

ABOUT FILM NOIR CANON CREATION

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Abstract || It is easier to establish a canon than to analyze its formation process. This article attempts to explain how the film noir canon was formed using the distinction between the *corpus* or catalog, the whole of the films, and the canon, the masterpieces. These have constituted the models, upon which, like in a constellation, the academics have attempted to gauge the distinctive features of the lot in the thematic, narrative and stylistic orders. A critical construction in the end, there is not agreement about if film noir is a genre at the theoretical level, either a series or a cycle of the American cinema, but its existence is undeniable at the empirical level.

Key-words || Canon | Film noir | Genre | Cycle | Distinctive features | Representative characters.

When speaking about the canon, confusion is often produced among the canon payment itself and what I propose to designate as a catalogue or corpus. Needless to say this last term includes all the works under consideration, in this work, the set of films gathered under the name of film noir. On the other hand, the canon would be made only for those films on the quality of which there is a consensus, in other words, is the set of films collectively considered (more) valuable and therefore worthy of preservation, study and admiration (Sull, 2007: 9-22). But, I insist, this is a small number of films, selected from the catalogue or corpus (also preserved) according to the value attributed to them as per criteria that could differ (historical representation, thematic, stylistic, narrative, characters, etc.), resulting of a selection process which in the case of the cinema, for its short history, is better to observe than when speaking of literature.

On one hand, the formation of the film's canon highlights both the generation of a consensus around a series of films as the coexistence of divergent canons, not only successive but contemporaries; on the other hand, it is clear the intervention of different groups in the selection, starting with the producers and distributors themselves (who have saved or not the films, who continue the exploitation on different media), librarians and archivists (who have bought them and stored them and made them available to the public), critics (who have spoken and have helped to generate the opinion), teachers (who choose films to explain them during the lessons or to study them and contribute to their prestige and diffusion), the filmmakers themselves (who have referred to them in their texts or films, who have rescued and restored them), and, finally, the spectators, both from a commercial perspective (viewing figures) and from the cult one (small groups who devote particular attention to specific movies, genres or directors) (Steiger, 1985; Wollen, 1993; Schrader, 2006). Even more, one of the mechanisms of the film canon formation would be voting on several occasions (festivals, celebrations, special issues of newspapers or magazines) that want to compile a list of the best films in general or for a particular genre or period. For example, the British magazine *Sight & Sound* convenes every ten years, since 1962, a rating to decide the ten best films in history, with historically variable results; in those ratings, by the way, only film critics participated at the beginning, but eventually also filmmakers were invited, always with an international scope (Martin, 2001; Sallitt, 2002). All this facilitates, on one hand, the diagnosis of the state of opinion or the taste for the cinema and, secondly, to give some tips to those who start watching films by giving them a list of the movies you must see, you must know about.

About film noir, has to be said in first place, that was the French film critics who designated as film noir a short set of north American

movies released in France in 1945, after the liberation from the Nazis, because resembled the so-called black series published by Gallimard, a collection of detective novels that included, also since 1945, works and authors of the hard-boiled movement emerged in the United States as well during the 20s and 30s of the past century around the pulp Black Mask magazine (Naremore, 1998). All I can say is that at first novels and movies had crime as common and essential ingredient; more than that, the American novel movement itself has received at last the name of black novel as well (Coma, 1985, 1994). The French critics insisted on this perception since 1946, until 1955, when Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton were able to publish a Panorama du film noir with a chronological index stating up to six series of films, from which only one was considered real film noir (including criminal psychology, vintage crime films, gangster films, police documentaries and films of social trends). A series, the film noir one, which included only twenty-two North American films produced between 1941 and 1951.

For the constitution of the film noir's corpus selecting movies has been necessary, but also to stipulate a time limit. In this case there is a certain consensus about those limits going from 1941 to 1958 (Schrader, 1996), although there are those who advances the starting point to 1940 and delays the disappearance to 1959 or 1960. There are those as well who include in film noir criminal subject movies from the 30s, and incorporates to the corpus itself mob movies of this decade (Herdero and Santamarina, 1996; Luengos, 1997). On the other side, there are those who have no problem in prolonging the existence of film noir until today, with the changes and mutations that are assumed (Sánchez Noriega, 1998; Santamarina, 1999; Balagué, 2004; Ballinger and Graydon, 2007). It is clear that determining the chronological boundaries of film noir means in the same movement to set an historical period and give the phenomenon predecessors and successors, as well as an internal history or evolution if you apply the organic model of birth, maturity and decline, which would give rise to the corresponding intermediate stages that distinguish, for example, so Borde and Chaumeton (1955) like Schrader (1996) or Herdero and Santamarina (1996). In any case, film noir of the considered classic era, the one produced between 1941 and 1958, is in principle a closed corpus.

However, in the constitution process both of the corpus and the canon of film noir there is a crucial step that should be highlighted. To provide a specific entity, in the abundant North American and international literature from the 70s to current day a great analysis effort can be observed to become another film genre among the Hollywood ones. This is an easy manoeuvre to understand because if the film noir was a film genre it would have the same recognition as

other Hollywood genders with a sociocultural and historical existence

undisputed. However, not all scholars of film noir agree to grant him this status.

To introduce some order I want to recall that a film genre is, in the first place, «un *esquema* básico o fórmula que precede, programa y configura la producción de la industria»; secondly, a «*estructura* o entramado formal»; on third place, it is a «*etiqueta* o nombre de una categoría fundamental para las decisiones [...] de distribuidores y exhibidores» and, on third and last place, a genre is a *contract* with the audience (Altman, 1999: 35; italic belongs to the original, Pérez Bowie as well, 2008). The status of film genre is, therefore, a socio-cultural convention that regulates the production, distribution and consumption of affected films and also determines the distinctive ones. So, it could be argued that there did not exist within the gender system prevailing in the 40s and 50s in Hollywood genre that the industry itself would call film noir; in short, neither the Hollywood studios were producing film noir (nor directors nor producers knew it), nor the exhibitors scheduled film noir, nor the audience knew they were watching film noir, nor the film critics (the U.S. ones, the closest) used this name. In any case, we can say that they existed as genres more or less independent gangster films, detective and suspense or criminal ones (which is usually called in English *thriller*, a term difficult to translate) (Neale, 2000); all them were films that had the crime as a common factor, that's right, but that they were treating it from different points of view. Historically speaking, there did not exist, therefore, a basic outline, a structure or a specific contract of something called film noir, which does not mean that directors, writers and producers were not working following the model of some films that were sharing characters, stories and ways of telling them and that generated some trend between 1940 and 1960, if we take the broadest chronological limits.

At this point awards are appropriate to help to understand the critical manoeuvre that produces the concept of film noir, because, among all the factors involved in the formation of the canon, it is the film critic the one that has intervened decisively in the construction of film noir. Firstly, the starting point is the set of Hollywood production during the years of the classic film noir, from 1941 to 1958, amounting to a total of 6,359 titles, a quite impressive figure. Secondly, it has to be taken into account that, at the same time, film noir has a catalogue (a *corpus*) that extends from the twenty-two titles of Borde and Chaumeton (not going further than 1951) up to the 312 from the catalogue of Silver and Ward (1992) or the 409 ones from Luengos (1997), always referred to the cinema produced between 1941 and 1958. This represents a 4.9% in the first case and 6.4% in the second

one in terms of percentages in relation to total production (Neale, 2000: 156). It does not have much importance that the percentage is small, because it only would indicate that we are talking about a minor genre in Hollywood production, as the criteria with several selections were made with, the result of which is, for example, that Luengos assigns to film noir movies such as *La mujer leopardo* (1942) or directors like Hitchcock, which one of his films, *Strangers on a Train* (1951), could fully enter into the classical period of film noir.

Either way, even though the film noir constitutes a small percentage of the so called classical film from Hollywood, it is on relation with this one that must be defined (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985). In fact, the set of films that fall into the age of classical cinema (1941-1958) is the *corpus* by excellence, which makes clear that there has been a considerable effort to create a specific catalogue of film noir with defined and stable limits, as it corresponds to a genre, although the result fluctuates between catalogues from Silver and Ward (1992), Luengos (1997) and Duncan (2006), among others. All these authors extend the chronological limits from 1940 to 1960 when talking about the classical period and have no objection to incorporate precedents or successors. However, film criticism has tended to work not with this whole *corpus* (which might be excessive if you think about it) but with a selection, the result of which is the canon itself, consisting of masterpieces, the classics, of film noir. It is from these core movies, produced, of course, from a certain consensus of film critics, which the academic tradition has built a conceptual model of film noir which has then tried to confirm in other films of the *corpus* in which it seemed to recognize, perhaps at least partially or completely. I repeat that it has been a critical operation that has attributed the *corpus* to historical and social factors, that has found distinctive characteristics and history (and successors) from a limited number of films and that has projected into the past with the result of giving unity and coherence to a group that, it must be kept in mind, it is not quite the result of a systematic analysis (lacking in distinctive features), nor an empirical reality clearly documented (Neale, 2000: 153). The manoeuvre, it must be emphasized, aims to close, on one hand, the list of films that can be assigned to the film noir, but, on the other hand, leaves the door open to new inclusions given the essential vagueness of the distinctive characteristics of film noir.

It is not surprising that the canon of film noir takes the form of the list (Eco, 2009), like three works available to Hispanic readers, dictionaries which give technical details of each film and offers a summary of the argument and a brief comment. In two cases, the number of films revolves around one hundred, a figure that seems

to have acquired a symbolic value: *El cine negro en cien películas* (Santamarina, 1998) and *Obras maestras del cine negro* (Sánchez Noriega, 1998); on the other hand, Balagué (2004) limits it to a *corpus* of fifty-one films. Note that, in the first case, the selection spans from 1912 to 1998, with the consequent blurring of the concept, while the second covers from 1930 to 1960; in the third example, Balagué incorporates cinema of the 30s and gets until now. In global, thanks to the recovery of titles in DVD, the *corpus* which the critique works on tends to be more and more accessible, which facilitates the familiarity and intensity of the comment, but it is undeniable that a large part of titles reviewed in the *corpus* are difficult to find for a non-specialist audience.

At the time Borde and Chaumeton did not escape the characterization of film noir: “the moral ambivalence, criminal violence and conflicting complexity of situations and motives help to raise in the audience a feeling of anguish or insecurity [...] it is the own brand of film noir of our time. All works in this series have a unity of emotions: *is the state of tension born in the audience for the disappearance of psychological references*. The vocation of film noir was to create a *specific malaise* » (Borde and Chaumeton, 1955: 15; italic belongs to original). Maybe it was not difficult to assemble a series of movies around this characterization, but nothing is more difficult to control than the reactions of the audience. How can you recognize this “specific distress” and how can it be specifically assigned to some movies and not to others? For more controversial their foundations are, based on a phenomenology of the reception of an unlikely empirical verification, Borde and Chaumeton provided back in 1955 a label and select a group of films (twenty-two, let us keep that in mind) to which they could apply it and, at the same time, sketched a referral canon.

When the film noir, with the label of film noir obviously borrowed from French, became an object of study for the North American critics, there were as well several attempts of definition or characterization. One of the most successful ones was the one from the film critic and screenwriter Paul Schrader, who denies the film noir being a genre and states that it is a specific period of cinema history down to the films produced in Hollywood in the 40s and early 50s that “represented a world of dark city streets, docks, crime and corruption” (Schrader, 1996: 53-54). The dominant theme of film noir would be the passion for the past and the present, but also fear for the future; in fact, the film noir hero fears looking forward and instead he strives to live every day and if he does not get it, he refugees himself in the past (1996: 58). But for Schrader film noir is mainly a style, because it elaborates the conflicts visually and not thematically, it hides the theme into the style (1996: 63).

On his side, James Damico tried to provide a prototype of the structure model of film noir, which would be:

Because of the fate or by chance or because he has been hired for a job specifically associated with it, a man whose life experience leads him to be relentless and often bitter knows a woman not so innocent with a similar attitude that sexually attracts him in a fatal way. Because of this attraction, either because the woman persuades him or because it is the natural result of their relationship, the man reaches the scam, attempts the murder or he actually murders a second man who the woman is unfortunately or involuntarily tied to (usually the husband or the lover), an act that often leads to the woman betraying the protagonist, but in any case causing the destruction, sometimes metaphorical but usually literal, of herself, the man which she is tied to and often the protagonist himself (1978: 103).

A scheme that, I will say in passing, fits like a glove with *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Scarlet Street* (1945), *Out of the Past* (1945) or *The Killers* (1946), only in part with *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), and nothing at all with *Laura* (1944), *The Big Sleep* (1946) or *The Big Heat* (1953), films that not only are part of the corpus but also of the film noir canon. The attempt of Damico, therefore, has limited success, because it does not describe the entire corpus (not even the canon) of film noir.

To get to the point, I will enumerate the set of features that according to Sanchez Noriega (1998) characterize film noir as a genre: a) stereotyped characters b) dramatic stories in the evolution of the plot in which death or violence have an important role c) conflict and crime determined by a social context d) the characters placed outside the law, in which conduct not always coincide legality and morality; e) the action is narrated is contemporary and occurs in urban spaces mainly; f) visual aesthetic has an expressionist view g) the dialogues are sharp, very “film way” and often cynical; h) stories are based on cheap novels (pulp fiction) and newspaper reports (Sánchez Noriega, 1998: 12-13). The first objection to pose to this list is that in a good portion they are not film noir genre distinctive but for the Hollywood cinema at that time; for example, in western not only stereotypical characters abound but dominate and sharp and cynical dialogues are often present; expressionist type visual aesthetics is not exclusively of film noir, it is shared with other contemporary film genres; and cityscapes and contemporaneity are usual on music films and comedies. The central place of death and violence would not be distinctive if you think about similar consolidated genres, prior or contemporary ones, as the gangster one, the detective one, or, in a very generic way, the thriller. In this line, and especially in connection with the detective genre, but also with western, the mismatch of

legality and morality would not be an exclusive feature. Anyway, social determination might seem a distinctive sign, but it is shared with the genre of social problems and, moreover, is not always explicit in the corpus of film noir. It is undeniable, as conclusion, that the film noir thrives a lot of cheap novels and newspaper reports, and even though everyone has insisted in the great debt to the most popular narrative (Palacios, 2005; Cattrysse, 1992), is not either a unique phenomenon nor all adapted authors belong to the same category. In this sense, is obliged to recognize the primacy of novelists such as D. Hammett, R. Chandler, J. M. Cain or C. Woolrich, even G. Greene, above many others, some of them located on the border between popular literature and the educated one (Chandler), but not all of them belonging to what is now called *thriller* (Cattrysse, 1992).

Now I look back and remember that in their book Borde and Chaumeton talk with caution about serial and not gender when referring to film noir, and define the series as:

a set of domestic films that share some common features (style, atmosphere, theme ...) strong enough to distinguish them without misunderstanding and provide them, in the course of time, with an inimitable nature (Borde and Chaumeton, 1955: 2).

For the time being, it is indisputable that film noir is a set of domestic films, particularly North American (Coursodon, 1996), and would be right the authors who assert that when a series has a variable duration, whether it is two or ten years: seventeen in the case of film noir. After having summarily reviewed some representative examples of film noir characterization as a genre, it has to be admitted that they do not meet the minimum requirements required, so it seems practical to me consider it as a series (perhaps a cycle) with close relations to similar genres like the gangsters one. However, I am unable to deny that the long critical effort that has addressed film noir as a whole with enough autonomy has educated the perception of many spectators, among whom I count myself in, to detect in North American films produced between 1941 and 1958 the presence (total or partial) of a series of features that have been associated to them, although they are not distinguishing strictly speaking.

However, I would argue that film noir can be characterized as a genre when adopting the metaphor of the constellation (Vilella, 2007) that allows the various theme trends gathered from a minimal characterization: gangster film, police, detectives and criminal (Herdero and Santamarina, 1996), passing through the Border and Chaumeton one (1955), to such excessive enumerations that, being so detailed, become useless, such as the pioneer of Durgnat (1970) and most recently the one from Silver and Ursini (2004). I

insist that film noir has been formed around a selection of films, a canon itself, each of which has become on one side a classic of the genre and on the other side a reference so it could gather around it other films sharing traits but did not reach its thematic or aesthetic quality. It's easy to find in studies of film noir that certain films are the quintessence of the genre or represent, at least, a thematic line, narrative or stylistic significant. Each of these films would constitute, therefore, a core of the constellation (that would be film noir in global) surrounded by a series of similar films, which, as far as the model, of the classical, they are, the more possibilities they would have to share features of another core theme. The most luminous stars (the classics) would serve, of course, to organize the most pale ones (arranged in a descending line), which would fill, however, the space between those and would ensure transitions until reaching a limit in which gender would be removed, would be distorted, not without contaminating similar genres like *western*, melodrama or science fiction (Ballinger and Graydon, 2007: 233-246). A side effect is that it would not be necessary to close the *corpus* because it would always be possible to find film noir features in movies that might initially seem far away from the models incorporated into the canon.

If it is true that all classical or canonical work lives thanks to the comment (Kermode, 1983: 67), it is indisputable that the film noir canon has generated numerous comments and interpretations that have not opted out of the mythology that tends to emerge around film stars. In connection with its own existence and the status as a genre or as a series, film noir has raised numerous readings and film critics have searched not only stylistic features but thematic as well that provide in a certain measure an image of the society in which was born. A good part of the film noir scholars interpret it as a response to the problems of the North American society: the development of organized crime throughout the 20s due to the introduction of Prohibition and its expansion during the following decade that generates the unmistakable figure of the gangster, police corruption, justice, politics and public administration; the concerns that led to both the war and the return of soldiers, followed by another war, this only an ideological one at first, the cold war, etc..

Bibliography tends to represent film noir as a critical analysis of North American society, its inequalities and injustices, the widespread corruption, that left common citizen helpless, pushing the weakest into poverty and sow the seed of crime among the most vulnerable ones. We cannot forget the crisis of 1929 and the following economic depression that left millions jobless. But is not the same to give an explanation of the entire genre or the series for its relationship with society than the interpretation of specific films. In the case of the totality, it is very difficult to relate the entire *corpus* with the society at

that time, as not all movies talk about the same issues nor they do it the same way, in other words, they cannot all be assigned with the same criticism (just keep in mind that it is a rule of classical cinema to reduce all situations to a single case and in parallel reduce the responsibility of society); in addition, a historical period of almost two decades so full of internal events (the gangsterism, violence, economical crisis) and external (World War) supports a diversity of interpretations and, if necessary, the relationship, always complex and indirect, between movie productions and social life. Nevertheless, studies such as the one by Coma and Latorre (1981), Heredero and Santamarina (1996) or Luengos (1997) strive to reconstruct the historical context of film noir and its ideological tensions by adopting a position which I think can be conceptualised as progressive when assessing the *corpus*.

It is a precaution that should not be neglected in a sociological analysis that the artistic product, film noir in this case, probably responds as well first to the specific rules that governed the production: the production system of Hollywood studios, first, and the more specific ones from crime movies or *thriller*, in the second place; besides reflecting the possible influence of the movies expressionism that some German directors were able to import, but also the relations of opposition or affinity with the dominant Hollywood way (Bordwell, 1985: 74-77). Bear in mind, so, the prevailing conditions of production that dominated the studios, big and not so big, in Hollywood, like the star system or the distinction between A-movies and B-movies (movies which in double session played the role of filler), *ie*, between the budgets and resources available to filmmakers (Kerr, 1979). In fact, much of the *corpus* of film noir is made of low-budget films, B-movies, which naturally affect its stylistic or narrative quality, due to a conventional photography, schematic scripts or a very short time of shooting. Of course, good movies and bad ones are mixed in the *corpus*, but even in the film noir canon: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) by John Huston, or *The Big Sleep* (1946), by Howard Hawks, together with *Gun Crazy* (1950), by Joseph H. Lewis and *Detour* (1945), by Edgar G. Ulmer.

Another factor that must be taken into account and moves from sociological interpretation to the problem of the author of the study of film noir directors. Sánchez Noriega (1998) includes nine films by Fritz Lang in his collection of film noir masterpieces, together with five by Alfred Hitchcock, Otto Preminger and Robert Siodmak, with four by Orson Welles and three movies by Sam Fuller, John Huston, Mervyn LeRoy, Raoul Walsh Billy Wilder and William Wyler. The list of names immediately raises doubts about whether all of Lang's films outlined belong to film noir or which Hitchcock's films can be assigned to it, as well as the role played in the film genre by German origin directors and the North American ones, and the significance

of their influence on the construction of the film genre or series. It is even more interesting to ask which is the weight that film noir movies have in other directors' filmography and the conditions that enabled them to be engaged to this type of movies, as in the case of Wilder, director of *Double Indemnity* (1944), considered a masterpiece of the genre. I also take this opportunity to draw attention to the fact that, in those years when the theory of literature discusses the author's death, the film critic, following the *politique des auteurs* promoted during the 50s by *Cahiers du Cinéma*, also has been dedicated to rescue B-movies directors such as Phil Karlson, Joseph H. Lewis or Edgar G. Ulmer. It seems that the film noir movies from those authors were determinants and, despite budgetary constraints traces of personality can be seen, even though not an easy task (Palacios and Weinrichter, 2005).

It is worth remembering how powerful was the Hayes code censorship (in force since the mid-30s) in aspects of public morality, in which dominated a restrict puritanism that represses the expression of eroticism and any other option other than conventional heterosexuality. The code required that the visual representation of eroticism was very controlled and forced to depend mainly on insinuation, double sense, suggestion. The famous scene of the first meeting between the insurance seller and the housewife in *Double Indemnity* (1944), by Billy Wilder, lays on minimum visual insinuations (a towel suggesting nudity, a chain at woman's ankle) as in a conversation full of double meanings (written by R. Chandler, by the way). The eroticism of the relationship between lovers at *Gun Crazy* (1949), by Joseph H. Lewis, is suggested by intense glances and very controlled kisses and hugs, besides the common passion for guns.

One area in which film noir has become a privileged object of study is critic of genre (Kaplan, 1980; Krutnick, 1991). Representation of male and female, even homosexuality (so veiled but present), has a great interest in a cinema industry that provides a stimulating gallery of *tough guys* and *femmes fatales*, accompanied by an extensive list of losers. Just remember the roles of Burt Lancaster, physically powerful, becoming the toy of really beautiful women, but real predators, Ava Gardner and Yvonne de Carlo, in *The Killers* (1946) and *Criss Cross* (1949), both directed by Robert Siodmak. Or the male protagonist of *Double Indemnity* (1944) doubly deceived by his accomplice and lover. Or the male protagonists from *Out of the Past* (1947), by Jacques Tourneur, who find the death at the hands of the woman who has deceived them both. It is clear that next to these losers, there is an important repertoire of detectives and tough policemen (some of which have become icons of film noir and the imaginary worldwide), like Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe above all, played both of them by Humphrey Bogart, or the police in *The Big*

Heat (1953), starring Glen Ford, who had already impressed slapping Rita Hayworth at *Gilda* (1946), by Charles Vidor. Nor I can fail to mention the long list of gangsters played by Bogart himself, Edward G. Robinson or James Cagney, who later on became police officers or investigators also tough enough (Silver and Ursini, 2005; Simsolo, 2005; Ballinger and Graydon, 2007).

The femme fatale, the vamp is an ambiguous character (Weinrichter, 2005b), because deception and betrayal are punished in the end, and lead her to destruction or death, as happens to the protagonists of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), by John Huston, *The Killers* (1946), by Robert Siodmak, or *Dead Reckoning* (1947) by John Cromwell. But what you cannot deny about this type of character is the strength, the willingness to act and to dominate men, like the woman of *Scarlet Street* (1945), by Fritz Lang, who exploits the lover that keeps her stealing money from the company where she works, but that kills her when she makes fun of him. In this sense it is very interesting the female character of *Gun Crazy* (1950), who as she wants a comfortable drags her lover to steal to get a lot of money very quickly. Or the opposition established down almost at the beginning of *The Killers* (1946) between the blonde, protagonist youthful promise (the neighbour next door), and the femme fatale brunette (partner of a gangster) for which he feels irresistibly attracted and inevitably betrayed him.

Finally, the text itself, the film, has been the subject of intense study in the bibliography of film noir. On one hand, much effort has been invested in determining the characteristics of the whole, the series in its entirety, with questionable results, but, on the other hand, this has not been an obstacle to have dedicated much attention, and more and more, to the detailed study of films and film fragments. One of the most promising lines was the one started by Paul Schrader (1996) when he stated that film noir is a style, an atmosphere, proposal that, with several nuances, has been quite successful in a constantly growing bibliography and that has generated any number of accurate formal examinations which are not abandoning attempts to characterize the set, while trying at the same time to justify the assignment of specific movies to the *corpus* still in the process of creation (Place i Peterson, 1974). That film noir has its own style is debatable statement, of course, because there are several films, not only from the *corpus* but also from the canon itself, which have very few stylistic features of the ones enumerated beyond the predictable night scenes of wet and lonely streets and insides with a highly contrasted lighting.

Syntagm *film noir* is used nowadays to designate either almost all of the crime-themed movies produced by Hollywood studios between 1941 and 1958 or the many later crime movies as well (the *post-noir* or *neo-noir*) that although they do not use the aesthetics of the classical era, at least ensure a continuity. In this sense, both to the presence in current movies and to the survival of the classic era *corpus*, I believe that film noir is part of the current visual and iconographic arsenal not only of film critics and scholars but many of many spectators, who cannot (nor want to) escape from its fascination (Weinrichter, 2005a).

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