



CORNELL WOOLRICH IN HIS HOTEL ROOM IN THE LATE 1950s, POSING WITH THE DUST JACKETS OF SEVERAL OF HIS NOVELS AND STORY COLLECTIONS. FREDERIC DANNAY PAPERS, RARE BOOK & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

"I had that trapped feeling, like some sort of a poor insect that you've put inside a downturned glass, and it tries to climb up the sides, and it can't, and it can't, and it can't."

—Cornell Woolrich, *Blues of a Lifetime*

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE **ARTS**

DR. SAUL AND DOROTHY KIT FILM NOIR FESTIVAL



INTO THE NIGHT: CORNELL WOOLRICH AND FILM NOIR

MARCH 27–31, 2019

**THE SECOND ANNUAL DR. SAUL AND DOROTHY KIT
FILM NOIR FESTIVAL**

FESTIVAL INTRODUCTION

“As a master of dread, he has conceivably no pulp equal.”

– Jonathan Rosenbaum

Short story maestro, former Columbia student, muse of suspense filmmakers: Cornell Woolrich (1903–1968) lived all of these lives. A prolific man of letters (who also published under the pseudonyms William Irish and George Hopley), Woolrich has had his novels and stories adapted into nearly 40 films and dozens of episodes of radio and television. Yet despite his strong influence on the postwar crime film, he has remained overshadowed by his literary contemporaries: Chandler, Hammett, and Cain.

But unlike those contemporaries, Woolrich was no hard-boiled detective author. His focus was less on the complex networks of criminality mapped in Chandler’s or Hammett’s fiction than on their nightmarish effects on characters who find themselves unwittingly caught up in them. Far from hard-boiled, his protagonists are haunted by paranoia and fear. To biographer Francis M. Nevins, he was “the Poe of the twentieth century and the poet of its shadows.” To novelist Anthony Boucher, he was a “black magician” who revealed the “potential terror” hidden within the everyday. Chandler himself complimented Woolrich as the “best idea man in the business,” but added that “you have to read him fast and not analyze too much; he’s too feverish.”

This oneiric – indeed “feverish” – fiction was immensely popular and influential from the 1930s through the 1950s: Woolrich’s short stories were widely published in thriller magazines like *Argosy*, *Black Mask*, and *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*, and his work was a frequent source for B movies and radio anthologies like *Molle Mystery Theatre* (1943–1952) and *Suspense* (1942–1962). As such, Woolrich’s oeuvre provides a remarkable optic into the American pulp mediascape and the “weird tales” (in the parlance of the time) that were a seedbed of noir.

It would be a mistake, though, to interpret Woolrich’s importance for American cinema solely in terms of noir. His work also anticipates the films of Alfred Hitchcock, whom Nevins describes as the writer’s “spiritual brother.” Hitchcock’s oft-debated relation to noir is cast in

clearest relief through Woolrich: Both artists were drawn to “wrong men” scenarios that outline a vision of the world as a malevolent trap. This year’s Kit Noir Festival explores the parallel by devoting a full day (March 31) to the Hitchcock connection, culminating in our closing screening of the British director’s celebrated Woolrich adaptation, *Rear Window* (1954).

Woolrich spun these dark visions from a life lived almost entirely in and around Morningside Heights in New York City. After a childhood with his father in Mexico, he spent his adolescence in the family home at 239 W. 113th St. (just east of Morningside Park, the building no longer stands). He attended Columbia University from 1921 to 1925 (but never finished his degree) and, after a failed marriage, lived the majority of his adult life in desperately confined circumstances with his mother in the Hotel Marseilles (still standing at the SW corner of Broadway and 103rd). This year’s Kit Noir Festival brings Woolrich’s paranoiac vision back to the stomping grounds whence it emerged.

The screenings in this series are accompanied by a number of talks by Woolrich experts and film historians, including Ann Douglas (Columbia University), Frank Krutnik (University of Sussex), James Naremore (Indiana University), Francis M. Nevins (Saint Louis University), and Pamela Robertson Wojcik (University of Notre Dame). Columbia’s Rare Book & Manuscript Library, located in Butler Library, will also host an accompanying exhibit of items from the Cornell Woolrich Papers.

Programmed by **Rob King**, Film and Media Studies

Managed by **Soheil Rezayazdi**, Columbia University

TICKET INFO

Tickets: \$12 General Admission / \$10 Seniors (65 and older) / \$8 Students

Packages: \$40 for four films / \$75 for all films

Advance ticket sales available online only

Day-of screening ticket sales available on-site, pending availability

Students have access to free rush tickets

For more information, contact filmnoir@columbia.edu.

All screenings and lectures take place in the The Katharina Otto-Bernstein Screening Room, Lenfest Center for the Arts.

All lectures are free and will be livestreamed and available on the School of the Arts’ YouTube channel.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 7:30 PM

AN AFTERTASTE OF DREAD: CORNELL WOOLRICH IN FICTION AND FILM

KEYNOTE LECTURE BY JAMES NAREMORE,
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Welcome by Dean **Carol Becker**, Columbia University School of the Arts

Festival introduction by **Rob King**, Film and Media Studies

This talk explores the distinctive literary techniques and moods of Cornell Woolrich, giving emphasis to the sense of dread that pervades his fiction and can also be found in other expressions of cultural modernity. The talk will try to explain why Woolrich was so frequently adapted into film, television, and radio during what we retrospectively think of as the noir decades of the 1940s and 50s. It will also provide notes on seven films (plus one television show) that are among the best of the adaptations.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 7:30 PM

DEADLINE AT DAWN

DOUBLE BILL WITH NIGHTMARE

1946 / 83 min / b/w

Dir. Harold Clurman / Scr. Clifford Odets

Cast: Susan Hayward, Bill Williams, Paul Lukas

Adapted from *Deadline at Dawn* (1944)

Digital copy courtesy of Swank

Introduced by **Soheil Rezayazdi** (Columbia University)

"This is New York," a character snaps early in *Deadline at Dawn*, "Where hello means goodbye."

The city is a sinister force in this acid-tongued noir from playwright Clifford Odets (*Sweet Smell of Success*, 1957). A key inspiration for the protagonist in the Coen Brothers' 1991 *Barton Fink* (which lifts a plot point from *Deadline at Dawn*), Odets does a dramatic rework here of Woolrich's then-popular novel. The basic structure is intact: A couple must race to prove a man's innocence before sunrise. From there, Odets imbues the work with his trademark banter and adds an amnesia plot structure very much in line with Woolrich's own "And So to Death" or *The Black Curtain* (both 1941). The result is a prime example of the one-crazy-night-in-New-York movie (think *After Hours*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, or *Good Time*).

A "motion-picture guessing game of superior quality" (*New York Herald Tribune*), *Deadline at Dawn* benefits from its formidable talent behind the camera. In addition to Odets there's cinematographer Nicholas Musuraca (*The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Out of the Past*), who bathes this nocturnal picture in inky low-key lighting, and director Harold Clurman, a founder of the influential Group Theatre, who here makes his sole feature film. Together they create a "racy little baffler" (*New York Times*) that captures both the allure and the terror of a great American city at night.

NIGHTMARE

DOUBLE BILL WITH DEADLINE AT DAWN

1956 / 89 min / b/w

Dir. and scr. Maxwell Shane

Cast: Kevin McCarthy, Edward G. Robinson, Connie Russell

Adapted from the short story "And So to Death," *Argosy*, March 1, 1941

35mm print courtesy of Park Circus

Introduced by **Rob King** (Columbia University)

Written and directed by Maxwell Shane, *Nightmare* is in fact a remake of Shane's own 1947 *Fear in the Night*. Both films are based on Woolrich's 1941 novelette "And So to Death" (better known as "Nightmare"), whose plot is quite similar to the 1940 short story "C-Jag" (which in turn was the source for Monogram's 1947 *Fall Guy*).

What led Shane to remake his own movie? His original *Fear in the Night* had been produced by the B-picture team of William Pine and William Thomas (aka the "Dollar Bills"), who had been responsible for dozens of low-budget pictures for Paramount between 1941 and 1955. Following Pine's death in 1955, Thomas and Shane joined forces with Pine's son to reconstitute the company as Pine-Thomas-Shane, now with a distribution deal through United Artists. It was in this context that the team chose to remake *Fear in the Night* as the new company's debut release.

The resulting film is an impressive example of noir's late mannerist phase. But *Nightmare* is also a window on the changed circumstances of low-budget filmmaking in the wake of the Supreme Court's Paramount ruling of 1948. Whereas once the studios had been able to dump low-budget B product on contracted exhibitors, films now had to compete for bookings on an open market. Accordingly, *Nightmare* significantly raises the production values of the original film by relocating its plot to the New Orleans jazz scene. The higher budget permitted extensive

location shooting as well as prominent roles for singer Connie Russell and bandleader Billy May, who arranged the swaggering jazz melody that features prominently in the plot.

What didn't change, fortunately, was the extraordinary opening, which replicates shot-by-shot the start of Shane's original.



NIGHTMARE (1956),
IMAGE COURTESY OF PARK CIRCUS/MGM STUDIOS

FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 7:30 PM

BLACK ANGEL

1946 / 81 min / b/w

Dir. Roy William Neill / Scr. Roy Chanslor

Cast: Dan Duryea, June Vincent, Peter Lorre

Adapted from *The Black Angel* (1943)

DCP courtesy of Universal Pictures

Introduced by **Ann Douglas** (Columbia University) and followed by a discussion with **Francis M. Nevins** (Saint Louis University).

What did Woolrich think of the film adaptations of his work? In the case of Universal's *Black Angel*, we know – and it wasn't pretty. Early in 1947, after watching the film on the prompting of Columbia professor Mark Van Doren, Woolrich scrawled out his disappointment on hotel-room stationery. "I was so ashamed when I came out of [the theater]," he wrote Van Doren. "All I could keep thinking of in the dark was: Is that what I wasted my whole life for?" (The letter is reprinted in this program.)

Woolrich's lifelong self-contempt likely prevented him from appreciating what, in the opinion of biographer Francis M. Nevins, is among the very best of Woolrich adaptations – a film that displays "total fidelity to [the source novel's] essence ... [yet] little to its literal text."

The 1943 novel replicates the formula of Woolrich's *Phantom Lady* of the previous year: A woman sets out to prove a man's innocence, tracking her way through a rogues' gallery of possible suspects (four, in the case of *Black Angel*). Roy Chanslor's script keeps this basic premise, but tightens the structure by jettisoning one of the suspects and conflating two others into the single figure of Marty Blair, played by Dan Duryea. The narrative redesign seems to have been intended in part to launch Duryea as a male lead. As *Variety* reported, Universal's plan was to "give a romantic buildup to Duryea and at the same time cash in on the underlip snarl he made famous in *Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street*."



BLACK ANGEL (1946), ©2019 UNIVERSAL STUDIOS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

"B MOVIE" WOOLRICH DAY

1:00 PM

THE GUILTY

DOUBLE BILL WITH FALL GUY

1947 / 71 min / b/w

Dir. John Reinhardt / Scr. Robert Presnell Sr.

Cast: Bonita Granville, Regis Toomey, Don Castle

Adapted from the short story "He Looked Like Murder," *Detective Fiction Weekly*, February 8, 1941

35mm restored print courtesy of the UCLA Film & Television Archive.
Restoration funding provided by the Film Noir Foundation.

FALL GUY

DOUBLE BILL WITH THE GUILTY

1947 / 64 min / b/w

Dir. Reginald Le Borg / Scr. Jerry Warner

Cast: Clifford Penn, Robert Armstrong, Elisha Cook, Jr.

Adapted from the short story "C-Jag," *Black Mask*, October 1940

Digital copy courtesy of Swank

Introduced by **Rob King** (Columbia University)

In 1946, Poverty Row studio Monogram Pictures picked up rights for a couple of Woolrich stories – "C-Jag" and "He Looked Like Murder" – which they put into production as *Fall Guy* and *The Guilty*, respectively. Both films were completed in November that year and released to theaters the subsequent March. Both translate Woolrich's Depression-era losers into shell-shocked ex-GIs. Both, furthermore, represent the spectrum of creative possibilities available for ultra-low-budget noir.

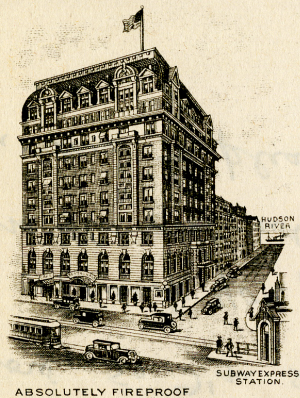
Of these, *Fall Guy* is somewhat the flatter film. Woolrich's original "C-Jag" concerns a man who comes out of a drug haze with an uncertain recollection of a body in a closet, a first try of a plot premise which he'd reuse the following year for "And So to Death." But where Woolrich's story had explored the maddening ambiguities between reality and (drug-addled) memory, the film adaptation largely withholds these psychological motifs in favor of a formulaic action plot about a gangland double-cross.

The Guilty, by contrast, demonstrates how the budgetary limitations of the B-level crime film could be catalysts for aesthetic distinction. Stylistically, the film was recognized at the time for its evocative use of sparse settings: "a gloomy, rainswept street, a neighborhood saloon, a couple of shoddy tenement rooms," as the *New York Times* reviewer recalled. Narratively, the film anticipates Alfred Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950) in its unusual use of a lying flashback (a significant departure from Woolrich's original, perhaps to give a twist for mystery fans already familiar with the source story).

As another critic pointed out in defense of *The Guilty*: "There is a school of thought which maintains the B picture performs no useful function. In *The Guilty*, with its small budget and some untried players, an experiment has worked out well."



STILL FROM *THE GUILTY*



Hotel Marseilles

LOCATED BETWEEN CENTRAL PARK & RIVERSIDE DRIVE

ON BROADWAY AT 103RD STREET

New York

Feb. 2nd, 1947

Dear Mr. Van Doren:

That was the kindest letter you sent me. I don't get very many, & at times it's like writing in a vacuum, you don't know if anyone likes it or not. (For that matter, you don't even know if anyone reads it or not.) So it did me a lot of good; made me want to write again for awhile.

However, I was foolish enough, because you had mentioned seeing The Black Angel picture, to go out & see it myself. I was so ashamed

when I came out of there, I was even too ashamed to answer your letter immediately, it took me 2 or 3 days to get over it. All I could keep thinking of in the dark was: "Is that what I wasted my whole life at?" You see I'm going to be 40 next Dec., & it sort of hits you cumulatively around then.

I don't like to look back at the Columbia days for that reason; the gap between expectation & accomplishment is too wide. Well, it's too late now, so I'm stuck with it.

Thank you, anyway, very much. I'm the one who's grateful to you. You seem to please so easily.

Sincerely,

Cornell Woolrich

4:15 PM

"WOOLRICH NOIR" AND THE B FILM

LECTURE BY FRANK KRUTNIK, UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Of all the writers to transition from pulp magazines to noir movies, Cornell Woolrich was by far the most prolific and most influential. From 1940 to 1954, the heyday of "classic" film noir, Hollywood based 18 films on Woolrich properties, with over 70 radio dramas produced during the same period and the beginnings of an equally abundant crop of television adaptations that would continue into the early 1960s. Focusing in particular on low-budget and independent thrillers, this talk places film adaptations of Woolrich's work in the context of the industrial, stylistic, and narrative practices of B-picture Hollywood.

6:00 PM

THE LEOPARD MAN

DOUBLE BILL WITH THE RETURN OF THE WHISTLER

1943 / 66 min / b/w

Dir. Jacques Tourneur / Scr. Ardel Wray

Cast: Dennis O'Keefe, Margo, Jean Brooks

Adapted from *Black Alibi* (1942)

35mm print courtesy of The Library of Congress

Introduced by **Jason Stevens** (Independent Scholar)

Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur, the producer/director team behind *Cat People*, followed up their 1942 sensation with another slice of feline-focused horror. *The Leopard Man* adapts a 200-page Woolrich whodunit into an early entry in the serial killer film. Ardel Wray's script moves the action from a South American metropolis to a small New Mexico town, where a botched publicity stunt at a nightclub incites a citywide panic. As the bodies pile up, the locals wonder if they're being hunted by a leopard, a man, or some ungodly mix of the two.

The Leopard Man is in many ways an anomaly among the Woolrich films. It takes place in a Southwestern village (not a big city), it contains traces of the supernatural, and its plot isn't an ingeniously sadistic Rube Goldberg machine designed to entrap its protagonist. Instead, Tourneur and Lewton offer an elegant precursor to the slasher movie. The victims here are young, beautiful women, as they so often would be in serial killer cinema ("Women alone the victims of strange savage killer!" the film's sensationalist poster screamed). The film, as such, retains the fear of women visible in many noir films from the period.

The Leopard Man changes the identity of the killer from Woolrich's *Black Alibi*, but it remains an overall faithful adaptation of the best-selling novel. It also boasts the strongest Columbia credentials in this retrospective: Like Woolrich, Val Lewton studied at CU, where he graduated from the School of Journalism.

THE RETURN OF THE WHISTLER

DOUBLE BILL WITH THE LEOPARD MAN

1948 / 61 min / b/w

Dir. D. Ross Lederman/ Scr. Edward Bock, Maurice Tombragel

Cast: Michael Duane, Lenore Aubert, Richard Lane

Adapted from the short story "All at Once, No Alice," *Argosy*, March 2, 1940

35mm print courtesy of Sony Pictures Entertainment

Introduced by **Frank Krutnik** (University of Sussex)

"I am the Whistler and I know many things, for I walk by night. I know many strange tales, many secrets hidden in the hearts of men and women who have stepped into the shadows."

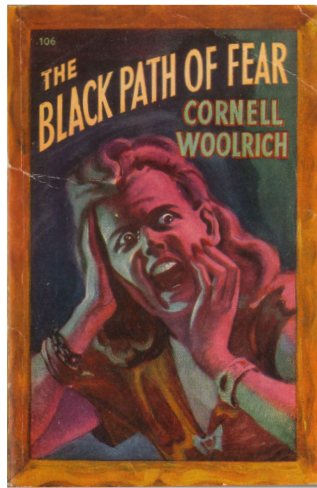
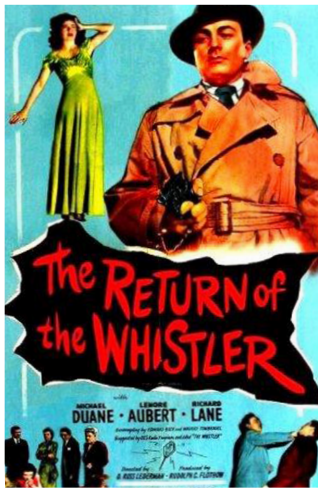
The famous opening lines of CBS's radio drama *The Whistler* (1942-1955) could be an almost perfect description of Woolrich's authorial persona. Yet the show was one of the few mystery radio series of the time that never adapted his work; instead, it used only original stories. Columbia Pictures' *Whistler* adaptations (1944-1948) were different,

however. Two of the series' eight films were taken from Woolrich: *The Mark of the Whistler* (1944), based on the 1942 story "Dormant Account," and *The Return of the Whistler*.

The translation of serial properties from radio to screen was part of a trend within the era's pulp mediascape. Columbia Pictures led the way courtesy of a distribution deal with producer Larry Darmour, who specialized in B pictures with pre-sold appeal, such as the *Ellery Queen* (1940-1942), *Crime Doctor* (1943-1949), and *Whistler* series, all from radio.

As Frank Krutnik has noted, the *Whistler* films "evoke the ... aesthetic specificity of radio drama." One of the novelties of the radio version was the fact that the stories focused on criminals and their psychological states, with the Whistler narrating the story with an odd second-person mode of address that was a hallmark of the show. The *Whistler* films approximate this by having the Whistler pop up as a kind of Greek chorus, usually as a shadow on the wall who addresses the characters in the fiction.

The first seven *Whistler* films had all starred Richard Dix, not as the Whistler, but, unusually, in a different protagonist role from film to film. After Dix's retirement, Columbia attempted to reboot the series with Michael Duane in *Return*, but discontinued it after the film's poor showing.



(L) *THE RETURN OF THE WHISTLER*, COURTESY OF SWANK MOTION PICTURES;
(R) COVER OF *THE BLACK PATH OF FEAR*, DELL MYSTERY REISSUE (1951).

9:15 PM

THE CHASE

1946 / 86 min / b/w

Dir. Arthur Ripley / Scr. Philip Yordan

Cast: Robert Cummings, Michele Morgan, Peter Lorre

Adapted from *The Black Path of Fear* (1944)

35mm restored print courtesy of the UCLA Film & Television Archive.
Restoration funding provided by The Film Foundation and the Franco-American Cultural Fund.

Introduced by **J. Hoberman** (Columbia University)

In 1946, film critics didn't quite know what to make of *The Chase*. "Its highly improbable plot has the eerie sensation of a bad dream," wrote *Life* magazine. It is a work "more confusing than suspenseful," wrote *The New York Times*. It reveals how far "narrative innovation could go in the 1940s," observes David Bordwell in a more recent reassessment. All of which is true: The film's dream-logic structure recalls not its peers, but the surrealist noir of *Mulholland Drive* (2001) made more than 50 years later. To date, the film is loved by those committed to the avant-garde. Experimental director Guy Maddin recorded a commentary track for *The Chase's* Blu-ray, where he likened the film to the works of David Lynch.

Several of the most striking elements of this Havana-set noir stem not from the Woolrich novel but from the minds of Ripley, Yordan, and producer Seymour Nebenzal (*M*, 1931; *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933). Nebenzal shot three different endings for the film, and he found its bizarre structure at least partially in post-production. *The Chase's* signature plot device – the villain's modified car – was also an invention of Ripley and Yordan.

Still, it would be unfair to say that Woolrich's source novel lacked avant-garde instincts. As Thomas Renzi has argued, *The Black Path of Fear* is a novel where "tonal considerations supersede strict narrative logic." The same, of course, could be said of *The Chase*.

SUNDAY, MARCH 31

WOOLRICH/HITCHCOCK/ TRUFFAUT DAY

1:00 PM

THE WINDOW

DOUBLE BILL WITH "FOUR O'CLOCK"

1949 / 73 min / b/w

Dir. Ted Tetzlaff / Scr. Mel Dinelli

Cast: Bobby Driscoll, Arthur Kennedy, Paul Stewart

Adapted from the short story "The Boy Cried Murder," *Mystery Book Magazine*, March 1947

35mm print courtesy of the Film Noir Foundation Collection at the UCLA Film & Television Archive

Introduced by **James Schamus** (Columbia University)

Five years after writing the story that would become *Rear Window* (1954), Cornell Woolrich penned another tale of murder as seen from an apartment window in New York City on a hot summer night.

NYC was a favorite setting for Woolrich. Indeed, nearly half the films in this retrospective are set there. With this story, Woolrich finds a riff on Aesop's "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" fable. Picture Jimmy Stewart's character in *Rear Window* as a chronically lying nine-year-old boy and you have a decent idea of where *The Window* takes its viewers. Connections to Hitchcock abound: In addition to the *Rear Window* parallels, *The Window* was also directed by Ted Tetzlaff, the cinematographer on *Notorious* (1946).

The Window is a taut coming-of-age thriller in its own right, though it remains of special interest for how it differs from Hitchcock's masterpiece. The film retains Woolrich's noir instincts far more than *Rear Window*; its final act in particular sends its protagonist hurtling through

dark, labyrinthine city streets. In terms of storytelling, *The Window* offers another key variation: Its lead (and we the viewers) have no doubt that a murder took place. Where *Rear Window* is propelled by uncertainty, *The Window* builds suspense without the layers of ambiguity. This faithful adaptation would be remade in 1966 as *The Boy Cried Murder*, an international co-production set in the Balkans.

"FOUR O'CLOCK"

(PREMIERE EPISODE OF THE NBC SERIES *SUSPICION*)

DOUBLE BILL WITH THE WINDOW

1957 / 51 min / b/w

Dir. Alfred Hitchcock / Scr. Francis M. Cockrell

Cast: E. G. Marshall, Nancy Kelly, Harry Dean Stanton

Adapted from the short story "Three O'Clock," *Detective Fiction Weekly*, October 1, 1938

Digital copy courtesy of Universal Pictures

Introduced by **Nico Baumbach** (Columbia University)

Few writers inspired the work of Alfred Hitchcock more than Cornell Woolrich. In addition to writing the source material for *Rear Window*, Woolrich had four of his works adapted for *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, including two episodes in the first season (1955-1956). "Four O'Clock" ran as the pilot episode of *Suspicion*, a short-lived NBC series executive-produced by Hitchcock. Of all the Woolrich adaptations under Hitchcock's television empire, it was the only one directed by Hitch himself.

"Four O'Clock" aired eight months prior to the premiere of *Vertigo* (1958), and it shares that film's affinity for long stretches of dialogue-free, slow-burn suspense. The plot is a distillation of pure Hitchcock and pure Woolrich: A watch repairman, consumed by fears of infidelity, builds a time bomb to murder his wife and her lover. But of course things don't go nearly as planned.

Hitchcock paid homage to Woolrich during one of his trademark intros to *Hitchcock Presents*. "This is a mouse trap, as any fool can plainly see," he said dryly. "It's an amazingly effective tool. Cornell Woolrich, the author of tonight's story, does not make mouse traps. Mr. Woolrich goes in for bigger game. He makes people traps, and very good ones, too." There was perhaps no filmmaker, before or since, better equipped to bring these people traps to the screen than Hitchcock.

Please note: This free screening will be from a low-resolution digital copy, the only format in which the episode is currently available.

4:15 PM

THE BOY, THE BACHELOR AND THE BRIDE: ADAPTATION AS ARRANGEMENT IN *THE WINDOW*, *REAR WINDOW*, AND *THE BRIDE WORE BLACK*

LECTURE BY PAMELA ROBERTSON WOJCIK,
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

This talk considers the process of adaptation in *The Window*, *Rear Window*, and *The Bride Wore Black*. Rather than worry about whether the films get the Woolrich source material "right," this talk envisions the films as unique performances or variations of their source texts. The films each amplify certain themes and components of the plots while abandoning others, and, in some cases, supplement the original material. In this sense, adaptation can be seen as a kind of authorship that simultaneously reflects the concerns of the film's author and provides a new lens on the original Woolrich story.

6:00 PM

THE BRIDE WORE BLACK (LA MARIÉE ÉTAIT EN NOIR)

1968 / 107 min / color

Dir. François Truffaut / Scr. François Truffaut, Jean-Louis Richard

Cast: Jeanne Moreau, Jean-Claude Brialy, Michel Bouquet

Adapted from *The Bride Wore Black* (1940)

35mm print courtesy of Film Desk

Introduced by **Annette Insdorf** (Columbia University)

The first of Truffaut's two Woolrich adaptations – the other being the following year's *La Sirène du Mississippi* (based on *Waltz into Darkness*) – *La Mariée était en noir* was conceived by the French director as an unofficial "homage à Hitchcock." Along with his earlier *La Peau douce* (1964) and *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), the film thus forms part of what Truffaut scholar Annette Insdorf dubs a "Hitchcockian strain" in Truffaut's output in the mid- to late-1960s, a period which also saw the publication of his *Hitchcock/Truffaut* interviews.

Truffaut chose wisely in selecting his source text. Not only was *The Bride Wore Black* the first of Woolrich's novels to fully realize the proto-noir sensibility he had been developing in his short stories of the 1930s, but it was recognized at the time of its publication as a literary parallel to Hitchcock's work in film. "If you can imagine Alfred Hitchcock's writing a novel the way he directs a movie," a critic wrote in the *Pittsburgh Press*, "then you have some idea of the drama and breathless suspense of *The Bride Wore Black*."

But Hitchcock and Woolrich are not the only presences here. Truffaut also described *La Mariée* as an attempt to reconcile Hitchcock with his other great influence: Jean Renoir. Hitchcockian technique is thus paired with Renoirian humanism in a game of cat-and-mouse in which, to quote from Renoir's *La Règle du jeu*, "everyone has their reasons."

A coda: *La Mariée* opened in New York on June 25, 1968, at the Festival Theatre on 57th and Fifth, just a mile away from the Sheraton-Russell where Woolrich was then living. At this point wheelchair-bound with one leg amputated, Woolrich would not leave his hotel to see it. He died three months later, on September 25.

8:45 PM

REAR WINDOW

1954 / 115 min / color

Dir. Alfred Hitchcock / Scr. John Michael Hayes

Cast: Jimmy Stewart, Grace Kelly, Thelma Ritter

Adapted from the short story "It Had to Be Murder," *Dime Detective Magazine*, February 1942

DCP courtesy of Universal Pictures

Introduced by **Pamela Robertson Wojcik** (Notre Dame)

At once the definitive indictment of cinema as voyeurism and Alfred Hitchcock's most irresistible entertainment, *Rear Window* may forever remain the finest Cornell Woolrich adaptation.

Woolrich submitted his story in 1941 under the title "Murder from a Fixed Point of View." That title, which changed prior to publication, presaged Hitchcock's much-celebrated visual approach for this material. Woolrich earned just \$225 from *Dime Detective Magazine* for the story, and he would later make a meager \$5,000 for the film rights for this and five other stories sold in a bundle. The most prominent triumph among Woolrich adaptations thus earned the author but a pittance by Hollywood standards.

For his adaptation, Hitchcock kept the story's basic structure but changed nearly all the particulars. He added a love story; he crafted an array of neighboring characters whose lives mirror that of his protagonist; and he gave the story a much lighter tone. On the page,

L. B. Jefferies is a cynical, classically noir anti-hero – he views his neighbors with a condescending disgust. Hitchcock softens his lead, which allows us to identify with his voyeurism. This Jefferies seeks answers to his everyday woes in the violent images he sees in the proscenium of his window. In the end, like Jefferies, we'd have been disappointed if there wasn't a murder.



REAR WINDOW (1954), ©2019 UNIVERSAL STUDIOS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

SUGGESTED READING

Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (Routledge, 1991)

Frank Krutnik, "Chiller-Dillers for the Shiver-and-Shudder Set: The Whistler Film Series," *Film Studies* 17 (Autumn 2017): 49-72

James Naremore, "Hitchcock at the Margins of Noir," in *An Invention without a Future: Essays on Cinema* (University of California Press, 2014), 155-172

Francis M. Nevins, Jr., *Cornell Woolrich: First You Dream, Then You Die* (The Mysterious Press, 1988)

Francis M. Nevins, Jr., "Translate and Transform: From Cornell Woolrich to Film Noir," in Alain Silver and James Ursini, eds., *The Film Noir Reader 2* (Limelight Editions, 1999), 137-157

Thomas C. Renzi, *Cornell Woolrich from Pulp Noir to Film Noir* (McFarland and Co., 2006)

François Truffaut, *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (Simon and Schuster, 1983 [1966])

Pamela Robertson Wojcik, *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945-1975* (Duke University Press, 2010)

Pamela Robertson Wojcik, "The Author of This Claptrap: Cornell Woolrich, Alfred Hitchcock, and *Rear Window*," in R. Barton Palmer and David Boyd, eds., *Hitchcock at the Source: The Auteur as Adapter* (SUNY Press, 2011), 213-227

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

FRANK KRUTNIK

Frank Krutnik is a Reader in Film Studies at the University of Sussex. Besides contributing to leading international screen studies journals since the early 1980s, he is the author of *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (1990, with Steve Neale), *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (1991), and *Inventing Jerry Lewis* (2000). He is the co-editor of *Un-American Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era* (2007) and special issues of the *New Review in Film and Television Studies* and the *Film Studies* journal. He is currently writing the monograph *Killers on the Kilocycles: Film Noir, Radio Noir and Old Time Radio*.

JAMES NAREMORE

James Naremore is Chancellors' Professor Emeritus at Indiana University and the author of the award winning *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (rev. ed. 2008). He has taught and lectured at numerous universities in the US and abroad and has been the recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Gallery of Art, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Among his many other writings on film are *The Magic World of Orson Welles* (1978), *Acting in the Cinema* (1988), *The Films of Vincente Minnelli* (1993), *On Kubrick* (2007), and *Charles Burnett: A Cinema of Symbolic Knowledge* (2017). His most recent publication is *Film Noir: A Very Short Introduction* (2019).

FRANCIS M. NEVINS

Francis M. Nevins is a Professor Emeritus at St. Louis University School of Law. In addition to legal scholarship he is the author of six novels, more than forty short stories, and a number of nonfiction books dealing with mystery and detective fiction. He has received two Edgar awards from Mystery Writers of America—including one for his *Cornell Woolrich: First You Dream, Then You Die* (1988)—and was shortlisted for a third. He lives in St. Louis, Missouri.

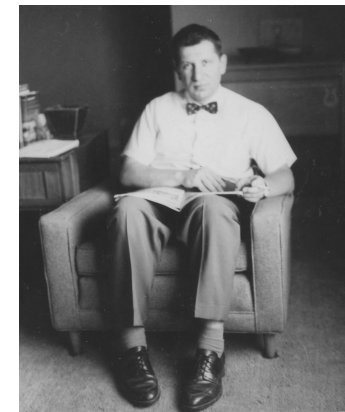
PAMELA ROBERTSON WOJCIK

Pamela Robertson Wojcik is a Professor in Film, TV and Theatre, and Concurrent Faculty in American Studies and Gender Studies at the University of Notre Dame. She is President of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. She is author of *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* (1996), *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945 to 1975* (2010), and *Fantasies of Neglect: Imaging the Urban Child in American Film and Fiction* (2016). She is currently writing a book about the film *Gidget*.

ABOUT DR. SAUL AND DOROTHY KIT

Born and raised in the early 1920s in the New York Metropolitan area, Dr. Saul Kit (Passaic, New Jersey) and Dorothy Anken Kit (Jackson Heights, Queens) were lovers of literature, theater, and film. Dorothy, an interior decorator, wrote poetry and plays in her leisure time and had a strong artistic bent, which included creating needlepoint designs based on famous works of art as well as her own original patterns, many of which were commissioned by her friends. A GI Bill undergraduate at the University of California, Berkeley, Saul went on to receive his PhD in Biochemistry from Berkeley, the location of the birth of their oldest child Sally (Syracuse, Class of 1971). Saul carried out his post-doctoral studies at the University of Chicago, where his first son, Malon (Columbia School of Engineering, Class of 1973), was born. Suffering from the bitter cold winters of Chicago, Saul subsequently moved the family to the warmest place he could find a job, Houston, Texas, where his second son, Gordon (Columbia College, Class of 1976) was born. Saul's extraordinary 35-year scientific career included important discoveries in cancer, virology, and vaccine research. He was Chief of the section of Nucleoprotein Metabolism in the Department of Biochemistry at M.D. Anderson Hospital, and later Professor and Head of the Division of Biochemical Virology at Baylor College of Medicine, both in Houston. Saul was a recipient of numerous research grants from various government and private organizations, including the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, and The American Cancer

Society. In recognition of over 25 years of service, he received a Research Career Award from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. In 1987, Saul, along with his son Malon, were honored with the Distinguished Inventor of the Year Award for developing the world's first genetically engineered vaccine to be licensed by the US government. Saul and Malon were granted numerous United States and international patents for their pioneering vaccine inventions, aided by their patent attorney son/brother, Gordon. Gordon's generous gift to Columbia funds the Film Noir Festival in honor of his parents.



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