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**THE BIG SLEEP (1946) 114 min.**

Selected for the National Film Registry 1997

Humphrey Bogart .... Philip Marlowe  
 Lauren Bacall .... Vivian Sternwood Rutledge  
 John Ridgely .... Eddie Mars  
 Martha Vickers .... Carmen Sternwood  
 Dorothy Malone .... Acme Bookstore proprietress  
 Peggy Knudsen .... Mona Mars  
 Regis Toomey .... Chief Insp. Bernie Ohls  
 Charles Waldron .... Gen. Sternwood  
 Charles D. Brown .... Norris (Sternwood's butler)  
 Bob Steele .... Lash Canino  
 Elisha Cook Jr. .... Harry Jones  
 Louis Jean Heydt .... Joe Brody  
 Pat Clark .... Mona Mars (scenes deleted)  
 Directed by Howard Hawks  
 Based on the novel by Raymond Chandler  
 Screenplay by William Faulkner, Leigh Brackett  
 & Jules Furthman  
 Executive producer...Jack L. Warner  
 Producer...Howard Hawks  
 Original Music by Max Steiner  
 Cinematography by Sidney Hickox  
 Art Direction by Carl Jules Weyl  
 Set Decoration by Fred M. MacLean



**HOWARD HAWKS** (30 May 1896, Goshen, Indiana—26 December 1977, Palm Springs, California, aftermath of a fall) directed 47 films, some of which were *Rio Lobo* (1970), *Hatari!* (1962), *Rio Bravo* (1959), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949), *A Song Is Born* (1948), *Red River* (1948), *To Have and Have Not* (1944), *The Outlaw* (1943, uncredited), *Sergeant York* (1941), *His Girl Friday* (1940), *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *Come and Get It* (1936), *Barbary Coast* (1935), *Twentieth Century* (1934), *Today We Live* (1933), *Scarface* (1932), *The Dawn Patrol* (1930), *A Girl in Every Port* (1928) and *The Road to Glory* (1926). He was awarded an honorary Academy Award in 1975.

**WILLIAM FAULKNER** (25 September 1897, New Albany, Mississippi—6 July 1962, Byhalia, Mississippi) wrote somewhere between 42 and 50 screenplays, depending which film list or biography you read. He is primarily known as a writer of fiction (for which he won the Nobel Prize in 1950). Many of his short stories and novels have been made into films, most of them abominably. Some of the films made from his works are: *Two Soldiers* (2003), *Old Man* (1997 made-for-tv; not bad), *The Long Hot Summer* (1985, made-for-tv, starring Don Johnson, based on stories “Barn Burning” and “Spotted Horses” and novel *The Hamlet*; dreadful); *The Reivers* (1969; quaint); *Sanctuary* (1961; the evil impotent Popeye is renamed “Candyman” and is played by Marilyn Monroe’s lover, Yves Montand), *The Sound and the Fury* (1959; Yul Brynner plays a reconfigured Jason Compson), *The Long, Hot Summer* (1958; Paul Newman plays several of the Snopes rolled into one, renamed “Ben Quick,” who gets it on with Joanne Woodward, daughter of Orson Welles, who cavorts with Angela Lansbury while Anthony Franciosa plays cutesy with Lee Remick), *u.s.w.* Most of this foolishness was written by other people. The last script Faulkner worked on was Hawks’ *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955). Perhaps the least perverse rendering of a Faulkner novel was *Intruder in the Dust* (1949). He wrote the script for Hawks’ *To Have and Have Not* (1944) based on Hemingway’s novel. His novel *Sanctuary* became the 1933 film *The Story of Temple Drake*, which many film historians credit with precipitating the first film code anybody in Hollywood had to take seriously since people started writing them around 1912.

**HUMPHREY BOGART** (25 December 1899, NYC—14 January 1957, Los Angeles, throat cancer) appeared in 77 films, the last of which was *The Harder They Fall* (1956). Some of the others were *The Desperate Hours* (1955), *The Left Hand of God* (1955), *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954), *Sabrina* (1954), *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), *Beat the Devil* (1953), *The African Queen* (1951), *In a Lonely Place* (1950), *Knock on Any Door* (1949), *Key Largo* (1948), *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), *Dark Passage* (1947), *Dead Reckoning* (1947), *To Have and Have Not* (1944), *Sahara* (1943), *Casablanca* (1942), *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *High Sierra* (1941), *They Drive by Night* (1940), *Virginia City* (1940), *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), *Dark Victory* (1939), *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), *Kid Galahad* (1937), *Bullets or Ballots* (1936), *The Petrified Forest* (1936), *Body and Soul* (1931), and *Up the River* (1930). He won a best actor Oscar for *The African Queen* and was nominated for *The Caine Mutiny* and *Casablanca*.

**LAUREN BACALL** (16 September 1924, NYC) has acted in 67 films and tv programs, the most recent of which is *These Foolish Things* (2006). Some of the others are *Dogville* (2003), *The Mirror Has Two Faces* (1996), *Prêt-à-Porter* (1994), *Mr. North* (1988), *The Shootist* (1976), *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), *Harper* (1966), *Written on the Wind* (1956), *Young Man with a Horn* (1950), *Key Largo* (1948), *Dark Passage* (1947), *The Big Sleep* (1946), and *Confidential Agent* (1945). Her first film was *To Have and Have Not* (1944), when she was 19. She and Bogart fell in love in the film and, during production, in real life. They remained together until his death 13 years later.

**Howard Hawks from World Film Directors vol I, ed John Wakeman, HW Wilson Co NY 1987 (entry by Gerald Mast)**

Director, producer and scenarist. Son of a wealthy paper manufacturer and grandson of a wealthy lumberman. Moved west w/family in 1906. Settled in Pasadena. The movies themselves traveled west about the same time.

East & west for education. Phillips Exeter, Pasadena High School, degree in Engineering from Cornell.

In 1917 prop boy for Famous Players-Lasky. Later that year joined US Army Air Corps as a flying instructor.

In the early 1920s, Hawks shared a Hollywood house with several young men on the threshold of movie distinction—Allan Dwan and Irving Thalberg among them. Thalberg recommended Hawks to Jesse Lasky, who in 1924 was looking for bright young man to run the story department of famous players. For two years Hawks supervised the development and writing of every script for the company that was to become Paramount, the most powerful studio in 1920s Hollywood. William Fox invited Hawks to join his company in 1926, offering him a chance

to direct the scripts he had developed. *The Road to Glory* was the first of eight films Hawks directed at Fox in the next three years, all of them silent except *The Air Circus* (1928) and *Trent’s Last Case* (1929), part-talkies in the years of Hollywood’s transition between silence and sound.

Of the Fox silents, only *Fig Leaves* (1926) and *A Girl in Every Port* (1928) survive. The former is a comedy of gender, tracing domestic warfare from Adam and Eve to their modern descendants. *A Girl in Every Port* is “a love story between two men,” in Hawks’ words—two brawling sailor buddies who fall for the woman. The motif of two friends who share the same love would recur in many Hawks sound films, particularly in the 1930s (*Tiger Shark*, *Today We Live*, *Barbary Coast*, *The Road to Glory*). The motif of two wandering pals, enjoying the sexual benefits of travel, returns with a gender reversal in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, with Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell playing the two traveling buddies. More than anything else, *A Girl in Every Port* declared male friendship one of Hawks’ primary concerns. With the end of his Fox contract in 1929, Hawks would never again sign a long-term contract with a single studio.

It was the coming of synchronized sound that

allowed Hawks to become so independent a film stylist. *The Dawn Patrol* (1930) was a remarkable early sound film in many respects. Its pacifism mirrored the reaction against the First World War in a period that produced such antiwar films as *What Price Glory?*, *The Big Parade*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The flying sequences in *The Dawn Patrol* were as photographically brilliant as they were aeronautically accurate. Flying and filming had never before been so beautifully mated, and Hawks' flavorful dialogue sounded as if it were uttered by human beings, not orating actors. The affected, stilted diction that marred so many early talkies was entirely absent. Dialogue in Hawks' films would always suggest the feel and flavor of spontaneous conversation rather than scripted lines—he in fact not only permitted his players to improvise but deliberately hired players who would and could.

*Scarface* (1930-1932) brought this spontaneous quality from the wartime skies to the urban streets. *Scarface* remains simultaneously one of the most brutal and most funny of gangster films—"as vehement, vitriolic, and passionate a work as has been made about Prohibition," in the opinion of Manny Farber. When Tony Camonte lets go with his new machine gun into a rack of pool cues, or the O'Hara gang shoots a restaurant to smithereens, they are murderous children having "fun," one of the most important words in Hawks' critical lexicon. Hawks' antihero Tony, a fanciful portrait of Al Capone sketched by Paul Muni, is not only a spiteful kid; he also nurses an unarticulated and repressed sexual attraction to his own sister and guns down their best friend (George Raft) who invades this Freudian turf. Hawks' recurrent piece of physical business for Raft—the obsessive flipping of a coin—has survived ever after as the quintessential gangster's tic. It introduced the familiar Hawks method of deflecting psychological revelation from explicit dialogue to the subtle handling of physical objects. As John Belton notes, "Hawks' characterization is rooted in the physical.

*Scarface* also introduced Hawks to two important professional associates: Howard Hughes, who produced the film and would weave through Hawks' entire career as either ally or enemy; and Ben Hecht, the hard-drinking, wise-cracking writer who, like Hawks, wanted to make films that were "fun." Hecht and Hawks were kindred cynics who would work together for twenty years. Hughes, however, had his own war to win. A lifetime foe of film industry censorship boards, Hughes resisted attempts to soften *Scarface*. He finally relented, not by toning down its brutal humor but by inserting a drab lecture on the social responsibility of voters. He also concluded the film with the fallen mobster's whining cowardice, to take the glamor out of his defiance. But Hughes was so enraged at being pressured into these emendations that he withdrew the film from circulation for four decades. Only his death returned it to American audiences.

Hawks traveled to other studios and genres in the 1930s. [prison movie, auto racing, sea]

Hawks returned to wartime professionals in *Today We Live* (1933) and *The Road to Glory* (1936). The former was adapted from "Turn About," a story by William Faulkner, and began Hawks' personal and professional association with the writer. Like Hawks, Faulkner loved flying and, like Hawks, had lost a brother in an air crash. Both men also liked drinking and storytelling. Hawks and Faulkner would drink, fly, and tell stories together over the next twenty years. *Today We Live*, made at MGM, began another Hawks pattern—walking off the set when studio bosses interfered with his filming.

Perhaps Hawks' most interesting genre films in the 1930s were screwball comedies. Hawks was a master of a genre that has come to represent one of the period's most revealing reflections of American aspirations. As the philosopher Stanley Cavell argued, the screwball comedy enacts the "myth of modern marriage," the basis of our culture's idea of happiness. While Hawks always added comic touches to serious stories—from *Scarface* in 1930 to *El Dorado* in 1967—the pure comedy provided much broader comic possibilities. Love and friendship had always been closely intertwined in his films, and since Hawks' friends fight as much as they talk, fight because they are friends, each convinced of his own rightness, it was a very short step from male friends to male-female lovers. The Hawks screwball comedy is distinctive in that the hero and heroine are as much friends as lovers and as much fighting opponents as spiritual kin; it is a comedy of ego in which two strong personalities fight because they love.

Hawks' first work in this genre *Twentieth Century* (1934), was adapted from a stage play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Along with Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*, made in the same year and at the same studio (Columbia), *Twentieth Century* was one of the films that defined the screwball genre. The two warring egos of *Twentieth Century* are the monomaniacal impresario Oscar Jaffe (played by the monomaniacal ham, John Barrymore) and his actress Galatea, Lily Garland (played by Hawks' own cousin, Carole Lombard, in her first major comic role). The film demonstrated several Hawks traits. Including breakneck dialogue that refused to soften or sentimentalize the combat, and the revelation of internal psychological states through concrete external objects—the visible, photographic means of making clear inner feelings that his characters never verbally express.

Hawks spent the early 1940s with two personalities less slick, cool, and distant than Grant. Gary Cooper made two films for Hawks, both in 1941. *Sergeant York*, produced at Warners by Jesse Lasky, Hawks' first boss, features Cooper as the homespun pacifist who became a World War I hero. Hawks' most honored film in his lifetime, *Sergeant York* brought him his only Academy Award nomination for best director.... Another wartime alternative to Grant was Humphrey Bogart. The Bogart quality Hawks exploited—quite the opposite of Cooper's

open warmth—was a tendency to hide the heart behind a tough mask of emotional indifference and vocal taciturnity. Hawks had always like characters who did and felt more than they said and Bogart became an especially effective partner for Hawks' newest find, Lauren Bacall. Hawks chose Bacall's name, hair style and characteristic vocal register—much as Oscar Jaffe did Lily Garland's in *Twentieth Century*—and mated Bogart and Bacall in two films at Warners....Like *Casablanca* Warners' wartime hit of 1942, *To Have and Have Not* brings the loner Bogart to a patriotic affirmation; unlike *Casablanca*, the affirmation comes not from a romantic renunciation but a reconciliation of love, friendship, and vocation—as is typical of Hawks. *The Big Sleep* (1946), a wittily sexual adaptation of the Raymond Chandler novel, plunged the combative lovers into a labyrinthine maze of plot points that Hawks refused to elucidate. In Bogart and Bacall, Hawks had found a matched pair who contrasted warm interiors with cool exteriors, powerful feelings with protective reticence. They overcome their reticence in the usual Hawks way—by working together on a job and having fun together on a lark. His onscreen team generated even more interest with their offscreen romance and marriage.

After *Red River* (1948), Hawks and Wayne took three more trips to the old West—in *Rio Bravo* (1959), *El Dorado* (1967), and *Rio Lobo* (1970). They also traveled to the wilds of Africa in *Hatari!* (1962).

Respected inside the industry as one of Hollywood's sturdiest directors of top stars in taut stories, Hawks acquired little fame outside it until the rise of the *auteur* theory in France, England, and America between 1953 and 1962. To some extent, it was the *auteur* theory that made Hawks a household name and Hawks that made *auteur* theory a household idea. In their campaign against both European "art films" and solemn adaptations of literary classics, articulators of the *auteur* view—François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, Peter Wollen, V.S. Perkins, Ian Cameron, Andrew Sarris, John Belton, William Paul—looked for studio directors of genre films whose work displayed both a consistent cinematic style and consistent narrative motifs.

Hawks was the model of such a director. He spent fifteen years in interviews denying any serious artistic aspiration, claiming that all he wanted to do was tell a story. But a Hawks story had an unmistakable look, feel, and focus. His style, though never obtrusive, had always been built on certain basic elements: a careful attention to the basic qualities of light (the lamps that always hang in a Hawks frame); the counter-point of on-frame action and off-frame sound; the improvisationally casual sound of Hawks' conversation; the reluctance of characters to articulate their inner feelings, and the transference of emotional material from dialogue to physical objects; symmetrically balanced frames that produce a dialectic between opposite halves of the frame. So too, Hawks'

films, no matter what the genre, handled consistent plot motifs: a small band of professionals committed to doing their jobs as well as they could; pairs of friends who were also lovers and opponents; reversal of conventional gender expectations about manly men and womanly women. Dressed as routine Hollywood genre pictures, Hawks' films were psychological studies of people in action, simultaneously trying to be true to themselves and faithful to the group. In his classic conflict of love and honor, Hawks was the American movie descendant of Corneille.

He died at the age of eighty-one in Palm Springs, California, from complications arising from a broken hip when he tripped over one of his dogs. Even as he grew older he continued to ride his motorcycle and raise his martini.

### **From *The Big Sleep*. David Thomson. BFI Publishing London 1997**

Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* was published in February 1939. The author was fifty, and at last moving from being a story writer, often for pulp and mystery magazines. He lived in Los Angeles with a wife eighteen years his senior, and he was less than pleased with his world. He was a worrier with uneasy feelings about writing and Los Angeles. But his first novel was a big step forward: the Knopf paperback sold 10,000 copies (very good), and a shrewd, favorable review in the *Los Angeles Times* reckoned that Humphrey Bogart would be ideal casting for Mr. Chandler's Marlowe—that was ahead of the movies of *High Sierra* and *The Maltese Falcon*, pictures that warmed and altered the actor's screen identity.

Chandler's Marlowe was a character far beyond what was expected of pulp fiction detectives. He had a very deft way with a funny line, so that nowadays—once L.A. and the tricky plots have passed into the realm of 'nostalgia'—we can feel the comic writer in Chandler, yearning to find a suitable form.

...Chandler had mixed feelings about L.A. and southern California, even if nowadays he is used as a spokesman for nostalgia's golden age. After all, it was reading Chandler as much as anything that reminded a real Angelino, Robert Towne, of the places, the airs and fragrances of his childhood, so that in *Chinatown* and that film's mid-to-late 1930s (before Marlowe's October morning) Jake Gittes has a nose and an eye for landscape and the faint, metallic tang of what might be water (or iniquity), Gittes is a good deal of a cynic: he feels more modern than Marlowe, even though he predates him. Gittes is far readier than Marlowe to compromise, to be pushed around by fate. But he has sounder roots than Marlowe: he has a palpable history and failures already; he falls in love and he is stirred by the sheer wicked wonder of how Los Angeles has been contrived out of the desert...It's testament to a legacy from Chandler that has affected screenwriters, writers in the age of movies, and many Los Angelenos. This is the notion that the place, its weather, its

light and its nearness to earthquake, fire and landslide are all begging metaphors for a city that has enjoyed hovering between real and realito....

Many commentators have reflected over the years on the density, and the near lyrical impossibility, of the plot in *The Big Sleep*.

In her autobiography. Lauren Bacall makes it clear that she and Hawks were no longer getting on by the time *The Big Sleep* was shot. His disapproval of her bond with Bogart left him silent. When the couple returned to the studio after their marriage, she says, everyone congratulated them, except Hawks. ...

There is a fascinating letter from Raymond Chandler that hints at things. The letter is to Hamish Hamilton, his English publisher, and it is dated 30 May 1946 (three months before the movie's release). Chandler speaks very favourably of Bogart ('he has a sense of humor that contains that grating undertone of contempt') and Hawks (who has 'the gift of atmosphere and the requisite touch of hidden sadism'). But : "*The Big Sleep* has had an unfortunate history. The girl who played the nymph sister was so good she shattered Miss Bacall completely. So they cut the picture in such a way that all her best scenes were left out except one. The result made nonsense and Howard Hawks threatened to sue to restrain Warners from releasing the picture. After long arguments, as I hear it, he went back and did a lot of reshooting."

Though Chandler's is the only account that supports the idea of Vickers' excellence being deliberately reined in, there is something to the reshooting claim. Principal photography on *The Big Sleep* ended in January 1945. One of the original writers, Leigh Brackett, reported that there had been length problems while shooting—too many scenes—which Jules Furthman had tried to address....Originally, the movie had a 42-day schedule, yet it ended going 76 days on principal photography alone. The reasons for that were various: Bogart missed some days, apparently because of a domestic disturbance—looking after Mayo, and romancing Bacall; even on set he was sometimes less than his best, maybe because of drinking; there was also the Hawksian habit of spending hours rewriting a scene, or reworking it with the actors; and there were hints that Bacall was less than effective. Even during principal photography there were days given over to retakes in order to get a better performance from her....

All we know for certain is that, once shot, *The Big Sleep* waited an inordinate time: nearly twenty months elapsed between the close of principal photography and the film's release. In those days, as now, this was commonly a sign of lost confidence. On the one hand, Warners were intent on releasing any film that had war relevance—to beat the peace. Other pictures were put back. Equally, the delay could reflect cutting difficulties, and Hawks' threatened legal action.

Warners by then owned Bacall's contract and they wanted to build her as best they could. Right after *The Big*

*Sleep* she was put into *The Confidential Agent*, from Graham Greene's novel (a wartime story), directed by Herbert Schumlin, and co-starring Charles Boyer. That movie was actually released in 1945m and it flopped badly. Playing an aristocratic English woman, Bacall got terrible reviews of the kind that wondered if *To Have and Have Not* had been just a fluke. Or Hawks.

There was anxiety about her at the studio, not much lifted when the first version of *The Big Sleep* was released (some time around the spring and summer of 1945) for US forces in the Pacific theatre. In August 1945 the feeling at Warners was that 'Bacall about one hundred times better in *Confidential* than she is in *Big Sleep*.' By November, with domestic release still uncertain, Charlie Feldman begged Jack Warner to 'Give he girl [Bacall] at least three or four additional scenes with Bogart of the insolent and provocative nature that she had in *To Have and Have Not*.' Otherwise, he reckoned, she would get bad reviews again.

Warner responded. He said he had been thinking the very same thing. He gave the go-ahead for further shooting. What did that involve? The horse-racing scene, of course, but more. The April 1945 print recently discovered by the UCLA Film Archive reveals that the boudoir scene that includes Marlowe's 'Those are harsh words...especially when a man's walking out of your bedroom' was also added (instead of a lengthy chat between Marlowe and Norris). By January 1946 Warner was talking about 'two new sultry sequences being added—and a thousand feet of film (over ten minutes) being taken out to make room and save the tempo. ...This new version was sneak previewed in February, and it was reckoned to be a hundred percent improvement and a major protection for Bacall....

One of the things of most historic interest about *The Big Sleep* is that it affected an indifference to narrative consequence that was startling. Hawks himself said often over the years that there had been a lesson in the film, about not needing to make sense, about having 'a good scene' or 'something that was fun', and carrying an audience along with you. Of course, we can see more clearly now that Hawks learned that lesson under some duress, or thanks to the second thoughts of the system. But it did work: no matter how poorly the first version of the picture previewed, on proper release the 'fatter', more digressive version grossed \$3 domestically—a major success....

What I'm trying to suggest is that *The Big Sleep*—without fanfare or even self-awareness of Hawks' part—is one of the most formally radical pictures ever made in Hollywood. For it abandons story and genre as easily as one of its girls stepping out of her clothes, and says this is a movie about being a movie, about movie-ness. This is a kind of ongoing rehearsal or improvisation—very nicely done, mind you, there's no need for untidiness (however open in design, Hawks was a precisionist in shooting). It's

a picture about its own process, the fun of making fun....

When the movie of *The Big Sleep* came out, Raymond Chandler was too impressed and excited to be critical. The film helped make him as an author. And Chandler was inexperienced enough, timid enough, to be captivated by the swaggering dream made by Hawks and Bogart. But as time passed, he was able to reflect. In 1949, Chandler was rather irked by an article John Houseman had written for *Vogue*, remarking on how Marlowe-like movies had little moral content. Chandler wrote to Houseman: "I'm all for your demand that pictures, even tough pictures, and especially tough pictures, have a moral content. (Because *The Big Sleep* [the movie] had none I feel a little annoyed with you for not realizing that the book had a high moral content.) *Time* this week calls Philip Marlowe 'amoral'. This is pure nonsense. Assuming that his intelligence is as high as mine (it could hardly be higher), assuming his chances in life to promote his own interest are as numerous as they must be, why does he work for such a pittance?...It is the struggle of all fundamentally honest men to make a decent living in a corrupt society. It is an impossible struggle; he can't win. He can be poor and bitter or take it out in wisecracks and casual amours, or he can be corrupt and amiable and rude like a Hollywood producer. Because the bitter fact is that outside of two or three technical professions which require long years of preparation, there is absolutely no way for a man of this age to acquire a decent affluence in life without to some degree corrupting himself, without accepting the cold, clear fact that success is always and everywhere a racket."...

*The Big Sleep* inaugurates a post-modern, camp, satirical view of movies being about other movies that extends to the New Wave and *Pulp Fiction*. In that sense, it breaks fresh ground while sensing the ultimate dead end of the form. And so I have to say, ruefully but with pleasure still, that *The Big Sleep* is both the most entertaining of films and a piece of shining whimsy, untrue to life in so many important ways.

**From Howard Hawks *The Grey Fox of Hollywood*. Todd McCarthy. Grove Press NY 1997**

Due to the august literary names involved, the adaptation of *The Big Sleep* has been far more intensely scrutinized than that of any other Hawks film except *To Have and To Have Not*; scholars specializing in Chandler, Faulkner, and Hawks have all taken close looks at it. Especially helpful is the work of Roger Shatzkin; the very title of his essay "Who Cares Who Killed Owen Taylor?" frankly addresses the issue no one can avoid when discussing *The Big Sleep*: that the plot is so complicated that even the original author couldn't say who murdered one of the characters, but that it didn't matter because everything else about it is so dazzlingly good. If there was a pivotal film in Hawk's career, after which his storytelling technique became more discursive, more leisurely, and less

tightly plotted, it is this one. As Hawks later stated: "I'm learning more about characters and how to let them handle the plot, rather than let the plot move them." It could easily be argued that after *The Big Sleep*, Hawks' films begin to suffer from loose, casual plotting and that their quality depends to a great extent simply upon how successful he is at getting away with it, or, on his terms, how good his scenes are. As Meta Carpenter so astutely noted, it was a risky way to make a movie, the equivalent of walking a tightrope without the net normally provided by a tightly-knit, well-constructed story. It is perhaps not coincidental that the most convoluted, heavily plotted story Hawks ever took on was the one that triggered this significant change in artistic attitude.

Hawks-Feldman, of which Hawks was now president, bought *The Big Sleep* for twenty thousand dollars, with an agreement that Warner Bros. would in turn pay him \$55,000 for the literary rights as well as completed screenplay—Hawks could keep the difference if there was any. With his impeccable story sense, Faulkner was entrusted to devise the structure, but the approach to the actual writing proved rather unusual. Brackett described her initial meeting with her partner on the lot: "Faulkner came out his office with the book *The Big Sleep*. . . and said: "I have worked out what we're going to do. We will do alternate sections. I will do these chapters and you will do those chapters.' And that was the way it was done....I never saw what he did and he never saw what I did. We just turned our stuff in to Hawks." Brackett acknowledged "It's a confusing book if you sit down and tear it apart. When you read it from page to page it moves so beautifully that you don't care, but if you start tearing it apart to see what makes it tick it comes unglued." In fact, it is possible, with some difficulty to fit all the pieces of the novel together, and Faulkner and Brackett actually went to considerable lengths to clarify some of the details left a bit vague by Chandler.

Aside from conforming the action of *The Big Sleep* to the requirements of the Production Code, the main challenge the filmmakers faced was to transform a suitably amorous vehicle for Bogart and Bacall. No matter what happened before, the ultimate goal was to arrive at an ending very much like that of *To Have and Have Not*, in which the audience is buoyed by the feeling that Bogie and "Baby" will stay together. This was by no means an easy matter, requiring more than a year of work.

**Lee Horsley: The Development of Post-war Literary and Cinematic Noir**

The years immediately following the end of World War Two marked the start of a crucial phase in the creation, definition and popularising of both literary and cinematic noir. There were several concurrent developments: the Hollywood production of a growing number of pessimistic, downbeat crime films, the post-war release in Europe of a

large backlog of American films, the publication in France of a new series of crime novels and the appearance in America of a new kind of book, the paperback original. Films released in America just before the end of the war, such as Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* and Edward Dmytryk's *Murder, My Sweet* (both 1944), were taken as evidence, when they appeared in France, that 'the Americans are making dark films too'.

In 1945, under the editorship of Marcel Duhamel, Gallimard started publishing its translations of British and American crime novels in the the *Série Noire*. In 1946, echoing the Gallimard label, the French critics Nino Frank and Jean-Pierre Chartier wrote the two earliest essays to identify a departure in film-making, the American 'film noir'. Although they were not thought of in the United States as films noirs (the French label did not become widely known there until the 1970s), numerous post-war Hollywood movies seemed to confirm the French judgement that a new type of American film had emerged, very different from the usual studio product and capable of conveying an impression of 'certain disagreeable realities that do in truth exist'.

The Hollywood releases of 1945 included Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour*, Michael Curtiz's *Mildred Pierce* and three films noirs directed by Fritz Lang - *Ministry of Fear*, *Scarlet Street* and *The Woman in the Window*. In 1946 David Goodis published the first of his crime novels, *Dark Passage*, and Delmar Daves began filming it; in the spring and summer months of 1946 alone, Hollywood released *Blue Dahlia* (George Marshall), *Dark Corner* (Henry Hathaway), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett), *Gilda* (Charles Vidor), *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak) and *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks). In the same year Gallimard brought out French translations of two of Horace McCoy's novels, the first American novels to be included in the *Série Noire*.

### ***The Iconic Figures of Film Noir***

The figure of the hard-boiled detective is often taken to be one of the defining features of film noir, particularly as exemplified by Humphrey Bogart, whose performances as Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* and as Marlowe in *The Big Sleep* established him as the iconic private eye. Revisions of the detective story were, however, only one element in the phenomenon, and Bogart's place as 'a key iconographic figure in all of film noir' was secured by the fact that he was cast, as well, in a range of non-investigative films noirs, such as *High Sierra* (1941), *Dark Passage* (1946) and *In a Lonely Place* (1950). Bogart's roles in them suggest the different forms noir took as it developed during forties. In addition to the weary integrity of the private eye, there was the pathos of the ageing gangster (Roy 'Mad Dog' Earle in *High Sierra*), the desperation of the 'wrong man' (the escaped convict wrongly accused of his wife's murder in *Dark Passage*) and the violence of the suspected psychopath (the self-destructive writer in *In a Lonely Place*).

In creating this range of films noirs, Hollywood drew on the work both of earlier writers (especially, of course, Hammett and Chandler) and of the late forties-early fifties novelists who were writing crime fiction that very often had no role for the private eye. Amongst those whose work was adapted during this period were W.R. Burnett, David Goodis, Dorothy B. Hughes, William Lindsay Gresham, Horace McCoy and William P. McGivern, all of whom produced novels that had as their protagonists violent, self-deceived men, criminals, crooked cops, killers, psychotics.

One of the most important influences on noir characterisation was the work of Cornell Woolrich, whose novels embodied in an extreme form the noir sense of helplessness and paranoia. Between 1942 and 1949, there were eleven Woolrich novels or stories made into films, the protagonists of which include a man hypnotised into thinking he is a murderer (*Fear in the Night*) and a mind-reader who predicts his own death (*Night Has a Thousand Eyes*), as well as alcoholics, amnesiacs, hunted men and fall guys. Private eye films continued, of course, to be made, but if investigative figures were included, they tended to become increasingly vulnerable and flawed - for example, Bogart's confused, hunted Rip Murdoch in John Cromwell's *Dead Reckoning* (1947), Robert Mitchum as the traumatised Jeff Markham in *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947), Edmund O'Brien as the dying protagonist hunting his own killers in Rudolph Maté's *D.O.A.* (1950).

The other key iconic figure of noir is, of course, the fatal woman, who poses seductively both on film posters and on hundreds of mid-twentieth century pulp covers. The elements of the image are a kind of visual shorthand for perilous attraction and steamy corruption. Sometimes the dangerous woman is simply a sexual predator who tempts and weakens a male protagonist; sometimes she actually imitates male aggression and appropriates male power. On the poster or pulp cover she perhaps holds only a cocktail glass and a smouldering cigarette, or she might hold a gun and might by the end of the narrative have pulled the trigger. Constrained by the Hays Code, Hollywood tended to package the femme fatale narrative in ways that ensured the defeat of the independent female, but such was the power of the image of the sexual, aggressive, strong woman that she in many ways, in the minds of audiences, resisted this formulaic reassertion of male control.

### ***Definitions of Film Noir***

Both literary and cinematic noir can be seen as closely related to the modernist crisis of culture - as reflecting the feelings of nightmarish alienation, disorientation and disintegration that are often taken as hallmarks of the modernist sensibility. James Naremore, in his recent analysis of the contexts of film noir (*More Than Night*), suggests that the French critics who, in the mid-1940s, first applied the term 'film noir' might well have agreed on a formulation that defined noir as 'a kind of modernism in

the popular cinema'. Modernism might seem to be separated from both Hollywood and pulp fiction by such qualities as its formal complexity and technical display, its aesthetic self-consciousness, its association with high culture and its rejection of classical narrative. But with its 'extraordinary compound' of apparently contradictory elements, modernism did encompass many impulses that found natural expression in a popular genre engaged in undermining the essentially optimistic thrust of other popular forms, such as detective and action adventure stories.

Discussions of noir often centre on visual and specifically cinematic elements – on things like low-key lighting, chiaroscuro effects, deep focus photography, extreme camera angles and expressionist distortion. But it is essential as well to take account of themes, mood, characterisation, point of view and narrative pattern. Both literary and cinematic noir are defined by: (i) the subjective point of view; (ii) the shifting roles of the protagonist; (iii) the ill-fated relationship between the protagonist and society (generating the themes of alienation and entrapment); and (iv) the ways in which noir functions as a socio-political critique.

The representation of the protagonist's subjectivity is crucial - his perceptions (both accurate and deluded), his state of mind, his desires, obsessions and anxieties. The need for attending to the handling of perspective in film noir is concisely summed up in Fritz Lang's explanation of his subjective camera work: 'You show the protagonist so that the audience can put themselves under the skin of the man'; by showing things 'wherever possible, from the viewpoint of the protagonist' the film gives the audience visual and psychological access to his nightmarish experiences.

We are brought close to the mind of a protagonist whose position vis à vis other characters is not fixed. Treacherous confusions of his role and the movement of the protagonist from one role to another constitute key structural elements in noir narrative. The victim might, for

example, become the aggressor; the hunter might turn into the hunted or vice versa; the investigator might double as either the victim or the perpetrator. Whereas the traditional mystery story, with its stable triangle of detective, victim and murderer, is reasonably certain to have the detective as the protagonist, noir is a deliberate violation of this convention.

Shared guilt is often the only common bond amongst noir characters, who are usually doomed to be isolated and marginalised. The main themes are generalisations of the ill-fated relationship between the protagonist and his society. Characters suffer either from failures of agency (powerlessness, immobilising uncertainty) or from loss of community (isolation, betrayal). Obsessed, alienated, vulnerable, pursued or paranoid, they suffer existential despair as they act out narratives that raise the question of whether they are making their own choices or following a course dictated by fate.

The noir narrative confronts the protagonist with a rift in the familiar order of things or with a recognition that apparent normality is actually the antithesis of what it seems to be: it is brutal rather than benign, dehumanised not civilised. In the course of the story, it becomes clear that the things that are amiss cannot be dealt with rationally and cannot ultimately be put to rights. The dispersal of guilt, the instability of roles, and the difficulties of grasping the events taking place all mean that there can be no 'simple solution'. Even if there is a gesture in the direction of a happy ending, the group reformed is damaged and cannot return to prior innocence. It is in the nature of noir that guilt never disappears, and any resolution will be coloured by the cynical, existentially bitter attitude that is generally taken to be one of the hallmarks of noir, creating a tone that can be blackly comic but that, if it modulates too far towards light humour, or becomes upbeat or sentimental, will lose its 'noirish' quality.

([www.crimeculture.com/Contents/Film%20Noir.html](http://www.crimeculture.com/Contents/Film%20Noir.html))

#### **Coming up in Buffalo Film Seminars XIII, Fall 2006:**

Oct 3 Satyajit Ray, **Aparajito/The Unvanquished** 1956  
Oct 10 Jean-Pierre Melville **Le Samourai** 1967  
Oct 17 Roman Polanski **Chinatown** 1974  
Oct 24 Robert Altman **M\*A\*S\*H** 1970  
Oct 31 Fred Zinnemann, **The Day of the Jackal** 1973  
Nov 7 Emile de Antonio **In the Year of the Pig** 1969  
Nov 14 Bob Rafelson, **Five Easy Pieces** 1970  
Nov 21 Nicolas Roeg **The Man Who Fell to Earth** 1976  
Nov 28 Spike Lee **Do the Right Thing** 1989  
Dec 5 Peter Greenaway **Prospero's Books** 1991

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<http://buffalofilmseminars.com>

...for the weekly email informational notes, send an email to either of us.

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