

13. Ibid., volume three, pp.852–853.
14. Mann, Thomas, “Nietzsches Philosophie im Lichte unserer Erfahrung,” [“Nietzsche’s Philosophy in the Light of our Experience”], in GESAMMELTE WERKE IN ZWÖLF BÄNDEN (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1960), Band IX, p.676.
15. Schlechta, Karl, op.cit., volume three, p.1452.
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17. Gide, André, IMAGINARY INTERVIEWS (New York: Knopf, 1944) translated by Malcolm Cowley, p.146.
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20. Barzun, Jacques, “Cultural History as a Synthesis,” in THE VARIETIES OF HISTORY (New York: Meridian Books, revised edition, 1972) edited by Fritz Stein, p.393.

CHAPTER 1: TRAGEDY

1. Kitto, H.D.F., THE GREEKS (New York: Pelican Books, 1951), p.129.
2. In Troy, William, WILLIAM TROY: SELECTED ESSAYS, op.cit., p.267.
3. The quotations are from the POETICS (IX.1–4.1451b). Throughout this chapter, wherever possible, I have used the Greek and Latin texts to be found in the Loeb Classical Library.
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9. In Huxley, Aldous, MUSIC AT NIGHT (1931; New York: Penguin Books, 1951), p.17.
10. In Hyman, Stanley Edgar, THE PROMISED END: ESSAYS AND REVIEWS, 1942–1962 (New York: World, 1963), pp.356–357.
11. Ibid., p.367.
12. Ibid., p.358.
13. Ibid., p.103.
14. Ibid., p.119.
15. Krieger, Murray, THE TRAGIC VISION: VARIATIONS ON A THEME IN LITERARY INTERPRETATION (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp.2–3.
16. Ibid., p.15.
17. Ibid., p.17.
18. Ibid., p.20.
19. Troy, William, WILLIAM TROY: SELECTED ESSAYS, op.cit., p.276.
20. Lattimore, Richmond, STORY PATTERNS IN GREEK TRAGEDY (1964; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p.17.

21. Kitto, H.D.F., *THE GREEKS*, op.cit., p.186.
22. Lattimore, Richmond, *STORY PATTERNS IN GREEK TRAGEDY*, op.cit., pp.86–87.
23. Nilsson, Martin P., *A HISTORY OF GREEK RELIGION*, op.cit., p.168.
24. Winnington-Ingram, R. P., *SOPHOCLES: AN INTERPRETATION* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.158.
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29. Diehls, Hermann, *DIE FRAGMENTE DER VORSOKRATIKER* [FRAGMENTS OF THE PRESOCRATICS] (1903; no city: Weidmann, 1974) edited by Walter Kranz, volume one, p.177.
30. Nietzsche, Friedrich, *WERKE*, op.cit., volume two, p.626.
31. Dodds, E. R., *THE GREEKS AND THE IRRATIONAL*, op.cit., p.186.
32. Kitto, H.D.F., *THE GREEKS*, op.cit., p.58.
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CHAPTER 2: HOSTAGES OF FATE

1. Quoted by F. L. Lucas in *THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMANTIC IDEAL* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p.24. In my translation, it reads: “All the women which one has had have been nothing but mattresses for the woman of one’s dreams.”

2. Lucas, op.cit., after thus quoting Voltaire made the point that “here lies in little the whole difference between the Romantic and the neo-Classic spirit—the refusal of the second to dream,” pp.74–75. It is a distinction I feel has validity and hence I have adopted it throughout this book. In my translation, it reads: “I go right for the facts in the case—that is my technique.”

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CHAPTER 5: THE *FILM NOIR* CANON

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5. Borde, Raymond, and Etienne Chaumeton, *op.cit.*, p.5. In my translation, it reads: "it is the presence of crime that provides *film noir* with its most enduring characteristic."
6. *Ibid.*, p.6. In my translation, it reads: "sordid or unusual, death always emerges at the conclusion of a picaresque journey. In the full sense of the word, *film noir* is film about death."
7. *Ibid.*, p.8. In my translation, it reads: "the American police procedural documentary is in reality a documentary glorifying the police and belongs to the same category as such productions as, in France, *IDENTITÉ JUDICIAIRE* [LEGAL IDENTITY], or, in England, *THE BLUE LAMP*. There is nothing of this kind in *noir* films. If there are policemen, they are rotten—as the inspector in *THE ASPHALT JUNGLE*, or that prime example of a corrupted brute incarnate by Lloyd Nolan in *THE LADY IN THE LAKE*—sometimes even murderers (*FALLEN ANGEL* and *WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS* directed by Otto Preminger)."
8. Duhamel, Marcel, *ibid.*, p.vii. In my translation, it reads: "the enormous work of compilation and accomplished decortication."
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29. Quoted by Bazin, André, *ORSON WELLES: A CRITICAL VIEW*, op.cit., p.58.

30. This narrative construction is based on my interviews over the years with H. Bruce Humberstone, Darryl F. Zanuck, et al.; and more information can be found in my career study, “H. Bruce Humberstone,” in *CLOSE-UP: THE CONTRACT DIRECTOR*, op.cit., pp.57–99.

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34. I have given a number of details concerning this collaboration in Chapter Nine of my book, *THE DETECTIVE IN HOLLYWOOD* (New York: Doubleday, 1978). The reader is referred to it for more information, as well as to Maurice Zolotow’s book on Billy Wilder, vide n.36 below.

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hame as aspects of the same soul in contrast to Paul M. Jensen who in *THE CINEMA OF FRITZ LANG*, op.cit., p.183 perceived this duality in Bannion and Lagana, "each contains elements of the other, his opposite," and Colin McArthur who in *UNDERWORLD U.S.A.* (New York: Viking, 1972), p.79, perceived Bannion as "the avenger, indistinguishable in behavior from the criminals he hunts."

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64. Farber, Stephen, “Violence and the Bitch Goddess,” FILM COMMENT (November-December, 1974), p.10.
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66. Place, Janey, “Women in *Film Noir*,” in WOMEN IN FILM NOIR, op.cit., p.39.
67. Silver, Alain, and Elizabeth Ward, FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIC REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN STYLE, op.cit., p.182.
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71. Ibid., p.964.
72. Higham, Charles, and Joel Greenberg, HOLLYWOOD IN THE FORTIES, op.cit., pp.33–34.
73. Karimi, A. M., TOWARD A DEFINITION OF THE AMERICAN FILM NOIR (1941–1949), op.cit., p.127.
74. Higham, Charles, and Joel Greenberg, HOLLYWOOD IN THE FORTIES, op.cit., p.34.
75. Taylor, John Russell, STRANGERS IN PARADISE, op.cit., p.203.
76. Shadoian, Jack, DREAMS AND DEAD ENDS: THE AMERICAN GANGSTER/CRIME FILM, op.cit., p.101.
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80. Sherman, Eric, and Martin Rubin, THE DIRECTOR’S EVENT (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp.15–16.
81. Cowie, Peter, THE CINEMA OF ORSON WELLES, op.cit., p.163.
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86. Parish, James Robert, and Michael R. Pitts, THE GREAT GANGSTER FILMS, op.cit., p.27. Also see my career study on Huston in CLOSE-UP: THE HOLLYWOOD DIRECTOR (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

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92. Taylor, John Russell, STRANGERS IN PARADISE, op.cit., p.203.

93. Flinn, Tom, "Three Faces of *Film Noir*," in KINGS OF THE Bs, op.cit., p.160.

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95. In Silver, Alain, and Elizabeth Ward, FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN STYLE, op.cit., p.35.

CHAPTER 6: NOIR WOMEN

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5. Gledhill, Christine, in WOMEN IN FILM NOIR, op.cit., p.13.

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11. Rosen, Marjorie, POPCORN VENUS, op.cit., pp.201-202.

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16. Harvey, Sylvia, "Woman's Place: The Absent Family in *Film Noir*," in WOMEN IN FILM NOIR, op.cit., p.33.
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21. Thomson, David, "In A Lonely Place," SIGHT AND SOUND (Autumn, 1979), p.216.
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26. Rosen, Marjorie, loc.cit., p.315.
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CHAPTER 7: NOIR MEN

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CHAPTER 8: *NOIR* DIRECTORS

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Chronology and Filmography of *Films Noirs*

In this chronological list of motion pictures influenced by the visual style or narrative structure of *film noir*, or both, the three basic plot varieties delineated in “The *Film Noir* Canon” have been used in classifying each of the films. Accordingly, after the title of a film it is noted in brackets whether it is a *film noir*, a *film gris*, or a melodrama. For the sake of clarity, melodramas have been further refined into either just melodrama or melodrama/pseudo-documentary. I have limited the years of the *film noir* movement to the two decades between 1940 and 1959. The films mentioned, made after this time, may be classed as various attempts to revert to the use of the *noir* style, but they are essentially imitations and do not belong to the mainstream of *film noir*. Complete casts with character identifications, technical credits, plot synopses, and brief critiques for most of these films can be found in either *FILM NOIR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA REFERENCE TO THE AMERICAN STYLE* or *A REFERENCE GUIDE TO THE AMERICAN FILM NOIR: 1940–1958*, cited in the bibliography. However, it ought to be noted that the release years in the latter reference are invariably correct, whereas in the former they are often misdated by a year or even two years.

1940

STRANGER ON THE THIRD FLOOR (RKO) [melodrama] d. Boris Ingster

1941

AMONG THE LIVING (Paramount) [melodrama] d. Stuart Heisler

CITIZEN KANE (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Orson Welles

HIGH SIERRA (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Raoul Walsh

I WAKE UP SCREAMING (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. H. Bruce Humberstone

THE MALTESE FALCON (Warner's) [*film gris*] d. John Huston

MAN HUNT (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Fritz Lang

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Josef von Sternberg

SUSPICION (RKO) [melodrama] d. Alfred Hitchcock

1942

THE GLASS KEY (Universal) [melodrama] d. Stuart Heisler
 JOHNNY EAGER (M-G-M) [*film noir*] d. Mervyn LeRoy
 SABOTEUR (Universal) [melodrama] d. Alfred Hitchcock
 STREET OF CHANCE (Paramount) [melodrama] d. Jack Hively
 THIS GUN FOR HIRE (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. Frank Tuttle

1943

FALLEN SPARROW (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Richard Wallace
 JOURNEY INTO FEAR (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Norman Foster
 SHADOW OF A DOUBT (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Alfred Hitchcock

1944

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY (Universal) [melodrama] d. Robert Siodmak
 DARK WATERS (United Artists) [melodrama] d. André de Toth
 DOUBLE INDEMNITY (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. Billy Wilder
 EXPERIMENT PERILOUS (RKO) [melodrama] d. Jacques Tourneur
 GASLIGHT (M-G-M) [*film gris*] d. George Cukor
 GUEST IN THE HOUSE (United Artists) [melodrama] d. John Brahm
 LAURA (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Otto Preminger
 THE LODGER (20th-Fox) [*film gris*] d. John Brahm
 THE MASK OF DIMITRIOS (Warner's) [*film gris*] d. Jean Negulesco
 MURDER, MY SWEET (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Edward Dmytryk
 PHANTOM LADY (Universal) [melodrama] d. Robert Siodmak
 THE SUSPECT (Universal) [melodrama] d. Robert Siodmak
 VOICE IN THE WIND (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Arthur Ripley
 WHEN STRANGERS MARRY (Monogram) [*film gris*] d. William Castle

1945

CONFIDENTIAL AGENT (Warner's) [*film gris*] d. Herman Shumlin
 CONFLICT (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Curtis Bernhardt
 CORNERED (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Edward Dmytryk
 DANGER SIGNAL (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Robert Florey
 FALLEN ANGEL (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Otto Preminger
 HANGOVER SQUARE (20th-Fox) [*film gris*] d. John Brahm
 HOUSE ON 92nd STREET (20th-Fox) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Henry Hathaway
 JOHNNY ANGEL (RKO) [melodrama] d. Edwin L. Marin
 LADY ON A TRAIN (Universal) [*film gris*] d. Charles David
 LEAVE HER TO HEAVEN (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. John M. Stahl
 THE LOST WEEKEND (Paramount) [melodrama] d. Billy Wilder
 MILDRED PIERCE (Warner's) [melodrama] d. Michael Curtiz
 MINISTRY OF FEAR (Paramount) [melodrama] d. Fritz Lang
 MY NAME IS JULIA ROSS (Columbia) [*film gris*] d. Joseph H. Lewis

SCARLET STREET (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Fritz Lang
 STRANGE ILLUSION (PRC) [*film gris*] d. Edgar G. Ulmer
 UNCLE HARRY (Universal) [melodrama] d. Robert Siodmak
 THE UNSEEN (Paramount) [melodrama] d. Lewis Allen
 THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Fritz Lang

1946

THE BIG SLEEP (Warner's) [*film gris*] d. Howard Hawks
 BLACK ANGEL (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Roy William Neill
 THE BLUE DAHLIA (Paramount) [melodrama] d. George Marshall
 THE CHASE (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Arthur Ripley
 CRACK-UP (RKO) [melodrama] d. Irving Reis
 THE DARK CORNER (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Henry Hathaway
 THE DARK MIRROR (Universal) [melodrama] d. Robert Siodmak
 DEAD RECKONING (Columbia) [*film gris*] d. John Cromwell
 DEADLINE AT DAWN (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Harold Clurman
 DECOY (Monogram) [*film noir*] d. Jack Bernhard
 DETOUR (PRC) [*film noir*] d. Edgar G. Ulmer
 DRAGONWYCK (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Joseph L. Mankiewicz
 FEAR (Monogram) [melodrama] d. Alfred Zeisler
 GILDA (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Charles Vidor
 JOHNNY O'CLOCK (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Robert Rossen
 THE KILLERS (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Robert Siodmak
 LADY IN THE LAKE (M-G-M) [melodrama] d. Robert Montgomery
 THE LOCKET (RKO) [*film noir*] d. John Brahm
 NIGHT EDITOR (Columbia) [*film gris*] d. Henry Levin
 NOBODY LIVES FOREVER (Warner's) [melodrama] d. Jean Negulesco
 NOCTURNE (RKO) [melodrama] d. Edwin L. Marin
 NOTORIOUS (RKO) [melodrama] d. Alfred Hitchcock
 THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (M-G-M) [*film noir*] d. Tay Garnett
 SO DARK THE NIGHT (Columbia) [*film noir*] d. Joseph H. Lewis
 SOMEWHERE IN THE NIGHT (20th-Fox) [*film gris*] d. Joseph L. Mankiewicz
 THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Robert Siodmak
 THE STRANGE LOVE OF MARTHA IVERS (Paramount) [melodrama] d. Lewis
 Milestone
 THE STRANGER (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Orson Welles
 SUSPENSE (Monogram) [*film noir*] d. Frank Tuttle
 TEMPTATION (Universal, 1946) [*film noir*] d. Irving Pichel
 THREE STRANGERS (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Jean Negulesco

1947

BODY AND SOUL (United Artists) [*film gris*] d. Robert Rossen
 BOOMERANG (20th-Fox) [*film gris*] d. Elia Kazan
 BORN TO KILL (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Robert Wise
 THE BRASHER DOUBLOON (20th-Fox) [*film gris*] d. John Brahm

BRUTE FORCE (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Jules Dassin
 CALCUTTA (Paramount) [*film gris*] d. John Farrow
 CROSSFIRE (RKO) [melodrama] d. Edward Dmytryk
 DARK PASSAGE (Warner's) [melodrama] d. Delmer Daves
 DESPERATE (RKO) [melodrama] d. Anthony Mann
 FALL GUY (Monogram) [melodrama] d. Reginald LeBorg
 FEAR IN THE NIGHT (Paramount) [melodrama] d. Maxwell Shane
 FRAMED (Columbia) [*film gris*] d. Richard Wallace
 THE GANGSTER (Allied Artists) [*film noir*] d. Gordon Wiles
 THE GUILTY (Monogram) [*film noir*] d. John Reinhardt
 THE HIGH WALL (M-G-M) [*film gris*] d. Curtis Bernhardt
 I WALK ALONE (Paramount) [melodrama] d. Byron Haskin
 IVY (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Sam Wood
 KISS OF DEATH (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Henry Hathaway
 THE LOST MOMENT (Universal) [melodrama] d. Martin Gabel
 NIGHTMARE ALLEY (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Edmund Goulding
 NORA PRENTISS (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Vincent Sherman
 OUT OF THE PAST (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Jacques Tourneur
 THE PARADINE CASE (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Alfred Hitchcock
 POSSESSED (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Curtis Bernhardt
 THE PRETENDER (Republic) [*film noir*] d. W. Lee Wilder
 PURSUED (Warner's) [melodrama] d. Raoul Walsh
 RAILROADED (PRC) [melodrama] d. Anthony Mann
 THE RED HOUSE (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Delmer Daves
 RIDE THE PINK HORSE (Universal) [*film gris*] d. Robert Montgomery
 THEY WON'T BELIEVE ME (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Irving Pichel
 T-MEN (Eagle-Lion) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Anthony Mann
 THE TWO MRS. CARROLLS (Warner's) [*film gris*] d. Peter Godfrey
 THE UNSUSPECTED (Warner's) [melodrama] d. Michael Curtiz
 THE WEB (Universal) [melodrama] d. Michael Gordon
 THE WOMAN ON THE BEACH (RKO) [melodrama] d. Jean Renoir

1948

THE ACCUSED (Paramount) [melodrama] d. William Dieterle
 ACT OF VIOLENCE (M-G-M) [*film noir*] d. Fred Zinnemann
 ALL MY SONS (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Irving Reis
 BEHIND LOCKED DOORS (Eagle-Lion) [*film gris*] d. Budd Boetticher
 BERLIN EXPRESS (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Jacques Tourneur
 THE BIG CLOCK (Paramount) [*film gris*] d. John Farrow
 CALL NORTHSIDE 777 (20th-Fox) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Henry Hathaway
 CANON CITY (Eagle-Lion) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Crane Wilbur
 CRY OF THE CITY (20th-Fox) [*film gris*] d. Robert Siodmak
 THE DARK PAST (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Rudolph Maté
 A DOUBLE LIFE (Universal) [*film noir*] d. George Cukor
 FORCE OF EVIL (M-G-M) [*film gris*] d. Abraham Polonsky
 HE WALKED BY NIGHT (Eagle-Lion) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Alfred Werker
 HOLLOW TRIUMPH (Eagle-Lion) [*film noir*] d. Steve Sekely

I WANT TO LIVE (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Robert Wise
 I WOULDN'T BE IN YOUR SHOES (Monogram) [melodrama] d. William Nigh
 KEY LARGO (Warner's) [melodrama] d. John Huston
 KISS THE BLOOD OFF MY HANDS (Universal) [*film gris*] d. Norman Foster
 THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI (Columbia) [*film noir*] d. Orson Welles
 MOONRISE (Republic) [melodrama] d. Frank Borzage
 NAKED CITY (Universal) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Jules Dassin
 NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. John Farrow
 PITFALL (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. André de Toth
 RAW DEAL (Eagle-Lion) [*film noir*] d. Anthony Mann
 ROAD HOUSE (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Jean Negulesco
 ROPE (Warner's) [melodrama] d. Alfred Hitchcock
 RUTHLESS (Eagle-Lion) [*film noir*] d. Edgar G. Ulmer
 SECRET BEYOND THE DOOR (Universal) [melodrama] d. Fritz Lang
 SLEEP, MY LOVE (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Douglas Sirk
 SO EVIL MY LOVE (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. Lewis Allen
 SORRY, WRONG NUMBER (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. Anatole Litvak
 THE STREET WITH NO NAME (20th-Fox) [melodrama/p.d.] d. William Keighly

1949

ABANDONED (Universal) [melodrama] d. Joseph M. Newman
 BEYOND THE FOREST (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. King Vidor
 BORDER INCIDENT (M-G-M) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Anthony Mann
 THE BRIBE (M-G-M) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Robert Z. Leonard
 CAUGHT (M-G-M) [melodrama] d. Max Ophuls
 CHAMPION (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Mark Robson
 CHICAGO DEADLINE (Paramount) [*film gris*] d. Arthur Ripley
 CITY ACROSS THE RIVER (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Maxwell Shane
 CRISS CROSS (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Robert Siodmak
 THE CROOKED WAY (United Artists) [*film gris*] d. Robert Florey
 D.O.A. (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Rudolph Maté
 THE FILE ON THELMA JORDAN (20th-Fox) [*film noir*] d. Robert Siodmak
 FLAMINGO ROAD (Warner's) [melodrama] d. Michael Curtiz
 FOLLOW ME QUIETLY (RKO) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Richard Fleischer
 HE WALKED BY NIGHT (Paramount) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Alfred Werker
 HOUSE OF STRANGERS (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Joseph L. Mankiewicz
 KNOCK ON ANY DOOR (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Nicholas Ray
 MANHANDLED (Paramount) [*film gris*] d. Lewis R. Foster
 PORT OF NEW YORK (Eagle-Lion) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Laslo Benedek
 THE RECKLESS MOMENT (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Max Ophuls
 REIGN OF TERROR (Eagle-Lion) [melodrama] d. Anthony Mann
 SCENE OF THE CRIME (M-G-M) [melodrama] d. Roy Rowland
 THE SET-UP (RKO) [melodrama] d. Robert Wise
 SIDE STREET (M-G-M) [melodrama] d. Anthony Mann
 TENSION (M-G-M) [melodrama] d. John Berry
 THEY LIVE BY NIGHT (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Nicholas Ray
 THIEVES' HIGHWAY (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Jules Dassin

TOO LATE FOR TEARS (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Byron Haskin
 THE UNDERCOVER MAN (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Joseph H. Lewis
 WHIRLPOOL (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Otto Preminger
 WHITE HEAT (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Raoul Walsh
 THE WINDOW (RKO) [melodrama] d. Ted Tetzlaff
 THE WOMAN ON PIER 13 (RKO) [melodrama] d. Robert Stevenson

1950

ARMORED CAR ROBBERY (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Richard Fleischer
 THE ASPHALT JUNGLE [*film noir*] d. John Huston
 BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND DAWN (Columbia) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Gordon Douglas
 THE BREAKING POINT (Warner's) [melodrama] d. Michael Curtiz
 CAGED (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. John Cromwell
 CONVICTED (Columbia) [*film gris*] d. Henry Levin
 THE DAMNED DON'T CRY (Warner's) [*film gris*] d. Vincent Sherman
 DARK CITY (Paramount) [melodrama] d. William Dieterle
 DESTINATION MURDER (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Edward L. Cahn
 EDGE OF DOOM (RKO) [melodrama] d. Mark Robson
 THE FURIES (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. Anthony Mann
 GUILTY BYSTANDER (Film Classics) [melodrama] d. Joseph Lerner
 GUN CRAZY (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Joseph H. Lewis
 HOUSE BY THE RIVER (Republic) [*film noir*] d. Fritz Lang
 IN A LONELY PLACE (Columbia) [*film noir*] d. Nicholas Ray
 KISS TOMORROW GOODBYE (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Gordon Douglas
 A LADY WITHOUT A PASSPORT (M-G-M) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Joseph H. Lewis
 THE LAWLESS (Paramount) [melodrama] d. Joseph Losey
 MYSTERY STREET (M-G-M) [melodrama/p.d.] d. John Sturges
 NIGHT AND THE CITY (20th-Fox) [*film noir*] d. Jules Dassin
 NO WAY OUT (20th-Fox) [*film gris*] d. Joseph L. Mankiewicz
 ONE WAY STREET (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Hugo Fregonese
 PANIC IN THE STREETS (20th-Fox) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Elia Kazan
 RED LIGHT (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Roy del Ruth
 711 OCEAN DRIVE (Columbia) [*film noir*] d. Joseph M. Newman
 SHAKEDOWN (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Joe Pevney
 THE SLEEPING CITY (Universal) [melodrama/p.d.] d. George Sherman
 THE SOUND OF FURY (United Artists) [*film gris*] d. Cyril Endfield
 SOUTHSIDE 1-1000 (Allied Artists) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Boris Ingster
 SUNSET BOULEVARD (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. Billy Wilder
 THE TATTOOED STRANGER (RKO) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Edward J. Montagne
 TRY AND GET ME (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Cyril Endfield
 UNION STATION (Paramount) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Rudolph Maté
 WHERE DANGER LIVES (RKO) [*film gris*] d. John Farrow
 WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Otto Preminger
 WOMAN ON THE RUN (Universal) [melodrama] d. Norman Foster

1951

APPOINTMENT WITH DANGER (Paramount) [*film gris*] d. Lewis Allen
 THE BIG CARNIVAL [a.k.a. ACE IN THE HOLE] (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. Billy Wilder
 THE BIG NIGHT (United Artists) [*film gris*] d. Joseph Losey
 CAUSE FOR ALARM (M-G-M) [melodrama] d. Tay Garnett
 CRY DANGER (RKO) [melodrama] d. Robert Parrish
 DETECTIVE STORY (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. William Wyler
 THE ENFORCER (Warner's) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Bretnage Windust
 FOURTEEN HOURS (20th-Fox) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Henry Hathaway
 HE RAN ALL THE WAY (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. John Berry
 HIS KIND OF WOMAN (RKO) [film gris] d. John Farrow
 HOUSE ON TELEGRAPH HILL (20th-Fox) [*film gris*] d. Robert Wise
 I WAS A COMMUNIST FOR THE F.B.I. (Warner's) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Gordon Douglas
 THE KILLER THAT STALKED NEW YORK (Columbia) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Earl McEvoy
 M (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Joseph Losey
 THE MAN WHO CHEATED HIMSELF (20th-Fox) [*film noir*] d. Felix E. Feist
 THE MAN WITH MY FACE (United Artists) [*film gris*] d. Edward J. Montagne
 THE MOB (Columbia) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Robert Parrish
 ON DANGEROUS GROUND (RKO) [melodrama] d. Nicholas Ray
 THE PEOPLE AGAINST O'HARA (M-G-M) [*film noir*] d. John Struges
 THE PROWLER (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Joseph Losey
 THE RACKET (RKO) [*film gris*] d. John Cromwell
 ROADBLOCK (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Harold Daniels
 THE SCARF (United Artists) [melodrama] d. E. A. Dupont
 THE SECOND WOMAN (United Artists) [melodrama] d. James V. Kern
 STRANGERS ON A TRAIN (Warner's) [*film gris*] d. Alfred Hitchcock
 THE STRIP (M-G-M) [*film gris*] d. Leslie Kardos
 THE TALL TARGET (M-G-M) [melodrama] d. Anthony Mann
 THE THIRTEENTH LETTER (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Otto Preminger
 THE UNKNOWN MAN (M-G-M) [*film noir*] d. Richard Thorpe

1952

BEWARE, MY LOVELY (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Harry Horner
 THE CAPTIVE CITY (United Artists) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Robert Wise
 CLASH BY NIGHT (RKO) [melodrama] d. Fritz Lang
 DON'T BOTHER TO KNOCK (20th-Fox) [*film gris*] d. Roy Baker
 KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Phil Karlson
 LOAN SHARK (Lippert) [*film gris*] d. Seymour Friedman
 MACAO (RKO) [melodrama] d. Josef von Sternberg
 THE NARROW MARGIN (RKO) [melodrama] d. Richard Fleischer
 NIGHT WITHOUT SLEEP (20th-Fox) [*film noir*] d. Roy Baker
 SCANDAL SHEET (Columbia) [*film gris*] d. Phil Karlson
 THE SNIPER (Columbia) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Edward Dmytryk

SUDDEN FEAR (RKO) [*film gris*] d. David Miller
 TALK ABOUT A STRANGER (M-G-M) [melodrama] d. David Bradley
 THE THIEF (United Artists) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Russell Rouse
 THE TURNING POINT (Paramount) [melodrama/p.d.] d. William Dieterle

1953

ANGEL FACE (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Otto Preminger
 THE BIG HEAT (Columbia) [*film noir*] d. Fritz Lang
 THE BLUE GARDENIA (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Fritz Lang
 THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS (Republic) [melodrama] d. John Auer
 THE HITCH-HIKER (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Ida Lupino
 I, THE JURY (United Artists) [*film gris*] d. Harry Essex
 NIAGARA (20th-Fox) [*film noir*] d. Henry Hathaway
 99 RIVER STREET (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Phil Karlson
 PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET (20th-Fox) [*film noir*] d. Sam Fuller
 VICKI (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Harry Horner [A remake of I WAKE UP SCREAM-
 ING]

1954

CRIME WAVE (Warner's) [melodrama] d. André de Toth
 DRIVE A CROOKED ROAD (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Richard Quine
 HUMAN DESIRE (Columbia) [*film gris*] d. Fritz Lang
 THE LONG WAIT (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Victor Saville
 LOOPHOLE (Allied Artists) [melodrama] d. Harold Schuster
 THE OTHER WOMAN (20th-Fox) [*film noir*] d. Hugo Haas
 PRIVATE HELL 36 (Filmakers) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Don Siegel
 PUSHOVER (Columbia) [*film noir*] d. Richard Quine
 ROGUE COP (M-G-M) [*film gris*] d. Roy Rowland
 SHIELD FOR MURDER (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Edmund O'Brien and Howard
 W. Koch
 SUDDENLY (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Lewis Allen
 WITNESS TO MURDER (United Artists) [*film gris*] d. Roy Rowland
 WORLD FOR RANSOM (Allied Artists) [*film gris*] d. Robert Aldrich

1955

THE BIG COMBO (Allied Artists) [*film gris*] d. Joseph H. Lewis
 THE BIG KNIFE (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Robert Aldrich
 THE BROTHERS RICO (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Phil Karlson
 THE DESPERATE HOURS (Paramount) [*film noir*] d. William Wyler
 HELL'S ISLAND (Paramount) [*film gris*] d. Phil Karlson
 HOUSE OF BAMBOO (20th-Fox) [melodrama] d. Sam Fuller
 I DIED A THOUSAND TIMES (Warner's) [*film noir*] d. Stuart Heisler [A remake of
 HIGH SIERRA]

KILLER'S KISS (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Stanley Kubrick
 KISS ME DEADLY (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Robert Aldrich
 MR. ARKADIN (M & A Alexander) [*film noir*] d. Orson Welles
 MURDER IS MY BEAT (Allied Artists) [melodrama] d. Edgar G. Ulmer
 NEW YORK CONFIDENTIAL (Warner's) [*film gris*] d. Russell Rouse
 THE NIGHT HOLDS TERROR (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Andrew Stone

1956

BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT (RKO) [*film gris*] d. Fritz Lang
 THE HARDER THEY FALL (Columbia) [*film gris*] d. Mark Robson
 THE KILLER IS LOOSE (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Budd Boetticher
 THE KILLING (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Stanley Kubrick
 A KISS BEFORE DYING (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Gerd Oswald
 NIGHTFALL (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Jacques Tourneur
 NIGHTMARE (United Artists) [melodrama] d. Maxwell Shane
 SLIGHTLY SCARLET (RKO) [*film noir*] d. Allan Dwan
 STORM FEAR (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Cornel Wilde
 WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS (RKO) [melodrama] d. Fritz Lang
 THE WRONG MAN (Warner's) [*film gris*] d. Alfred Hitchcock

1957

BABY FACE NELSON (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Don Siegel
 THE BURGLAR (Columbia) [*film noir*] d. Paul Wendkos
 CRIME OF PASSION (United Artists) [*film gris*] d. Gerd Oswald
 THE GARMENT JUNGLE (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Vincent Sherman
 THE NIGHT RUNNER (Universal) [film gris] d. Abner Biberman
 PLUNDER ROAD (20th-Fox) [*film noir*] d. Hubert Cornfield
 SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS (United Artists) [*film gris*] d. Alexander Mackendrick
 THE TATTERED DRESS (Universal) [melodrama] d. Jack Arnold

1958

THE LINEUP (Columbia) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Don Siegel
 PARTY GIRL (M-G-M) [melodrama] d. Nicholas Ray
 TOUCH OF EVIL (Universal) [*film noir*] d. Orson Welles

1959

THE BEAT GENERATION (M-G-M) [melodrama/p.d.] d. Charles Haas
 THE CRIMSON KIMONO (Columbia) [melodrama] d. Sam Fuller
 ODDS AGAINST TOMORROW (United Artists) [*film noir*] d. Robert Wise

SUBSEQUENT FILMS INFLUENCED BY *FILM NOIR*

It should be noted with regard to these more recent films influenced by the *film noir* that they have been mostly filmed in color, a medium almost antithetical to the black and white photography of true *film noir*.

BLAST OF SILENCE (Universal, 1961) d. Allen Baron
 UNDERWORLD U.S.A. (Columbia, 1961) d. Sam Fuller
 CAPE FEAR (Universal, 1962) d. J. Lee Thompson
 EXPERIMENT IN TERROR (Columbia, 1962) d. Blake Edwards
 THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE (United Artists, 1962) d. John Frankenheimer
 SHOCK CORRIDOR (Allied Artists, 1962) d. Sam Fuller
 THE NAKED KISS (Allied Artists, 1964) d. Sam Fuller
 BRAINSTORM (Warner's, 1965) d. William Conrad
 POINT BLANK (M-G-M, 1967) d. John Boorman
 MADIGAN (Universal, 1968) d. Don Siegel
 THE SPLIT (M-G-M, 1968) d. Gordon Flemyng
 MARLOWE (M-G-M, 1969) d. Paul Bogart
 THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY? (ABC, 1969) d. Sydney Pollack
 DIRTY HARRY (Warner's, 1971) d. Don Siegel
 THE FRENCH CONNECTION (20th-Fox, 1971) d. William Friedkin
 HICKEY & BOGGS (United Artists, 1972) d. Robert Culp
 THE FRIENDS OF EDDIE COYLE (Paramount, 1973) d. Peter Yates
 THE LONG GOODBYE (United Artists, 1973) d. Robert Altman
 CHINATOWN (Paramount, 1974) d. Roman Polanski
 THE OUTFIT (M-G-M, 1974) d. John Flynn
 FAREWELL, MY LOVELY (Avco-Embassy, 1975) d. Dick Richards
 THE FRENCH CONNECTION II (20th-Fox, 1975) d. John Frankenheimer
 HUSTLE (Paramount, 1975) d. Robert Aldrich
 THE NICKEL RIDE (20th-Fox, 1975) d. Robert Mulligan
 NIGHT MOVES (Warner's, 1975) d. Arthur Penn
 TAXI DRIVER (Columbia, 1976) d. Martin Scorsese
 AMERICAN GIGOLO (Paramount, 1980) d. Paul Schrader
 THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (Paramount, 1981) d. Bob Rafelson
 BODY HEAT (Warner's, 1981) d. Lawrence Kasdan
 BREATHLESS (Orion, 1983) d. Jim McBride

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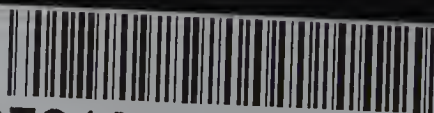
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