LIMINAL NOIR IN CLASSICAL WORLD CINEMA

EDITED BY ELYCE RAE HELFORD AND CHRISTOPHER WEEDMAN

LIMINAL NOIR IN CLASSICAL WORLD CINEMA

Traditions in World Cinema

General Editors
Linda Badley (Middle Tennessee State University)
R. Barton Palmer (Clemson University)

Founding Editor
Steven Jay Schneider (New York University)

Titles in the series include:
Traditions in World Cinema
Linda Badley, R. Barton Palmer and Steven Jay Schneider (eds)

Post-beur Cinema: North African Émigré and Maghrebi-French Filmmaking in France since 2000
Will Higbee

New Taiwanese Cinema in Focus: Moving Within and Beyond the Frame
Flannery Wilson

International Noir
Homer B. Pettey and R. Barton Palmer (eds)

Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic
Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport (eds)

Nordic Genre Film: Small Nation Film Cultures in the Global Marketplace
Tommy Gustafsson and Pietari Kääpä (eds)

Contemporary Japanese Cinema Since Hana-Bi
Adam Bingham

Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Wuxia Tradition (Second edition)
Stephen Teo

Slow Cinema
Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge

Expressionism in the Cinema
Olaf Brill and Gary D. Rhodes (eds)

French-language Road Cinema: Borders, Diasporas, Migration and 'New Europe'
Michael Gott

Transnational Film Remakes
Iain Robert Smith and Constantine Verevis

Coming-of-Age Cinema in New Zealand
Alistair Fox

New Transnationalisms in Contemporary Latin American Cinemas
Dolores Tierney

Celluloid Singapore: Cinema, Performance and the National
Edna Lim

Short Films from a Small Nation: Danish Informational Cinema 1935–1965
C. Claire Thomson

B-Movie Gothic: International Perspectives
Justin D. Edwards and Johan Höglund (eds)

Francophone Belgian Cinema
Jamie Steele

The New Romanian Cinema
Christina Stojanova (ed.) with the participation of Dana Duma

French Blockbusters: Cultural Politics of a Transnational Cinema
Charlie Michael

Nordic Film Cultures and Cinemas of Elsewhere
Anna Westerståhl Stenport and Arne Lunde (eds)

New Realism: Contemporary British Cinema
David Forrest

Contemporary Balkan Cinema: Transnational Exchanges and Global Circuits
Lydia Papadimitriou and Ana Grgić (eds)

Mapping the Rockumentary: Images of Sound and Fury
Gunnar Iversen and Scott MacKenzie (eds)

Images of Apartheid: Filmmaking on the Fringe in the Old South Africa
Calum Waddell

Greek Film Noir
Anna Poupou, Nikitas Fessas, and Maria Chalkou (eds)

Norwegian Nightmares: The Horror Cinema of a Nordic Country
Christer Bakke Andresen

Late-colonial French Cinema: Filming the Algerian War of Independence
Mani Sharpe

Australian International Pictures (1946–75)
Adrian Danks and Constantine Verevis

Film Censorship in a Cultural Context
Daniel Sacco

Liminal Noir in Classical World Cinema
Elyce Rae Helford and Christopher Weedman

Please see our website for a complete list of titles in the series
www.edinburghuniversitypress.com/series/TIWC

LIMINAL NOIR IN CLASSICAL WORLD CINEMA

Edited by
Elyce Rae Helford and
Christopher Weedman

EDINBURGH
University Press

Edinburgh University Press is one of the leading university presses in the UK. We publish academic books and journals in our selected subject areas across the humanities and social sciences, combining cutting-edge scholarship with high editorial and production values to produce academic works of lasting importance. For more information visit our website: edinburghuniversitypress.com

Cover image: Ill-fated lovers Maciek (Zbigniew Cybulski) and Krystyna (Ewa Krzyżewska) in Andrzej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) Image © Photofest
Cover design: riverdesignbooks.com

Edinburgh University Press Ltd
The Tun – Holyrood Road
12(2f) Jackson's Entry
Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

Typeset in 10/12.5 pt Sabon
by IDSUK (DataConnection) Ltd, and
printed and bound in Great Britain

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 4744 9814 2 (hardback)
ISBN 978 1 4744 9816 6 (webready PDF)
ISBN 978 1 4744 9817 3 (epub)

CONTENTS

FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As co-editors, our first thanks go to the contributors, whose compelling studies provide the substance of this volume, illustrating whatever merit our subject and approach possess in illuminating the ongoing value of classic noir cinema for international film studies in the twenty-first century. We are grateful to have been introduced to compelling theory and new films by tremendous scholars at all stages of the profession. We appreciate and value the support of many at Edinburgh University Press, especially Gillian Leslie, Sam Johnson, Fiona Conn, and Christine Barton. A special thanks to series editors Linda Badley and R. Barton Palmer, who not only encouraged us and offered great advice that has improved the volume but also provided introductions to several of the excellent writers whose work is included herein. And cheers to MTSU graduate assistant Lis Sodl for her work on the index.

Elyce thanks her amazingly supportive spouse and son for their encouragement, patience, and reminder to take time away from academic work now and then. Sincere appreciation to Vince Brook for his friendship and helpful feedback on her chapter. And a shout-out to the #BNoirDetour crew that gathered for years on Sunday evenings for public domain noir livetweets.

Christopher is indebted to his wife Eudora and daughter Elenore for their unwavering love, patience, and good humour during the preparation of this volume. He thanks Julian Grainger for helping secure hard-to-find

British films for his chapter. He also extends his sincerest gratitude to Mary L. Bogumil, Parley Ann Boswell, Onur Duman, Susan Felleman, Christopher Hanlon, Connie Russell Hosier, Michael R. Molino, Theodore K. Quinn, and Tony Williams for their generous support and encouragement over the years.

CONTRIBUTORS

Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns (PhD in Arts, PhD candidate in History) is Professor of Filosofía y Letras at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. He teaches courses on international horror film and serves as the director of *Grite*, a research group on horror cinema currently investigating horror in Baltic regions. He is author of *Historias para no Dormir* (2020) on Spanish horror television and has edited collections on the *Frankenstein* bicentennial, director James Wan (2021), and the Italian giallo film. Currently, he is editing a volume on Hammer horror and another on Wes Craven.

Vincent Brook retired as a long-time UCLA Lecturer in 2021. He has authored or edited ten books, most on Jewish issues in film and television. These include *Something Ain't Kosher Here: The Rise of the 'Jewish' Sitcom* (2003), *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir* (2009), and *From Shtetl to Stardom: Jews and Hollywood* (2017, co-editor). He has also written *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (2013) and *All About Eva: A Holocaust-Related Memoir, with a Hollywood Twist* (2021), about his German-Jewish parents' experiences in Nazi Germany and as refugees in America. Most recently, he's started a blog, babblingbrook.substack.com, on media and politics.

Alicia Byrnes is a Teaching Associate in Screen Studies at the University of Melbourne working at the intersection of women's issues in cinema and film

technology. She received her PhD in Screen and Cultural Studies from Melbourne in 2021, where she was awarded the Thesis Excellence Award and the Australian Postgraduate Award. She received her MA in Cinema Studies from New York University. Her current book project, *The Matter of Absence: Female Disembodiment and Digital Cinema*, asserts the value of contemporary film technology for negotiating issues of women's representation. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Film-Philosophy*, *Senses of Cinema*, and *Science Fiction Film & Television*.

Osvaldo Di Paolo Harrison is Professor of Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies at Austin Peay State University. He has published seven books related to hard-boiled literature and film noir: *Crisis del sistema capitalista en la novela negra hispana* (2022), *Femicrímenes: Femicidios en la literatura del siglo XX y XXI* (2020), *Queer Noir hispánico* (2018), *Noir Boricua: La novela negra de Puerto Rico* (2016), *Negrótico* (2015), *Gemidos y explosiones apocalípticas poshumanas: la novela negra y de ciencia ficción hispana del siglo XXI* (2013), and *Cadáveres en el armario: el policial palimpséstico en la literatura argentina contemporánea* (2011). He has also published book chapters and numerous peer-reviewed essays in national and international journals.

David Greven is Professor of English at the University of South Carolina. His books include *Intimate Violence: Hitchcock, Sex, and Queer Theory* (2017), *Queering the Terminator* (2017), and *Ghost Faces: Hollywood and Post-Millennial Masculinity* (2016). His essays on film have appeared in the journals *Screen*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Cinema Journal*, *Genders*, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, *Postmodern Culture*, *The Hitchcock Annual*, *Film International*, *Flow*, *Jump Cut*, *CineAction*, and *Cineaste*, and the critical collections *The Cambridge Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*, *Close-Up: Great Cinematic Performances*, *Patricia Highsmith on Screen*, *Reading Sex and the City*, *Action Chicks*, and *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*. He is currently writing a book on the Merchant-Ivory film *Maurice* (1987) for the revived 'Queer Film Classics' series.

Julie Grossman is Professor of English and Communication and Film Studies at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, New York. She is author of *Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir: Ready for Her Close-Up* (2009), *Literature, Film, and Their Hideous Progeny: Adaptation and ElasTEXTity* (2015), and *The Femme Fatale* (2020). She is co-author (with Therese Grisham) of *Ida Lupino, Director: Her Art and Resilience in Times of Transition* (2017) and co-author and co-editor with Will Scheibel (respectively) of *Twin Peaks* (2020) and *Penny Dreadful and Adaptation: Reanimating and Transforming the Monster* (2023). She is founding co-editor (with R. Barton Palmer) of the book series 'Adaptation

and Visual Culture' and co-editor (with Palmer and Marc C. Conner) of *Screening Contemporary Irish Fiction and Drama* (2022). With Palmer, she co-edited the essay collection *Adaptation in Visual Culture: Images, Texts, and Their Multiple Worlds* (2017).

Milan Hain is Assistant Professor and program director of Film Studies at Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic. He is the author or co-author of five books on cinema, including, most recently, *Starmaker: David O. Selznick and the Production of Stars in the Hollywood Studio System* (2023). Hain's articles have appeared in *Jewish Film and New Media*, the *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, and *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. Recently, he was the recipient of the Visiting Research Fellowship at the University of Łódź, where he researched the representation of Czech and Polish identities in studio-era Hollywood. Since 2013, he has been a programmer at the annual Czech Noir Film Festival (www.noirfilmfestival.cz), the only event of its kind in Central Europe.

Elyce Rae Helford (www.elycehelford.com) is Professor of English, faculty in Women's and Gender Studies, and director of the Jewish and Holocaust Studies minor at Middle Tennessee State University. She is the author of *What Price Hollywood?: Gender and Sex in the Films of George Cukor* (2020) and editor or co-editor of multiple collections on gender representation in American popular media. Recent and forthcoming publications include 'Racial Darkness in *Ace in the Hole*' (*Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, 2022), which addresses Native American and Jewish representation alongside issues of Holocaust survivor guilt in Billy Wilder's 1951 noir drama, and 'Traumatic Timescapes: Holocaust Memory in Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic* and Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed*' in *Jewish Future Females*, edited by Marleen S. Barr. Helford is book reviews editor for the journal *Jewish Film and New Media* and serves on its editorial board.

Nadina Olmedo is Associate Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at the University of San Francisco. Her research focuses on Gothic literature, women and gender studies, and emergent horror cinemas. She is the author of *Ecos goticos en la novela del Cono Sur* (2013) and co-author of *Negrotico* (2015). She is the co-editor of the journal *Polifonia, Revista de Estudios hispanicos*.

Matthew Sorrento teaches Film Studies at Rutgers University-Camden and is editor-in-chief of *Film International*. He is the author of *The New American Crime Film* (2012) and co-editor of *David Fincher's* Zodiac: *Cinema of Investigation and (Mis)Interpretation* (2022). He has published chapters on *Full*

Metal Jacket, hybrid westerns, *The Purge* series, the crime documentary, and NBC's *Hannibal*, with entries forthcoming on Wes Craven's work in television and David Lynch and film noir. His current research focuses on noir writer David Goodis on screen, indie filmmaker Nicole Holofcener, the crime novels of W. R. Burnett, and the SyFy series *Channel Zero*. His reviews/essays have appeared in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Film & History*, *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Senses of Cinema*, *Middle West Review*, and *Critical Studies in Television*.

Christopher Weedman is Assistant Professor of English at Middle Tennessee State University, where he serves as both director of General Education English and faculty advisor of the interdisciplinary Film Studies minor. His scholarship has appeared in *Film International*, *Jewish Film and New Media*, *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Senses of Cinema*, and the edited collections *Fifty Hollywood Directors* (2015) and *David Fincher's* Zodiac: *Cinema of Investigation and (Mis)Interpretation* (2022). He is co-editor (with Anne Etienne and Benjamin Halligan) of the collection *Adult Themes: British Cinema and the X Certificate in the Long 1960s* (2023). Currently, he is writing a critical biography of Anne Heywood, the groundbreaking British film star of *The Fox* (1967) and *I Want What I Want* (1972).

Alan Woolfolk is Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty Emeritus at Flagler College. He is a scholar of social, cultural, and political theory who has published extensively on contemporary culture, public intellectuals, nationalism, literature, and film, and he has twice been a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow. Woolfolk is currently working on the book *Dark Charisma: Agency, Authenticity, and Alien Space in Noir Film*.

TRADITIONS IN WORLD CINEMA

General editors: **Linda Badley and R. Barton Palmer**
Founding editor: **Steven Jay Schneider**

Traditions in World Cinema is a series of textbooks and monographs devoted to the analysis of currently popular and previously underexamined or undervalued film movements from around the globe. Also intended for general interest readers, the textbooks in this series offer undergraduate- and graduate-level film students accessible and comprehensive introductions to diverse traditions in world cinema. The monographs open up for advanced academic study more specialised groups of films, including those that require theoretically-oriented approaches. Both textbooks and monographs provide thorough examinations of the industrial, cultural, and socio-historical conditions of production and reception.

The flagship textbook for the series includes chapters by noted scholars on traditions of acknowledged importance (the French New Wave, German Expressionism), recent and emergent traditions (New Iranian, post-Cinema Novo), and those whose rightful claim to recognition has yet to be established (the Israeli persecution film, global found footage cinema). Other volumes concentrate on individual national, regional, or global cinema traditions. As the introductory chapter to each volume makes clear, the films under discussion form a coherent group on the basis of substantive and relatively transparent, if not always obvious, commonalities. These commonalities may be formal,

stylistic or thematic, and the groupings may, although they need not, be popularly identified as genres, cycles, or movements (Japanese horror, Chinese martial arts cinema, Italian Neorealism). Indeed, in cases in which a group of films is not already commonly identified as a tradition, one purpose of the volume is to establish its claim to importance and make it visible (East Central European Magical Realist cinema, Palestinian cinema).

Textbooks and monographs include:

- An introduction that clarifies the rationale for the grouping of films under examination
- A concise history of the regional, national, or transnational cinema in question
- A summary of previous published work on the tradition
- Contextual analysis of industrial, cultural and socio-historical conditions of production and reception
- Textual analysis of specific and notable films, with clear and judicious application of relevant film theoretical approaches
- Bibliograph(ies)/filmograph(ies)

Monographs may additionally include:

- Discussion of the dynamics of cross-cultural exchange in light of current research and thinking about cultural imperialism and globalisation, as well as issues of regional/national cinema or political/aesthetic movements (such as new waves, postmodernism, or identity politics)
- Interview(s) with key filmmakers working within the tradition.

INTRODUCTION: LIMINALITY AND THE BOUNDARIES OF FILM NOIR

Elyce Rae Helford and Christopher Weedman

An appreciation of classical film noir and its importance to international cinema studies must begin with an understanding of its rich and complex history. The earliest influential studies of what has come to be identified as film noir emerged from France in the immediate post-World War II era and concentrated on a subset of Hollywood films that had previously been withheld from distribution in France during the *années noires* (dark years) of the Nazi occupation (1940–4). In their seminal 1955 study, *A Panorama of American Film Noir*, Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton followed the lead of earlier critics Nino Frank and Jean-Pierre Chartier by applying the term 'film noir' to a strain of American motion pictures that French cinephiles encountered in July and August 1946.[1] These films, including John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944), and Edward Dmytryk's *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) were based largely on hard-boiled crime fiction written during the 1930s and 1940s (called *Série noire* by the French). Produced and distributed by various Hollywood film studios such as Warner Bros., Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox, and RKO, these motion pictures shared 'an unusual and cruel atmosphere' as well as a 'very particular eroticism', establishing a historical 'noir series' of films by 1946. This American cycle, Borde and Chaumeton confidently announced, 'is seemingly beyond question'.[2] That this dark series of films reflected a more expansive transnational cultural mood and influence was left largely unconsidered, as was agreement on exactly what elements define film noir.

The difficulty of developing unifying or even cohesive definitions of film noir has not stopped critics from trying. Raymond Durgnat, for instance, posits the centrality of crime or criminals within an 'interbreeding' process of motifs, from 'crime as social criticism' and 'middle class murder' to 'sexual pathology' and 'psychopaths'.[3] In popular culture, noir is instead often defined by its recurring character types, such as the disillusioned private eye and the duplicitous femme fatale; by its bleak and gritty urban settings; by its subjective and, at times, complex flashback structure; or by its low-key, chiaroscuro cinematography. In this volume, we will find that the most useful definitions recognise the origins, influences, and cultural affect of noir. Paul Schrader, for example, outlines a valuable definition coming from 'the more subtle qualities of tone and mood' that are drawn from a series of 'catalytic elements', including historical ('war and post-war disillusionment'), filmic ('post-war realism' and 'German influence'), and literary ('the hard-boiled tradition').[4] These qualities – as well as Schrader's acknowledgement of 'foreign offshoots of *film noir*' from Britain and France such as Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949), Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1959), and Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Doulos* (1962) – illustrate what Andrew Spicer, as part of an ever-growing contemporary body of scholarship, rightly interprets as 'a transnational cultural phenomenon'.[5]

Some critics have productively made noir's definitional elusiveness the centrepiece of their analysis. James Naremore, for example, argues that film noir does not comprise a definitive genre or a unique style. Nor, he claims, can it even best be defined as 'transgeneric'. As he posits, 'Neither the film industry nor the audience follows structuralist rules, and movie conventions have always blended together in mongrelized ways.'[6] Film noir certainly involves historical and social connections; nevertheless, we cannot fully establish final boundaries or uniformity for the category.[7] As Marc Vernet, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, Steve Neale, and Naremore have demonstrated, the majority of films combine thematic, narrative, and stylistic elements from diverse categories and, as a result, they are, in Naremore's words, 'transgeneric or polyvalent'.[8]

In his Introduction to the Edinburgh University Press collection *Film Noir*, Homer B. Pettey openly acknowledges the problematics of 'imposing systematic, often rigid categories upon art'.[9] He recognises 'the dire need for scholars to construct a homogeneous schema for a collection of seemingly heterogeneous elements comprising film noir' as well as 'an historical evolution for film noir', but he concludes by refusing to reduce complexity for the sake of cohesiveness. Instead, Pettey's book provides a group of essays that offer 'aesthetic, thematic and interpretive strategies for opening up, expanding upon, revisiting, and re-evaluating film noir'.[10] This volume works in similar fashion.

To return to the original French critical perspective, we can understand how the creation of 'film noir' was governed and limited by its historical and

cultural context. Vital is recognition that the critics who identified the original 'cycle' of noir films were ardent fans of American cinema. As R. Barton Palmer argues, 'Frank, Chartier, and others were intrigued by US productions that seemed consonant with a substantial trend within their own national cinema: the gloomy romanticism and poignant melancholia of 30s Poetic Realism.'[11] While often acknowledged alongside German expressionism as a crucial influence on film noir, poetic realism must also be recognised as having an impact on the French critics themselves, men whose affection for Hollywood led them to define noir as coming from beyond their own national borders. When explored through a broader global lens, the post-war period that brought the dark series of formerly banned Hollywood films to an appreciative French audience also saw 'the developing fashion for dark melodramas in both British and the revived German cinemas'.[12] Echoing while further nuancing contemporary scholarship, Palmer thus identifies film noir as, from its conception, 'complexly trans-national'.[13]

With similar emphasis, Pettey commences the Introduction to Edinburgh's *International Noir* with acknowledgment that 'film noir from its inception has always been a culturally diverse genre, style, sensibility and movement', adding that similar problems emerge when attempting to define or delineate the meanings of '"world", "international", or "global"' cinema.[14] Exploring film noir in such a context, he reminds us, 'requires an analytic sensitivity to aesthetic and narrative influences migrating across countries and continents'.[15]

Liminal Noir therefore begins with an appreciation of and indebtedness to a nearly 75-year history of scholarship that has defined, redefined, critiqued, and broadened the indefinite international category of film we call 'noir' to the point that it can persuasively be defined as 'one of the dominant intellectual categories of the late twentieth century' and beyond.[16] This volume proceeds from the premise that film noir theory and criticism offer a useful apparatus for reconsidering and reassessing international films from what might loosely be termed the classical era of cinema. Our purpose is not to broaden the noir canon, which, as Spicer observes, already 'remains an object of dispute and estimates of its size vary considerably'.[17] Nevertheless, we recognise that this may be one result. More central to our goals is to explore what Naremore calls more 'interesting uses' of noir.[18]

A central concern of this volume is the ways in which films linked with (though not necessarily identified as) classical noir share what Christopher Breu and Elizabeth A. Hatmaker identify as 'an affective disposition' that crosses national boundaries.[19] From such a perspective, noir is more than a category attached to a corpus; it is perhaps best considered as a way of thinking and feeling that produces texts which share particular qualities and emotional resonances.[20] Such a perspective allows us to expand the boundaries of noir study while acknowledging shared qualities, liminality in particular.

In many ways, liminality may be deemed noir's most defining feature – in areas from content and theme to style and affect. Literal borders are central to the plots of many classical noir films, for example, including contrasts between urban and rural settings (where the former symbolised corruption and the latter an innocence impossible to attain or recover) and flight across national boundaries (such as criminals in the US seeking to cross the Mexican border to escape prosecution). On the level of production, there were shifts across as well as within films from studio settings to location shooting, particularly as newsreels, wartime documentaries, and Italian neorealist cinema, alongside American noirs such as Henry Hathaway's *The House on 92nd Street* (1945), Elia Kazan's *Boomerang!* (1947), and Jules Dassin's *The Naked City* (1948), helped bring a 'semidocumentary' approach to American studio filmmaking.[21] Generic hybridity inflects noir with liminality as well, including diverse blends of established genres that achieve complex moods beyond the traditional boundaries of individual film categories.

Beyond boundaries, we can also see the liminal as related to states of transition. Grounded in the struggles of the global post-Depression and World War II era, social and psychological wellness or wholeness emerges as impossible in film noir. Noir disorients through its foregrounding of absolute states as illusory, marking true self-awareness as unreal. Cultural dictates and norms inflect and block change as they drive both obedience and resistance – often simultaneously. The petty criminal who longs for the big time or tries to go straight, the black widow who craves patriarchal power she cannot achieve, the private detective who seeks respect while shunning it: these core noir types are caught between the limitations of the real and impossible ideals. The impact of such conflicts relates directly to fragmentation, similarly central to noir. As Richard Martin argues, film noir in many aspects is 'about fragmentation, not only stylistically (the disruptive effects of lighting, mise-en-scène, and editing) and structurally (the employment of flashbacks and voice-overs) but also thematically (the dissolution of community and family, the psychological fragmentation of the protagonist)'.[22] From national and generic boundaries to fragmented narratives and divided selves, liminality offers an illuminating concept through which to explore the dark films of the classical era.

The chapters collected for this volume explore liminality, both directly and indirectly, through readings of social and psychological upheaval in films produced internationally between the 1940s and the early 1960s. We have purposely limited our focus to this cinematic period before a new generation of cultural anxieties and tensions – in part reflecting the Vietnam War and the political unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s – brought about a more self-reflective and self-reflexive style of noir (dubbed 'neo noir') that captured these rapidly changing times. Furthermore, the films under consideration are generally not labelled noir but benefit from a focus on noir liminality in style

and content. National cinemas under consideration in this book's case studies include Argentina, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic), Great Britain, France, Poland, Spain, and the United States. While necessarily limited in scope, we intend these selections as representative illustrations. We hope others will expand upon this focus, taking the study of liminal noir in new directions.

The chapters in Part I of the collection, 'Exposing Cultural Anxieties', feature liminally positioned characters during moments of social and political tension within specific national contexts. For Alan Woolfolk, Andrzej Wajda's *Popiól i diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*, 1958) uses the theme of compromised agency to address the inescapable legacy of Polish struggles against the Third Reich that were followed by violent conflict between Polish nationalists and Communists. Character and nation are inexorably bonded in this dark drama. Julie Grossman offers a study of the US gender politics of female trauma in Ida Lupino's *Never Fear* (1949), a tale of a young dancer on the verge of success who is stricken with polio. Using location shooting to particularise a modern story about desire and disability, *Never Fear* anatomises myths of completion in the contexts of domestic romance and fraught notions of health and the female body. Autarkic Spain provides the background for Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns's study of Ignacio Iquino's *Camino Cortado* (*Closed Road*, 1955). Complex female characterisation, elements of melodrama, and a presentation of geographical asphyxiation result in a potent example of Francoist crime cinema that interrogates impossible hopes of escape. Finally, Elyce Rae Helford considers the racial politics of post-war America in John Sturges's little-known western-noir hybrid *The Walking Hills* (1949). Here, a Mexican border town brings together a group of treasure hunters with hidden pasts, among them an oddly placed African American performer whose diegetic songs speak directly to the film's engagement with concepts of identity.

Part II, 'Reconceptualising National Cinemas', offers case studies of films from the US, Czechoslovakia, Great Britain, and Argentina that visually and thematically explore notions of state and of national boundaries. In his study of Anatole Litvak's *Blues in the Night* (1941), Vincent Brook considers issues of hybridity in World War II-era Hollywood cinema, including the film's combination of comedic, musical, and populist elements alongside noirish violence and expressionist *mise en scène*. Through this close reading, the liminal appears in questions of generic hybridity, race relations, and the role of the Jewish émigré filmmaker. Milan Hain explores Václav Krška's *Zde jsou lvi* (*Scars of the Past*, 1958) for its subversions of prevailing ideological and aesthetic norms in Czechoslovakia of the late 1950s. Through its unconventional dark approach, the film tackles such sensitive issues as individualism and crises of conscience, making it a welcome target for a threatened Communist system. Christopher Weedman reappraises Joseph Losey's critically-neglected *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* (1958), which finds the blacklisted Hollywood director subverting the British

costume melodrama by infusing it with an American noir sensibility, particularly in its dark depiction of the duplicitous femme fatale: a half-Romani, half-British travelling woman named Belle. Played by Greek cinema star Melina Mercouri in a sexually bold and aggressive manner seldom found in either British film noirs or Gainsborough-style costume melodramas during the post-World War II period, Belle embodies cultural fears of both female promiscuity and racial miscegenation and arguably serves as a harbinger of the type of sexually complex female performances that became more prevalent on British cinema screens after the emergence of the British New Wave with the release of Jack Clayton's seminal *Room at the Top* in 1959. This section concludes with Osvaldo Di Paolo Harrison and Nadina Olmedo's reading of Román Viñoly Barreto's *El vampiro negro* (*The Black Vampire*, 1953), which examines this Gothic-noir fusion against the context of national tensions over notions of civilisation vs. barbarism in Argentina of the 1950s. Generally considered a remake of Fritz Lang's *M* (1931), *The Black Vampire* combines psychological horror with the detective film to provide a problematic moral guide to national norms of citizenship.

The chapters that comprise Part III, 'Aesthetics and Antecedents', consider the ways in which noir cinematography and other artistic elements impact the meaning and affect of films that have generally been explored apart from noir. Alicia Byrnes reads Agnès Varda's debut film *La Pointe Courte* (1954) as producing an inadvertently noir aesthetic through the repurposing of a modernist novel. Varda's film offers dual narratives linked only by setting into a series of juxtapositions that generate an overall sense of uncertainty characteristic of the liminal and the porous boundaries of modernism. Matthew Sorrento's (re)consideration of Richard Brooks's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1958) focuses on noir style as it energises an adaptation of one of the most page-bound of nineteenth-century novels. While critical commentary has largely dismissed the film as tamed by the Hollywood assembly line, Sorrento illustrates how noir visuals and framing open up the screenplay's chamber-drama treatment. Lastly, David Greven brings cinema and literary history to bear on the visuals, setting, and symbolism of Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1953). In the context of the American Gothic, Greven explores the film's complex representations of male bonds and homoerotic tensions.

Ultimately, *Liminal Noir* seeks to broaden the study of classical-era international cinema through an expansive conceptualisation of liminality that is central to the original cycle and international dimensions of film noir. Contributors herein create original perspectives that reinvigorate study of a body of relatively neglected or reductively theorised motion pictures from diverse nations. Some titles will be familiar to English-speaking audiences, though usually outside the context of film noir; others will be entirely new, even unavailable outside of their country and language of origin. All reveal the benefits of study through a liminal noir lens. Of course, no single collection can be exhaustive, and our

chosen focus and case-study approach has helped both to narrow our focus and to suggest the myriad possibilities of study beyond it. We hope readers learn as much from this volume and its process as we have learned in editing it.

Notes

1. Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir: 1941–1953*, trans. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002), p. 1; Nino Frank, 'A New Kind of Police Drama: The Criminal Adventure' (1946), trans. Alain Silver, in *Film Noir Reader 2*, ed. Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), pp. 15–19; and Jean-Pierre Chartier, 'Americans Also Make *Noir* Films' (1946), trans. Alain Silver, in *Film Noir Reader 2*, ed. Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), pp. 21–3.
2. Borde and Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir*, pp. 1–2. Traditional film noir historiographies frequently adhere to Borde and Chaumeton's assertion that the term 'film noir' was coined by Nino Frank in the socialist film journal *L'Écran Français* in August 1946. However, as Charles O'Brien demonstrates, the term's origins can instead be traced back to French newspaper film criticism, published between January 1938 and September 1939, in reference to Marcel Carné's *Quai des brumes* (*Port of Shadows*, 1938), Jean Grémillon's *L'étrange Monsieur Victor* (1938), Jeff Musso's *Le Puritain* (1938), Jean Renoir's *La Bête humaine* (1938), and other French films associated with the proto-noir style of Poetic Realism. Frank, 'A New Kind of Police Drama: The Criminal Adventure', p. 18; and Charles O'Brien, 'Film Noir in France: Before the Liberation', *Iris*, no. 21 (Spring 1996), p. 7.
3. Raymond Durgnat, 'Paint It Black: The Family Tree of the *Film Noir*' (1970), in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996), pp. 37–51.
4. Paul Schrader, 'Notes on Film Noir', *Film Comment* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 9–10.
5. Borde and Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir*, p. 1; Schrader, 'Notes on Film Noir', p. 9; and Andrew Spicer, 'Introduction', in *European Film Noir*, ed. Spicer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 1. See also R. Barton Palmer, 'Film Noir Begins: Some Thoughts', *South Atlantic Review* 86, no. 4 (2021), pp. 1–30. Examples of this growing body of scholarship include William K. Everson, 'British Film Noir: Part I', *Films in Review* 38, no. 5 (May 1987), pp. 285–9; Everson, 'British Film Noir: Part II', *Films in Review* 38, nos. 6–7 (June/July 1987), pp. 341–7; Robin Buss, *French Film Noir* (London: Marion Boyars, 1994); Tony Williams, 'British Film Noir', in *Film Noir Reader 2*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), pp. 243–69; Jennifer Fay and Justus Nieland, *Film Noir: Hard-Boiled Modernity and the Cultures of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2010); Dennis Broe, *Class, Crime and International Film Noir: Globalizing America's Dark Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Homer B. Pettey and R. Barton Palmer, eds, *International Noir* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); and Deborah Walker-Morrison, *Classic French Noir: Gender and the Cinema of Fatal Desire* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).