



# THE DARK PAGE

SUN 5 AUG —  
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# HOME

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*The Killing, 1956*

# A BRIEF NOTE ON THE FILM SELECTIONS

The best way to think of this season is perhaps in the manner of a music compilation that offers a career overview with some hits, a couple of B-sides and a few lesser-known curiosities and outtakes. All of the selections are morally and spiritually ambiguous and feature compromised protagonists doing questionable things in difficult circumstances. This is after all the dark and sometimes delirious underworld of film noir and pulp fiction.

As well as covering some of the staples we also very much wanted to include work written by different voices. The hope was that we could offer a new perspective on relatively well-trodden terrain. Sadly, many of the films we very much wanted to include were unavailable, either due to rights issues or due to a lack of materials fit for screening. This lack of preservation perhaps offers a perspective in itself. I should also point out that for economic reasons, we were unable to import materials from the U.S. (the season is American in its focus).

Whenever we present a season of this nature we inevitably always face questions of the 'Why aren't you screening INSERT TITLE HERE?' variety. Quite often the answer can be found in my paragraph above or, as is increasingly common given that we screen over 580 titles each year, that we recently presented it under different circumstances. I always find it can be instructive to list some of the titles we were hell-bent on securing but which sadly got away, so listed below are a number of them. They are listed by author.

**Jason Wood, Curator of The Dark Page and Artistic Director: Film, HOME**

Dashiell Hammett – *The Maltese Falcon*  
Jim Thompson – *The Kill-Off*  
Donald Westlake – *Point Blank*  
Charles Willeford – *Cockfighter, The Woman Chaser*  
Oscar Micheaux – *Murder in Harlem*  
Joe Gores – *Hammett*  
Chester Himes – *A Rage in Harlem, Cotton Comes to Harlem*  
Mickey Spillane – *Kiss me Deadly*  
Sarah Paretsky – *V I Warshaki*

# GLOSSARY OF FEATURED WRITERS

Here is a very brief snapshot of all the writers included in the season. For further reading it is very much worth seeking out *The Badlands* by John Williams, a vital mix of literary criticism, geography, politics and author profile in which Williams interviews some of America's greatest living crime writers. Robert Politto's *Savage Art: The Life of Jim Thompson* is also highly recommended.

## Cornell Woolrich (1903 – 1968)

Widely regarded as one of the twentieth century's finest writers of pure suspense fiction, Woolrich is the author of numerous classic novels and short stories. Incredibly prolific, Woolrich published under multiple pseudonyms and lived a life as dark and emotionally tortured as any of his characters and died, alone, in a seedy Manhattan hotel room following the amputation of a gangrenous leg. Upon his death, he left a bequest of one million dollars to Columbia University, to fund a scholarship for young writers. A regular source of material for cinema, other notable Woolrich works adapted for the screen include *The Bride Wore Black* and *The Night Has A Thousand Eyes*.

## David Goodis (1917 – 1967)

Born and bred in Philadelphia, a city to which he retained a deep identification during his professional life, Goodis began his career after completing a degree in journalism in 1937. A writer known for his observational skills, Goodis frequently portrayed urban landscapes gone wrong and was particularly eloquent at capturing human despair. *Dark Passage*, *Nightfall* and *The Burglar* are other notable Goodis big screen adaptations.

## Dorothy B. Hughes (1904 – 1993)

Born in Kansas City, Hughes studied at Columbia University, and won an award from the Yale Series of Younger Poets for her first book, the poetry collection *Dark Certainty* (1931). After writing several unsuccessful manuscripts, she published *The So Blue Marble* in 1940. A New York-based mystery, it won praise for its hard-boiled prose, which was due, in part, to Hughes's editor, who demanded she cut 25,000 words from the book. A contemporary of Margaret Millar, Vera Caspary and Elizabeth Sanxay Holding,

Hughes published thirteen novels, with *Ride the Pink Horse* and *The Fallen Sparrow* also being adapted for the screen. Hughes later became a literary critic, winning an Edgar Award. In 1978, the Mystery Writers of America presented Hughes with the Grand Master Award for literary achievement.

## Elmore Leonard (1925 – 2013)

Born in Dallas but relocating to Detroit early in his life and becoming synonymous with the city, Elmore Leonard began writing after studying literature and leaving the navy. Initially working in the western genre in the 1950s (*Valdez Is Coming*, *Hombre* and *Three-Ten To Yuma* were all filmed), Leonard switched to crime fiction and became one of the most prolific and acclaimed practitioners of the genre. Martin Amis and Stephen King were both evangelical in their praise of his works. Despite the taut economy of his writing with its particular eye for the American underbelly, Leonard was badly served in terms of big screen adaptations with big screen tilts at *Mr. Majestyk*, *Glitz* and *Cat Chaser* (amongst many others) all widely missing the mark. *Get Shorty* and *Out of Sight* fared far better.

## George V. Higgins (1939 – 1999)

Alongside Joe Gores (the author of *Hammett*, which was brought to the screen by Wim Wenders), George V. Higgins is amongst the finest but less celebrated contemporary American crime writers. A respected journalist, Higgins was also a practising US lawyer and this understanding of the legal system and forensic attention to detail informs his best work. *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* inspired a new cycle of Boston-set thrillers. *Cogan's Trade* was adapted for the screen by Andrew Dominik as the excellent *Killing Them Softly*.

## James M. Cain (1892 – 1977)

Born James Mallahan Cain in Maryland, Cain was a former journalist who served in France with the U.S. army in the final year of World War I. Cain initially turned his hand to screenplays in Hollywood, with only modest success, and then later fiction following a short stint as managing editor of *The New Yorker*. The publication of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in 1934 signalled his literary breakthrough. Cain proved a fertile source of material during the 1940s film noir heyday with *Double Indemnity*, *Mildred Pierce* proving particularly influential.

## Jim Thompson (1909 – 1977)

Thompson wrote more than thirty novels, the majority of which were original paperback publications by pulp fiction houses, from the late-1940s through mid-1950s. Despite some positive critical notice, notably by Anthony Boucher in the *New York Times*, he was little-recognised in his lifetime but his stature accelerated during the 1980s when several of his works were re-published in the Black Lizard series of re-discovered crime fiction. An admirer of Dostoevsky, Thompson frequently imbued his work with unreliable, disliked and psychopathic narrators entirely lacking in morality. His most highly regarded works include *The Killer Inside Me*, *Savage Night*, *A Hell of a Woman* and *Pop. 1280*. Of the many screen adaptations, *The Grifters* remains perhaps the most highly-regarded with the problematic

*The Killer Inside Me* being undoubtedly the most faithful. My favourite Thompson adaptation is Maggie Greenwald's *The Kill-Off*, a film I tried desperately hard to track down for this season. We include here instead Kubrick's *The Killing*, a commissioned adaptation of Lionel White's *Clean Break*.

## Raymond Chandler (1888 – 1959)

Chandler had an immense stylistic influence on American popular literature, and is considered by many to be a founder, along with Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain and other Black Mask writers, of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction. Chandler's Philip Marlowe, along with Hammett's Sam Spade, are considered to be the archetypal private detectives. Chandler, who published just seven novels during his lifetime, came to writing at the age of forty-four, turning to detective fiction after losing his job as an oil company executive during the Depression. Chandler's first novel, *The Big Sleep* was published in 1939 and was an immediate success. Filmed by Howard Hawks, it would be one of numerous Chandler novels to be realised as motion pictures. Chandler also delivered the screenplay for Patricia Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train*.

## Patricia Highsmith (1921 – 1995)

Born in Forth Worth, Texas, Patricia Highsmith's first suspense novel *Strangers on a Train* was adapted for the screen by Alfred Hitchcock in 1951. A writer of incredible intelligence, insight and intellect, Highsmith specialised in psychological crime thrillers, many of which featured the sociopathic anti-hero Tom Ripley. *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *Ripley Under Ground*, *Ripley's Game*, *The Boy Who Followed Ripley* and *Ripley Under Water* all featured the character. Tom Ripley would prove a rich though not always happy hunting ground for directors, with Wim Wenders undoubtedly getting closest to the essence of the character in *The American Friend*. Considered as existing as part of an existentialist tradition represented by her own favourite writers, in particular Dostoevsky, Conrad, Kafka, Gide, and Camus, Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* was recently directed as *Carol* by Todd Haynes.

## Walter Mosley (1952 – present)

A writer who has written science fiction, erotica, works for young adults and political monographs, Mosley is perhaps most acclaimed for a series of hard-boiled novels featuring black private investigator and WWII veteran Easy Rawlins. A resident of New York City and a recipient of the PEN America's Lifetime Achievement Award, Mosley stands alongside Chester Himes as one of the relatively few black writers associated with the crime/pulp movement. The Easy Rawlins mysteries, which as well as *Devil In A Blue Dress* also include the exceptional *A Red Death* and *White Butterfly*, authentically depict white patriarchal society.

# TURNING THE DARK PAGE

The Dark Page takes its title from the acclaimed book by Kevin Johnson and reviews the literary background of film noir and the influence of key writers such as Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and Jim Thompson. Noir fan and interdependent film curator James King tells us more.

One of the main challenges when discussing film noir is finding anything interesting or original or unique to actually say about the matter, given that it is quite possibly the most written-about and well-trodden subject in twentieth-century cinema. Books on the topic are innumerable, as are its influences over today's cinematic and televisual landscapes, from the reboot of *Twin Peaks* to the reboot of *Blade Runner*. From its earliest ripples, the French New Wave very much wore a love of noir on its sleeve, from Louis Malle's *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (1958) to Godard's debut *A bout de souffle* (1960), they were completely enamoured by the dark monochromes of Howard Hawks, Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, et al. I mean it's not hard to recognise the lasting allure: with its pulp fiction origins, striking expressionistic aesthetic, stark chiaroscuro lighting set-ups, glamorous femmes fatales, smoke-filled seedy locales, doomed protagonists, fatalistic philosophies and jazz-infused soundtracks, the area is as attractive to film theoreticians as fresh rain on black asphalt is to the cinematographer's eye. And it's undeniable that there is something continually sexy and sordid and seductive about film noir, at least when compared to abstract formalism or Dunkirk. Therein perhaps lies the problem – film noir has become a victim of its own success, so much so that its influence has become almost ubiquitous, and there are very few surprises to be had in its examination. So rather than reel off a list of classics with which you are undoubtedly familiar, or could obtain through a rudimentary Wikipedia search, I thought it'd be more worthwhile to discuss a few films that have been directly adapted from noir literature but are currently almost impossible to find (at least through legal channels) – "lost noirs" if you will. But, first, I suppose we'd better define exactly what it is we mean when we say film noir, with some inevitable contradictory title-dropping, as there's been a fair amount of rather boring debate amongst academic and critical circles concerning the term's precise definition.

Many claim that the classic noir cannon began in 1940 with Boris Ingster's *Stranger on the Third Floor* – starring an opium-glazed Peter Lorre as the titular stranger/strangler – and ended with Orson Welles' baroque tale of murder, kidnapping and police corruption on the Mexican border, *Touch of Evil* (1959). However reductive and restrictive this bookending may be, at least the films are good, so I guess it suits a certain purpose. Subsequently, anything prior to this classical period is referred to as a "proto-noir" and anything following it has been dubbed "neo-noir". This encompasses New Hollywood landmarks such as Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974); sci-fi fusions like Godard's *Alphaville* (1965) and Ridley Scott's aforementioned *Blade Runner* (1981). It is worth noting here that although the phrase "film noir" was first coined by Italian-born French critic Nino Frank in 1946, it did not enter popular usage until the 1970s, so it is very much a retrospectively applied handle and not one that was ever used self-consciously by filmmakers during the classical era, which further complicates the process of definition. Personally, I prefer to think of noir as an atmosphere, a sensibility, a vibe. And a decidedly pessimistic one at that. If not downright fatalistic. In noir, there is something deeply wrong with the world at large, and the end usually involves some kind of death, doom or general disillusion. Therein, arguably, lies its longevity.

The cosmically pessimistic outlook noir purports originated from the hard-boiled American crime fiction of the 1920s and 30s. Following on from the horrific one-two punch of the Great War and the Great Depression, a lost generation of writers such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, W. R. Burnett and Cornell Woolrich popularised the despairing detective trope in pulp fiction publications, such as the seminal *Black Mask* anthology magazine, and went on to create enduring novels including *The Big Sleep*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *The Maltese Falcon*, all of which have been adapted numerous times for the big screen. These writers frequently became sucked into the Hollywood studio system, often adapting each other's work – *The Big Sleep* was adapted for Howard Hawks by none other than William Faulkner, alongside Jules Furthman and Leigh Brackett (one of the few female noir practitioners, and one of the best). Later writers

such as Jim Thompson and Charles Willeford rose to prominence and even Thomas Pynchon eventually lampooned the genre (sic) in 2009 with his stoner-detective romp *Inherent Vice*. So now that we've established a brief history of noir, a framework to build upon, we can return to the promise of the premise: three lost noirs.

Firstly, there's *Série noire*, directed by Alain Corneau in 1979 and adapted from Jim Thompson's novel *A Hell of a Woman* (1954). Transposing the action from the American Mid-West to the Parisian banlieues of the 1970s, Corneau cast Patrick Dewaere as Frank Poupart, a hapless door-to-door salesman who becomes involved with an underage prostitute called Mona (an incandescent turn from a young Marie Trintignant). When Frank falls into some financial difficulties, he and Mona plot to rob her wealthy aunt/pimp and live off the riches. Things inevitably go awry. Whilst *Série noire* remains a fine adaptation of Thompson's novel, co-scripted by avant-garde novelist Georges Perec, its most remarkable trait is Dewaere's neurotic performance as the demented amoral protagonist Poupart. One cannot help but watch the actor's turn with the dark knowledge that, just three years later, he would kill himself with a 22-calibre rifle, somewhat ironically following the release of *Paradis pour tous* (1982), in which his character also commits suicide. Dewaere's screen presence is unhinged to say the least, and at times he seems downright possessed. In one scene, in which Frank and Mona are arguing in a scarpard, Dewaere lets out a cry of frustration, charges up a pile of debris, then hurtles head-first back down and head-butts the side of his car, knocking himself unconscious. One can almost feel the crew lurching behind the camera at this moment – it feels completely improvised and the injuries sustained must have been very real. Just as Poupart recklessly charges towards his own oblivion, so too can one feel Dewaere giving in to his own self-destructive demons and letting them run riot on screen. It's a harrowing thing to witness, but charged with electricity and danger. In another sequence Dewaere submerges himself in a bathtub and lets the air escape his lungs. For the longest time you're simply not sure if he's ever going to come back up.

Another noir curio is Andrei Tarkovsky's student film *The Killers* (1956). Produced whilst he was studying at the State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow this is a relatively straightforward adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's short story of the same name, which had been expanded into

a full-length feature a decade earlier by Robert Siodmak, starring Ava Gardner and a young Burt Lancaster. Running at just 20 minutes, Tarkovsky limits himself to a relatively literal rendering of Hemingway's existential short story, in which two unnamed hitmen loiter in a restaurant waiting to kill a Swedish boxer called Ole Andreson. The Swede never shows up and they eventually leave without major incident. However, upon learning later of these murderous visitors the boxer takes no further action, he does not try to leave town, he doesn't even get out of bed – he simply remains lying down, smoking, resigned to his fate. Despite a few visual flourishes that hint at Tarkovsky's later mastery of the cinematic form, the short film remains relatively unremarkable (barring some pretty jarring use of blackface that has not stood the test of time). However, over 20 years later in his science-fiction masterpiece *Stalker* (1979), over the title credits the three principle characters meet in a dingy sepia-toned bar, preparing to go on their treacherous voyage into the fabled Zona. The resemblance to Hemingway's restaurant is undeniable, and even despite Tarkovsky's life-long faith in the existence of God, the dark existential heart of noir still finds its way into this metaphysical odyssey.

Last but not least is Robinson Devor's playful and outrageous neo-noir, *The Woman Chaser* (1999). Shot in beautiful monochrome, and starring Patrick Warburton in a career-best performance as the used-car-salesman-turned-psychotic-film-director Richard Hudson, Devor's film is so knowingly self-aware, with every scene and composition a riff on some noir trope, that it constantly threatens to implode into a *Persona*-esque celluloid tangle. Hudson narrates his tales from behind a projector, offering a voice-over commentary that decimates Christian Bale's turn as Patrick Bateman when it comes to cool sociopathy. An uncompromising hero, worthy of Ayn Rand's most erotic nightmare, we watch in horror as this philandering protagonist evolves from a sleazy salesman, obsessed with securing a deal at any cost, to a self-possessed filmmaker to whom the act of creation represents the only point of human existence. He is so convinced of his artistic vision that he would rather destroy it than see it diluted by the pressures and compromises of the commercial marketplace.



Rear Window, 1954

### Rear Window (PG)

Sun 5 Aug, 13:00

Tue 7 Aug, 20:25

Wed 8 Aug, 13:00

Dir Alfred Hitchcock/US 1951/114 mins

James Stewart, Grace Kelly, Wendell Corey

L.B. Jeffries, a photographer with a broken leg, takes up the art of spying on his Greenwich Village neighbours during a summer heat wave. One of cinema's finest observations of the act of looking, this is perhaps the best-known adaptation of a work by prolific, somewhat underrated New York writer Cornell Woolrich.



Shoot the Pianist, 1960

### Shoot the Pianist (15) (Tirez sur le pianist)

Fri 10 Aug, 18:30

Dir François Truffaut/FR 1960/78 mins/French wEng ST

Charles Aznavour, Marie Dubois, Nicole Berger

In a brilliant piece of casting, celebrated French chanteur Charles Aznavour stars in François Truffaut's whip-smart, scintillating second film – a combination of mischievous, tongue-in-cheek homage to American noir and effervescent, inventive French New Wave. Having left behind his life as a gifted concert pianist, Charlie sees out his downcast days tinkling the ivories in a dingy Parisian jazz bar. One day, his brother Chico arrives, searching for sanctuary from a gang of crooks that he's double-crossed. Charlie offers to help but soon finds his murky past catching up with him and before long is embroiled in an affair that he can no longer control.

The Long Goodbye, 1973

# THE LONG GOODBYE: A MARLOWE FOR THE 70S

Raymond Chandler's iconic creation, detective Philip Marlowe is usually seen as the epitome of the hardnosed, no nonsense detectives who inhabit hard-boiled American fiction. On screen he has been portrayed by a number of actors who themselves very much inhabit star personas that conjure up classic images of Hollywood masculinity such as Humphrey Bogart (*The Big Sleep*, 1946) and Robert Mitchum (*Farewell My Lovely*, 1975 and *The Big Sleep*, 1978).

With his 1973 adaptation of Chandler's sixth Marlowe novel *The Long Goodbye*, originally published in 1953, Robert Altman made the hard-boiled crime film for the new Hollywood of the early 1970s. To create this take on a Hollywood classic, Altman worked with a script by Leigh Brackett who had already contributed to the adaptation of *The Big Sleep* for Howard Hawks' 1946 film version. As with her earlier adaptation of Chandler, Brackett's version of *The Long Goodbye* seems less concerned with clarity of plot development that it is with character. However, this 1970s version of Marlowe could not be more different to Bogart's. Here he is portrayed by Elliott Gould, an actor who had found film stardom in *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* (1969) and had previously worked with Altman playing one of the leads in *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970). He had also achieved a level of celebrity through his marriage to Barbra Streisand (1963-1971).

Originally from Brooklyn and describing himself as having a 'very deep Jewish identity', Elliott Gould was not your typical Hollywood star. He certainly offered something different to other popular male stars of the era such as Robert Redford or Paul Newman, and in doing so reflected how the Hollywood of the early 1970s was tentatively re-negotiating male film stardom. Reflecting these changes, Gould offers a very different version of Marlowe. His detective is driven by uncertainty. He is a doubter, someone who is not sure of anything, a male lead who finds it difficult to decide upon any course of action. This Marlowe seems a man out of time and place. In the hot Californian sun, he wears a crumpled dark suit and drives an old 1940s car. Continually smoking, he doesn't seem to be able to make sense of the early 1970s in

general never mind solve any of his cases. To this end Altman dubbed his detective 'Rip Van Marlowe' indicating that he saw the character as someone who could have been asleep for 20 years awaking into a new world he could not make head nor tail of. This Marlowe repeatedly responds to difficult situations, questions and challenges with the line 'That's OK by me'. As the film progresses this phrase comes to sum up the character's unwillingness or inability to intervene in anything. It is with this underlying uncertainty that Brackett and Altman really create a Marlowe for the early 1970s.

In one of the film's most fondly remembered moments Gould's indecisive Marlowe can't even keep his pet cat happy. Following a scene where the cat bullies the detective into going to the store to buy its favourite brand of cat food, Marlowe tries to dupe the feline by swapping an un-favoured brand into the empty tin of the cat's favourite hoping it will eat it. It won't and briskly turns its nose up and leaves through the cat flap leaving Marlowe to mutter his response, 'That's OK by me'. One certainly can't imagine Bogart or Mitchum's Marlowe getting into such a standoff with a pet.

The visual style of *The Long Goodbye* also enhances the feeling of indecisiveness that pervades the California represented on screen. Working with cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond, Altman adopts an ever-moving camera, one that is unable to ever settle on any person or object. This style beautifully captures the uncertainty of this 1970s Marlowe, reflecting perfectly his lack of drive and his continued inability to join any dots as he searches for the whereabouts of missing writer Roger Wade. Rarely does a film's writing, acting and visual style come together so perfectly to reflect the ambiguity of a time as it does the 1970s of *The Long Goodbye*. And then there is the film's ending...

Andy Willis, Professor of Film Studies, School of Arts and Media, University of Salford

### The Long Goodbye (18)

Sun 12 Aug, 17:50

Dir Robert Altman/US 1973/110 mins

Elliott Gould, Nina van Pallandt, Sterling Hayden

When private eye Philip Marlowe is visited by an old friend, this sets in motion a series of events in which he's hired to search for a missing novelist and finds himself on the wrong side of vicious gangsters. Misunderstood for decades, it is now regarded as one of the outstanding American films of its era.

# THE FRIENDS OF EDDIE COYLE — NOTES ON THE SOUNDTRACK

*Jackie Brown* has a convoluted lineage. In 1997, Quentin Tarantino used the name as the title for his film version of Elmore Leonard's novel from 1992, *Rum Punch*, renaming Leonard's Jackie Burke as a tribute to an illicit gun seller in George V. Higgins's first novel, *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, published in 1972. But Leonard was also paying tribute to Higgins by using the unisex name of Jackie for a female character in *Rum Punch*. It's complicated and crosses a few time zones but to make sense of a George V. Higgins novel you have to pay close attention, otherwise you're lost. As Higgins told me in 1986 when I interviewed him for *The Face*, a tyre iron – the sharp end filed and polished – might show up in an early chapter. "I'm not going to take a big roll of salami or something and bang you on the head with that," he said, "but if you miss it you're not gonna understand the story."

In *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, Jackie Brown is an abrasive foreground character, riding for a fall, albeit in a \$4,000 Plymouth Roadrunner, whereas Coyle aspires to be as shadowy as his sobriquet, "the stocky man", allows. Like most everyone else, Coyle is a racist, misogynist lowlife, though also pathetic, too drunk at the end to know much about the way things work out. But mostly he's paying attention and has to be in a story dominated by fractious exchanges between Boston's finks, cops and mobsters. The Higgins writing style was driven by dialogue. Instead of describing Jackie Brown's car, Higgins lets us eavesdrop on a conversation about its fittings, a technique whose ancestry goes back to Ivy Compton-Burnett in the late Victorian era and Jane Austen before her.

What Leonard learned from Higgins you couldn't get from Austen or Compton-Burnett. These rhythms of coarse speech, as he put it, liberated the author of *Be Cool* and *Get Shorty*, setting him on course to become a great novelist, and in the long term came to influence a television series like *The Wire*, not just because it's tough guys barking "Fuck you" but because of the way sentences can wind their way through a lot of witty, ripe and ingeniously cryptoleptic language. With his day job as a Boston state prosecutor and assistant US

attorney, Higgins had a thorough understanding of criminals and their perfidies. Nobody in the book is cultured to any discernable degree, nor are they particularly smart. As Higgins told me in 1986: "They have absolutely not a glimmer of the possibility that Cromwell put to the elders of the Scottish church in 1615 I think it was: 'I beseech you in the bowels of Christ consider that ye may be mistaken'. And of course they didn't and he beat the shit outta them." They operate in the unglamorous 1970s of *Screw* magazine, panhandling hippies, armed black radicals and toxic opinion. What interests them is the art of the deal, so there are no sexy villains listening to hip music or sentimental liaisons with the good guys coming through, as is often the case with Leonard. Jackie Brown listens to Johnny Cash tapes; a bank employee hears a Supremes record on his way to work. Otherwise it's strictly business.

All of which presented Dave Grusin with a blank canvas when he came to score Peter Yates's 1973 film of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*. Yates was born in England, working his way through films like *Summer Holiday* before making *Robbery* in 1967. A scene in which a silver-grey Jaguar is pursued by police at high speed through London streets, wild by British standards, led to him directing *Bullitt*, in which Steve McQueen staked a claim to greatest cinematic car chase ever. Jackie Gleason was mooted as Eddie Coyle but the part went to Robert Mitchum. "I thought he did a wonderful job with it," said Higgins, albeit with some typically colourful expressions of displeasure concerning Mitchum's off-screen personality.

Paul Monash's screenplay adaptation of the Coyle character could have been made for Mitchum. From his first appearance on screen, walk, face, clothes and speech all emanate the clammy odour of exhaustion and desperation; though there's a general softening of the novel's brutal tone, he fills the centre of the story with a discretely virtuoso portrait of a doomed loser. Chilly, autumnal moods hang over the entire enterprise – the first chords of Grusin's theme promising a mournful hundred or so minutes – but then the music kicks back against the downbeat atmosphere with a sequence of short, exquisitely crafted cues that seem to melt

in and out of each other. What we're seeing is a bleak world yet Grusin makes it sparkle.

Grusin's path to film composing emerged in the 1960s out of string-sweetened piano jazz and the hard bop of *Kaleidoscope*. By the time he came to score *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* his soundtrack credits included *The Graduate*, *Candy*, a melodramatic Henry Hathaway western called *Shoot Out*, Abraham Polonsky's *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* and various other genre comedies and forgettable dramas, in other words a successful Hollywood apprenticeship. Scattered about in this motley collection there are moments that anticipate his work on *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, particularly in *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* from 1969, similarly based around exotic percussion, bass flutes, electric guitar and unusual keyboard sounds.

Film composing is a pragmatic art, dependent on soothing contradictory agendas. Grusin already proved himself capable of compromise composing but *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* was attuned, deliberately or not, to a funkier zeitgeist of *What's Going On*, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock's *Mwandishi*, Stevie Wonder, The Crusaders, The Meters, Donny Hathaway's score for *Come Back, Charleston Blue* and Marvin Gaye's score for *Trouble Man*, along with TV show themes like *The Streets of San Francisco*. There are few cues but as beautifully transparent miniatures they have the integrated feel of a complex suite of subtle transitions and textural mood shifts: tense, strutting, explosive, though always haunted by melancholy. Listen, for example, to the way the two bass flutes heighten suspense by playing slightly out of tune with each other on *Partridge Robbery*, then follow that by playing a similar phrase in tune but with one flautist using a sobbing vibrato, like a Japanese hotchiku. All that for a car leaving a garage.

The musicians – including Tom Scott, Bud Shank, Dennis Budimir, Chuck Rainey, Larry Bunker, Joe Porcaro and Emil Richards – were among the very best of the LA session scene of the time. Between them, their shared discographies (even in 1973) ranged across the fault lines of American music: Ella Fitzgerald, Bill Evans, Frank Zappa's *Lumpy Gravy*, The Beach Boys' *SMiLE*, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Byrds, Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Don Ellis, Henry Mancini's *Hatari!* and Lalo Schiffrin's scores for *Bullitt*, *Mission: Impossible* and *Enter the Dragon*.

Inevitably, given the plethora of studio work in the 1960s and 70s, their connections with each

other were intricate. Percussionists Joe Porcaro and Emil Richards played together, for example, on an experimental electronic-psychedelic album – *New Sound Element "Stones"* – credited to Richards in 1967, while Richards, guitarist Dennis Budimir, woodwind player Gene Cipriano and violinist James Getzoff all played on Zappa's *Lumpy Gravy*. From the range of global percussion heard on these recordings – sansa, Chinese gongs, marimba, waterphone, woodblocks, chimes and a host of other ticking and tocking devices, it seems to be Richards, the doyen of studio percussionists, who is at the heart of the music. Ultimately, the tight focus, harmonic sensibility and subtle arrangements come from the composer, Dave Grusin. *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* may not be his best known or most celebrated score but like both book and film, it's a quiet classic.

**Original essay by David Toop written for the Wewantsounds vinyl release of the Eddie Coyle soundtrack (2018)**

Grab yourself a copy of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* vinyl soundtrack in our HOME shop on the ground floor.



*The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, 1973

## The Friends of Eddie Coyle (15)

**Sat 18 Aug, 18:00**

Dir Peter Yates/US 1973/102 mins

Robert Mitchum, Peter Boyle, Richard Jordan

In one of the best performances of his career, Robert Mitchum plays small-time gunrunner Eddie 'Fingers' Coyle in an adaptation by Peter Yates of George V. Higgins' acclaimed novel. Directed with a sharp eye for its gritty locales and an open heart for its less-than-heroic characters, this is one of the true treasures of 1970s Hollywood filmmaking.

Event/This screening will be introduced by Austin Collings writer, short-filmmaker & artistic director at THE WHITE HOTEL.



In A Lonely Place, 1950

### In A Lonely Place (PG)

Thu 16 Aug, 20:40

Dir Nicholas Ray/US 1950/91 mins

Humphrey Bogart, Gloria Grahame, Frank Lovejoy

When a gifted but washed-up screenwriter with a hair-trigger temper becomes the prime suspect in a brutal murder, the only person who can supply an alibi for him is a seductive neighbour with her own troubled past. This emotionally charged film, adapted from a Dorothy B. Hughes thriller, is a brilliant, turbulent mix of suspenseful noir and devastating melodrama.

This new restoration will screen in 4k.



The Killing, 1956

### The Killing (PG)

Sat 25 Aug, 18:10

Dir Stanley Kubrick/US 1956/85 mins

Sterling Hayden, Coleen Gray, Vince Edwards

Kubrick's account of an ambitious racetrack robbery is one of Hollywood's tautest, twistiest noirs. Aided by a radically time-shuffling narrative, razorsharp dialogue from pulp novelist Jim Thompson, and a phenomenal cast of character actors, *The Killing* offers a cold-blooded punch to the gut.

Strangers on a Train, 1951



### Strangers on a Train (PG)

Sun 19 Aug, 13:00

Tue 21 Aug, 20:35

Wed 22 Aug, 13:00

Dir Alfred Hitchcock/US 1951/103 mins

Farley Granger, Robert Walker, Ruth Roman

In a world of shadows, Patricia Highsmith looms large in terms of crime writing and exploring the dark and twisted underbelly of the human psyche. In Hitchcock's adaptation of one of her earliest works a psychotic socialite confronts a pro tennis star with a theory on how two complete strangers can get away with murder... a theory that he plans to implement.

# HITCHCOCKING THE TRAIN TO HIGHSMITH-VILLE

Amongst the abounding number of subgenres of noir (hard-boiled, grip-lit, psychological suspense, urban noir, existential noir, tech noir, neo-noir, domestic noir...too many to list here) there has been, within the recent cinematic landscape, a resurgence in the popularity of psychological crime thrillers written by women (*Gone Girl*, *The Girl on the Train*). Many saw this as a breakthrough trend that women were finally getting recognition for writing successful suspense thrillers in a traditionally male-dominated genre. However this perception is problematic as it fails to recognise a legacy of female writers such as Patricia Highsmith, who set a precedent for noir writers many decades before for both women and men alike. Considered one of the first outstanding noir fiction writers in history, she is renowned for exploring the darkest and most complex depths of the human mind.

Her novels are invariably punctuated with elegant, methodical narratives of brutality, inner turmoil, murder, manipulation and dark humour. *Strangers* was her debut novel written in 1950, the first of many gripping, creatively violent novels which saw the same importance put on character as narrative. Her protagonists were habitually revealed to us as damaged, complex, clever, charming, self-destructive and deliciously obsessive; Highsmith was an expert (fictional) killer also adept at dissecting the sociopathic, homicidal psyche, much to our entertainment. Her characters are somewhat strangely captivating as well as monstrous, as they reveal their inner demons in addition to their cold sociopathy. Her other successful novel to film adaptations are most notably *The Talented Mr Ripley* books (aka *The 'Ripliad*) and *The Price of Salt* (adapted as *Carol* by Todd Haynes) which was revered for being the first lesbian novel with a happy ending.

*Strangers on a Train* (1951) is about a murder-swap where two diametrically opposed lives become dangerously entangled. Guy and Bruno can be seen as inextricable doppelgangers of each other and at the same time direct

dichotomies. In the novel and even more so in the film there is an implied homoerotic subtext to their relationship which Hitchcock was keen to accentuate. Highsmith and Hitchcock are both geniuses of suspense; two strangers themselves coming together from two different paths and artistic mediums to the same point, a lot like the protagonists in her novel.

Hitchcock's journey from novel to film was in itself punctuated with suspense. Buying the rights to the book for a mere \$7,500 (to Highsmith's later dismay) he attempted and failed to hire numerous writers including Raymond Chandler, whose script he binned (literally throwing it into the trash whilst holding his nose), before landing on the unknown Czenzi Ormonde. Eventually he and his innovative crew delivered Highsmith's text through a chiaroscuro-saturated visual tapestry, an array of film noir stylistic devices and Hitchcock's trademark visual identity making the film aesthetically expressionistic. There are some truly iconic scenes foregrounding Robert Burks' Oscar-nominated cinematography (most notably a murder scene shot through glasses). The film pulsates with an underlying creepiness whilst remaining subtly gripping with steadily unfolding suspense. Though some may prefer the denouement of the novel, what is created is an intriguing adaptation; the film, like its two main characters, is itself a dual identity of the novel, both opposing dichotomies of the other yet inextricable doppelgangers, and both successful individually within the vast noir arena.

Ally Davies MPhil in Cinema and Screen Studies from the University of Manchester

# BLAXPLOITATION, NOIR AND JACKIE BROWN

On the surface, *Jackie Brown* sure looks like a blaxploitation movie. It features Pam Grier for starters, the subgenre-icon who famously embodied the entire movement in films like *Coffy*, *Bucktown* and of course, *Foxy Brown*. Expletive-spitting arms dealer Ordell Robbie (played by director Quentin Tarantino's good luck charm Samuel L. Jackson) provides the lowlife crime element that featured heavily in similar films of the 70s. Even the sound of it screams blaxploitation with its street-smart mixtape of transportational funk, R&B and soul pulsing throughout. However despite all this Tarantino has assured us that *Jackie Brown* doesn't belong in this genre – and on closer inspection it's clear that he's right.

Hot off the success of his first two films, 1997's *Pulp Fiction* follow-up saw Tarantino remain in the world of pulp to helm his first – and so far, only – adaptation. Taking Elmore Leonard's crime novel *Rum Punch* as his inspiration, the director quickly injected his own personality into the story of a drug smuggling airline stewardess drawn back into business for one last job. His translation process turned the film's titular heroine from white to black and her surname from Burke to Brown – however almost all other aspects of Leonard's crime thriller remained intact.

The most notable of which is surely Max Cherry (Robert Forster), the LA bail bondsman with a heart of gold who's seen it all. Through Cherry, Tarantino is gifted the opportunity to subtly indulge in some classic noir tropes and mash together two cinematic worlds which rarely – if ever – collide. Cherry feels out of step with the movie he's in, sat in a shabby, run down office that screams 1940's gumshoe far more than his contemporary LA surroundings. He's a nice guy in a bad line of work and it's during a key conversation with Jackie (who's fast becoming his femme fatale) where he comes to a key realisation. "Why am I doing this?" he asks, "19 years of this shit?"

Max is tired, world weary and surprised by nothing, like many noir PI's that have come before him. The way he sees it, his future involves either dying as LA's last remaining good guy or living long enough to break bad himself and it's here where Jackie tests his will with an alluring proposition. "If you could walk away with half a million dollars," she asks, "would you take it?" It's an offer that would drastically change his world, removing him from his pokey office and LA's petty crime scene and introducing this nice guy to a potentially nice future – if he's ready to grab it.

As the jangly chords of Bobby Womack's "Across 110th Street" starts to play, signifying both Cherry's decision and the film's climax, we come to the stark realisation that his world hasn't changed at all. Tarantino's return to the same track that opened *Jackie Brown* is a harsh reminder of things coming full circle, with that noir motif stepping fully into the spotlight. Here, the good aren't always rewarded and sometimes, crime does pay. Max Cherry may not belong in Jackie Brown's empowered blaxploitation world but make no mistake: he's right at home in *The Dark Page*.

Simon Bland, Digital Content Officer, HOME

## Jackie Brown (15)

Tue 28 Aug, 19:50

Dir: Quentin Tarantino/US 1997/154 mins

Pam Grier, Samuel L. Jackson, Robert Forster

Elmore Leonard is undoubtedly one of the finest and most prolific of contemporary pulp writers and his novel *Rum Punch* is given a surprisingly mature transfer to the big screen by Tarantino. A work that looks at race and class, the film features a compelling central performance from Pam Grier as the eponymous airline stewardess who becomes embroiled in a world of crime.

THE  
DARK  
PAGE

# TANGLED UP IN BLUE

*Devil in a Blue Dress* is based on the debut hard-boiled detective story by Walter Mosley, published in 1990, but set in 1948. The film, directed by Carl Franklin (his second feature, after *One False Move* (1992), an intimate depiction of small-time drug dealers), was released in 1995, in full cognisance of the potential of film noir to question dominant political and social discourse. Here, unusual for noir narratives, the focus is on the African American community.

Denzel Washington is Ezekiel (Easy) Rawlins, a war veteran turned private detective who is hired by a white man to look for a white woman in the titular blue dress (Jennifer Beals) who may or may not be a femme fatale. The title suggests she is. She is assumed to be hiding in the African American community around Central Avenue in the Watts district of Los Angeles. Reluctantly, Easy accepts this as his first job. He is unemployed and needs money to, surprisingly, pay the mortgage for his own little house in a quiet street, his pride and joy. This seems to make him an unusual noir hero. However, his past connection to a man named Mouse (played with alacrity by Don Cheadle) tells us that he may not be as innocent as he seems. The many ambiguities in the film testify to its being a noir, with twists and turns worthy of the designation.

This is a tough account of the tough times of a black PI who stumbles into his profession and grows from vulnerability to awareness to confidence. Noir devices are augmented skillfully and convincingly by the exploration of race relations that had much resonance when the film was made – think of the Rodney King riots in Watts in 1992 – and still do today.

But this is also a film to be savoured, from the sumptuous cinematography (Tak Fujimoto, who

won a prestigious award for this work), which strikes a beautiful balance between darkness and light, both literally and metaphorically, to the jazz soundtrack oozing from the screen. The lighting is superb and makes the most of locales and characters, main and supporting. Under the opening titles we literally see a work of art – the camera roves over a painting of a night street scene, the dominant colour being blue, amplified by the jazzy blues score that is laid upon it. The painted scene gives way to a real street – Central Avenue – that is at the centre of the narrative.

Film noir, having emerged during WWII and continuing through most of the 1950s, has always had the potential to explore political and social issues of the day within the form of complex crime plots, the best of which delve into the dark machinations of politics high and low.

Staying true to the source novel, *Devil in a Blue Dress* uses the conventions of classic noir in a fresh way, capturing the sights and sounds of a vibrant community and combining political statement with cinematic pleasures.

**Maggie Hoffgen, freelance film educator and programmer**

## *Devil in a Blue Dress* (15)

**Thu 30 Aug, 20:40**

Dir Carl Franklin/US 1995/101 mins

Denzel Washington, Tom Sizemore, Jennifer Beals

Directed by Carl Franklin and brilliantly shot by Tak Fujimoto, this is one of the few novels by black hard-boiled writer Walter Mosley to make it to the screen. Following the exploits of Watts detective Easy Rawlins, the film takes a long hard look at institutionalised racism in America and the nefarious nature of US politics.

*Mildred Pierce*, 1945



## *Mildred Pierce* (PG)

**Sun 2 Sep, 13:00**

**Tue 4 Sep, 20:30**

**Wed 5 Sep, 13:00**

Dir Michael Curtiz/US 1945/111 mins

Joan Crawford, Jack Carson, Zachary Scott

After her cheating husband leaves her, Mildred Pierce proves she can become independent and successful, but can't win the approval of her spoiled daughter.

# THE DARK PAGE

*Devil in a Blue Dress*, 1995

## Events and films in the season



*Rear Window*  
From Sun 5 Aug



*Shoot the Pianist*  
Fri 10 Aug



*The Long Goodbye*  
Sun 12 Aug



*In a Lonely Place*  
Thu 16 Aug



*The Friends of Eddie Coyle*  
Sat 18 Aug



*Strangers on a Train*  
From Sun 19 Aug



*The Killing*  
Sat 25 Aug



*Jackie Brown*  
Tue 28 Aug



*Devil in a Blue Dress*  
Thu 30 Aug



*Mildred Pierce*  
From Sun 2 Sep

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