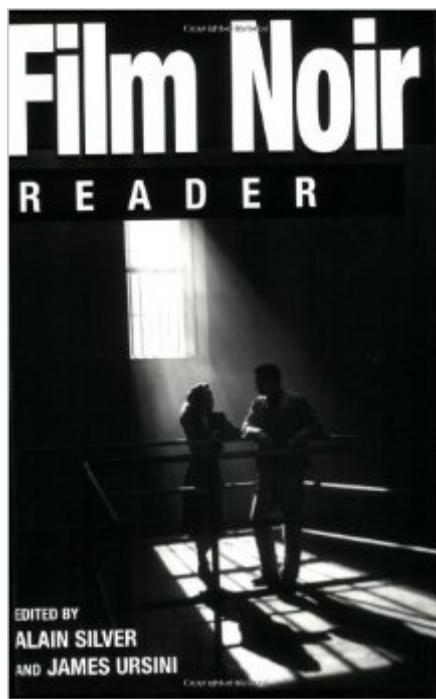


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Film Noir Reader



Synopsis

(Limelight). This bountiful anthology combines all the key early writings on film noir with many newer essays, including some published here for the first time. The collection is assembled by the editors of the Third Edition of *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*, now regarded as the standard work on the subject.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'm including reviews of both "Film Noir Reader" and "Film Noir Reader 2" in the same review until gets the two books unlinked. **FILM NOIR READER (1)** "Film Noir Reader" is a collection of 22 essays about film noir, written between the mid-1950s and mid-1990s by a diverse group of film theorists, including a few essays by the editors themselves, Alain Silver and James Ursini. Some of the essays are illustrated with black-and-white photographs. Mr. Silver takes the opportunity of the book's Introduction to deliver a scathing rebuttal of French critic Marc Vernet's views before commenting on the book's content. "Film Noir Reader" has three parts: Part I is "Seminal Essays", which include 8 essays written 1955-1979. An excerpt from Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton's seminal 1955 book "A Panorama of American Film Noir" is included, as well as Paul Schrader's essential 1972 essay "Notes on Film Noir". Other essays discuss film noir's visual style, existential motifs, and there is a very interesting essay by Paul Kerr on the circumstances that caused B movies, including B-noirs, to flourish in the 1940s. Part II, "Case Studies", includes 8 essays about specific films and directors, all but one addressing films of the classic noir period.

Essays are dedicated to directors John Farrow and Anthony Mann, while others discuss the films "Phantom Lady", "Angel Face", "The Killers", "Night and the City", "Kiss Me Deadly", "Hickey and Boggs", and "The Long Goodbye". Part III, "Noir Then and Now", includes 6 articles that seemed not to fit into Part I or Part II, including a few about neo-noir films. Karen Hollinger discusses the effects of first-person male voiceovers on the images of female characters in classic film noir.

It's what in academia is sometimes disparagingly called a "non book," a collection of essays with a few contributions by the editors. In this case, it happens to be quite a good non book. The contributors seem to know what they're talking about. Some of the essays are older than others, so it's not exactly a snapshot in time, but that's not bad in itself. The focuses run from early gangster films through the so-called neo noirs of the 1970s and after. (They're the ones in color.) Here is how Todd Erikson describes the jelling of the genre. "What made the noir films of the forties such as Double indemnity, The Killers, and Out of the Past so revolutionary in their day was that they distorted the viewer's psychological reference points by establishing a new set of generic codes. This new set of generic codes incorporated iconography from the detective and gangster genres, the distinctive narrative voice (or attitude) of the hard-boiled writers, and the first-person sensibility of the expressionistic subjective camera, through which the underworld could be experienced vicariously by the viewer." Now, that's writing that both informed and informative. The prose is not for the casual viewer. It's not for tabloid fans. It's a little challenging. You have to think twice about "generic codes" and "iconography" and "expressionistic," but it condenses a good deal of data in a relatively small space. I'm hardly an expert on the subject of film noir and I admit to not having read this book from cover to cover, page by page, all 327 of them, seriatim. But it's not that kind of a book anyway. It's more like an encyclopedia than a novel. You don't gobble it all down, you have to dabble in it.

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