ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS

L.A. NOIRE

L.A. NOIRE
STUDY GUIDE

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FIRSTLY, SOME BACKGROUND...

LA Noire is set in the American city of Los Angeles (L.A.) in 1947. In historical terms this was just after the Second World War (1939 – 1945) - which America had joined in 1942. At that time America and Britain – along with other European countries – were engaged in fighting Nazi Germany.

The Noir genre can be seen partly as a response to the Great Depression in America. Following the 'Roaring Twenties', when America began mass producing cars, the gap between rich and poor became very marked despite the industrial success. Europe, meanwhile, fell into economic decline and America became "the world's banker". This led to Europe taking on huge debts and importing less American products and this situation became known as The Great Depression. In the second decade of the 20th century, the 'credit crunch' and Eurozone crisis have created a similar situation. Consumer spending reduces and unemployment rises.

The Noir genre emerges from this backdrop.

This is important because its sets the context for the *L.A. Noire* videogame and also explains some of the key characteristics which make up the *noir* genre.

America's entry into the war in 1942 would result in some very significant changes in the position of women in US society. Before the war, America and Britain, to an extent, were

defined by very traditional roles for men and women: men went to work and women stayed at home to look after the children.

This is something of a generalisation of course, but the fact remains that many American men enlisted to fight the Germans in the Second World War, which meant that women had to go out to work; they now started to circulate in places traditionally dominated by men (factories, etc) and they started to occupy roles which before the war had tended to be the ones men filled. Women were now taking over men's role in American society. So, there was a huge change
 in the sexual division of labour.

Another huge change in American society was a rise in immigration as many people fled war-torn Europe for the relative safety of America. When Adolf Hitler came to power in the 1930s, significant numbers of German intellectuals and artists left the country fearing conflict and emigrated to the United States. Their influence on American cultural life cannot be understated and they included academics such as the Frankfurt School of Marxist thinkers as well as filmmakers such as Fritz Lang, Douglas Sirk and Billy Wilder. These people brought their own skills, talent and influences to America, as well as big new ideas such as psychoanalysis, which was being promoted by Sigmund Freud.

After the war ended in 1945, American men returned from Europe and Japan to find that American women were now far more independent. There had been a complete role reversal; many women enjoyed the freedom of having jobs and careers, and earning their own money. So, there was something of a conflict in American society in the 1940s, as men expected to neatly slot back into their old lives, and many women refused to return to the domestic world of marriage and motherhood.

This period of maladjustment set the scene for the cinematic genre of *film noir*, and these films would reflect the many contradictions now inherent in 1940s America.

As America moved into the 1950s and 1960s, the genre would change to reflect the Cold War (1947 – 1991) between the United States and Russia, which lasted many decades. The *noirs* of the 1950s in particular, were defined by dark and pessimistic undercurrents as well as insecurity and paranoia.

Whereas before the Second World War, the main concerns of the American public was the supply of illegal booze from Chicago, after the war the external threat of communist Russia and the internal problems of organised crime perpetrated by the Mafia were now the dominant issues.

LITERARY INFLUENCES

Although many people assume that *noir* has its origins in the *film noirs* of the 1940s and 1950s, in fact the genre has a strong literary heritage. The novels of Dashiel Hammett (1894 – 1961) and Raymond Chandler (1888 – 1959) are really where it all started. These two writers were both quite left-wing in political outlook, and Hammett's novels in particular were a reaction against the British Detective novel; these tended to feature plots set in country houses and often featured very rich and upper-class characters.
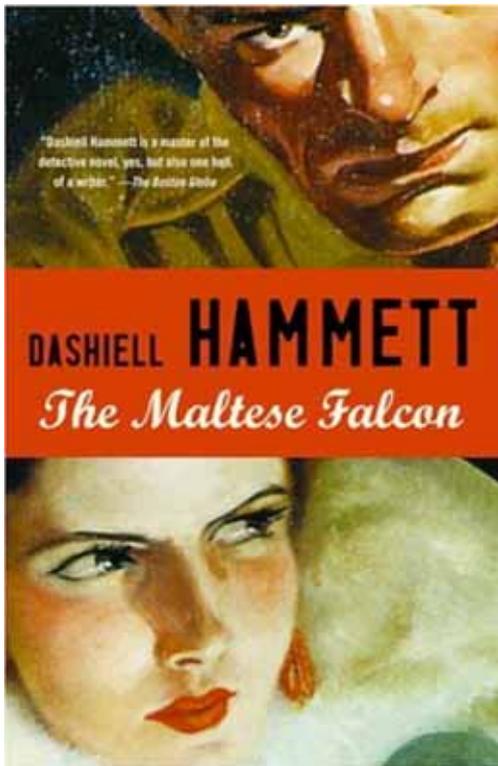
Dashiel Hammett wanted to write about 'real' people and the corruption he saw in American institutions such as the Police and local politics. His first four novels, published between 1929 and 1931, pretty much defined the conventions we would now recognise today as *noir*.

These two writers would be joined by James M. Cain and James Hadley Chase, and are now considered to be the founding-fathers of what would later become known as the *film noir* genre.

All four wrote for the very popular *Black Mask* (1920 – 1951) magazine, which specialised in publishing 'hardboiled' detective fiction. This literary genre was defined by its gritty realism, and characters full of contradictions and internal conflict.

Hammett's central character was the private detective, Sam Spade, whereas Raymond Chandler wrote stories which featured his world-weary investigator, Philip Marlowe.

Sam Spade first appears in Hammett's novel, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), and would go to be played by Humphrey Bogart in the 1941 film adaptation. Philip Marlowe first appeared in the novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939), and was also played by Bogart in the 1946 film adaptation – showing how interchangeable and connected these two characters are. The character would also go on to be portrayed by Elliot Gould and Robert Mitchum in later films.

SAM SPADE

- He first appeared in Dashiel Hammett's novel, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930);
- The first 'hardboiled' private eye (private investigator);
- His base is in the American city of San Francisco;
- He is respected by criminals and the law alike;
- He never carries a gun;
- He is shrewd and cunning.

PHILIP MARLOWE

- He first appeared in Raymond Chandler's novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939);
- Like Sam Spade, he too is a private detective;
- His base is Los Angeles – also the setting for *L.A. Noire*;
- He is incorruptible but very 'world-weary';
- He is an introspective loner.
- He likes poetry, art and music.

These two characters would set the template for all the *film noirs* which followed, as the Spade and Marlowe characters were adapted for film and television almost continuously from the 1940s.

So the *film noir* genre definitely has an important literary heritage, which we should recognise. The genre would really develop a life of its own on film however, but it is still important to note that 20% of all *film noirs* made between 1941-1948 were based on previously published short-stories and novels.

The main protagonist in *L.A. Noire* is Cole Phelps. He begins the game as a uniformed cop, but eventually becomes a detective. So, he is part of the very type of institution *noir* texts attempt to critique. How close is he then to the archetypal male protagonist in *film noir*?

Make two short lists; the first list should contain the elements of Cole's character which do match the noir archetype, and the second list should contain those which don't meet the archetype.

PROBLEMS OF DEFINITIONS

"NO PRODUCER IN THE 1940S SET OUT TO MAKE A FILM NOIR"
(ROBERT STAM)

One of the problems with *noir* (or *film noir*) is trying to define exactly what it is. Lots of people claim they know what it means, but few of them agree: some theorists argue that *noir* is a film movement while others say that it is a genre. Critics even suggest that *noir* is nothing more than a style.

What we can say for certain is that despite the fact that *noir* has its origins in the 1930s 'hardboiled' detective novel, and has been seen on film since at least the early 1940s, the term *film noir* did not appear until 1946; it was first used by a French critic.

Post-war France was deluged with American popular culture in the immediate aftermath of their occupation by Nazi Germany. Parisian film-goers were immediately exposed to all of the films they had missed during the Second World War.

French audiences were thrilled by a series of very modern, gritty and realistic detective films and the term *film noir* was used to describe them; *roman noir* was a term already used to describe the very 'hardboiled' detective novels on which *noir* films were based, so it made a lot of sense – the word *noir* in the French language means 'black' or 'gloomy'. The phrase stuck and is now widely used to label a group of American detective films made in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as films which deal with similar and related themes in many other different genres, including science fiction (as we shall see).

Most critics seem to agree that *film noir* blends the already existing genres of the detective story, the gangster story and the melodrama. The *noir* films were about power relations and sexual identity. Essentially, the films were about non-conformity.

KEY NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS OF *FILM NOIR*

Noir films were different from other Hollywood movies of the time because they made extensive use of flashback and voiceover in ways not seen (or heard) before; in some of the *noir* films, the main principle narrative could all be one big flashback – see *Double Indemnity* (1944).

In *noir*, the story is often told in a first person voice-over from the point of view of the (male) protagonist. He usually comes into conflict with a powerful, independent and seductive woman – often known as the 'femme fatale'. This role reversal would reflect the same one which was occurring all over America at the time.

The plots in *noir* films generally centre on an investigation of some type. If we were to come up with a checklist for all things *noir* it might include:

- The story is always set in a specific and recognisable location (usually a city such as L.A.);
- There is an emphasis on point of view (POV).
- The protagonist (main point of view character) must suffer an internal psychological conflict;

- *Noir* films generally challenge traditional heterosexual relationships;
- The films generally don't necessarily have happy endings or positive conclusions;
- Making wrong or right decisions in relative;
- All of the central characters at least have the potential to commit murder, or act violently;
- The central characters are trapped in the present;
- The films are defined by their employment of voiceover and flashback.

SOMETHING ON STYLE IN *NOIR*...

Several industrial constraints influenced significantly the *film noir* genre. The first was The Production Code. This was a very strict censorship board which was particularly powerful throughout the 1940s and 1950s. This meant that *noir* writers and filmmakers had to be very creative when trying to portray core *noir* themes such as strident sexuality, infidelity and betrayal. Some actors were ingeniously suggestive in their use of props, such as cigarettes, to suggest provocative sexuality.

In America during the Second World War film budgets were quite small and restrictions were placed on set construction. This forced filmmakers to use real locations instead of large Hollywood sound stages; the big budget Hollywood productions of the time were often fairly artificial and formalist.

The reason French critics used the word *noir* to describe these films is because of their heavy use of shadow and low-key lighting. The way in which these films were lit then directly contrasted with the glamour of mainstream Hollywood cinema.

This dark visual style was further developed by the filmmakers who had fled war-torn Europe and who were now working in Hollywood. These directors had been very heavily influenced – and in some cases were part of – the very atmospheric German Expressionist film movement; a movement defined by its use of low-key lighting and shadows.

NOW THINK ABOUT THIS...

The 'classic' era of *film noir* (1940s & 1950s) was defined by films shot in black and white, which could make full and extensive use of low-key lighting and the use of shadow.

The *neo-noirs* from the 1960s onwards, where generally shot in colour, so had to use different methods and techniques to portray the gloomy city.

How does the design of *L.A. Noire* meet the stylistic conventions of *noir* (or not)?

WOMEN IN *NOIR*

"THE IDEOLOGICAL OPERATION OF THE MYTH (THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF CONTROLLING THE STRONG, SEXUAL WOMAN) IS THUS ACHIEVED BY FIRST DEMONSTRATING HER DANGEROUS POWER AND ITS FRIGHTENING RESULTS, THEN DESTROYING IT."
(JANEY PLACE)

One of the most interesting aspects of *noir* is the role of women; they usually portray a character known as the 'femme fatale'. In 1940s America there was a conflict occurring as men returning from the Second World War expected to fit back into the jobs and roles they had before enlisting in the armed forces.

However, many women were now out in the workplace and reluctant to return to their old lives as full-time wives and mothers. Masculinity became bound up in US national identity.

In *film noir* this was reflected in the portrayal of strong, powerful and sexually independent women. However, the characters often came to an unfortunate end; they were very often punished for their subversion and refusal to conform to traditional gender roles. So in *noir,* the films both reflected and critiqued the change which had occurred in the sexual discrimination of U.S labour.

In *noir*, there is a general absence of family life, while in America women were being pushed back into the domestic space by the returning U.S soldiers.

In *noir*, women are far more active and are no longer confined to wife, or wholesome girlfriend roles. In many *noir* films it is the women who are tying to clear the male protagonist's name after he has been accused of a crime he hasn't committed.

While the role of 'femme fatale' is usually a central one, she either seems to die in an unpleasant way or she must submit to the patriarchal system. For example, at the end of *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) Orson Welles leaves Rita Hayworth to bleed to death in a hall of mirrors, whereas in *L.A. Confidential* (1997), Russell Crowe and Kim Basinger get married; the female character's sexuality must be contained.

NOW THINK ABOUT THIS…

In *L.A. Noire*, Cole Phelps' girlfriend is Elsa Lichtmann. Just like European intellectuals and filmmakers such as Fritz Lang in the 1930s and 1940s, she fled Germany because her family were killed during the Second World War.

She works as a singer in The Blue Room nightclub, and she first meets Phelps after his promotion from the traffic desk.

Now think about Elsa's storyline throughout the game, her relationship with Cole Phelps and the fact she is married and has been a drug addict.

How far does Elsa meet the criteria for the 'femme fatale' in *film noir*?

Janey Place describes two possible character arcs for the 'femme fatale': the "rejuvenating redeemer" and the "deadly seductress." Does Elsa Lichtmann fit either of these?

NEO-NOIR.

As *film noir* very much had it origins in literature and would combine the film genres of the detective story, the gangster movie and the melodrama to great effect we shouldn't be surprised that it would move into other genres too.

Many theorists who write about film genre, such as Thomas Schatz, Steve Neale and Rick Altman, all agree that genres change over time and some move through cycles constantly renewing themselves. *Film noir* is no different and from the late 1960s the genre had become quite tired and the infamous Production Code was starting to lose its grip on restricting what stories writers and filmmakers could tell.

In this new liberal period *film noir* changed quite a lot, so much so that some critics started labelling films as *neo-noir* ('neo' just means 'new'). Many films embodied the central themes of *noir* – pessimism and betrayal – and used the same narrative characteristics – a lone male protagonist, an enigmatic 'femme fatale', voice-over narration, flashback, etc - but on the surface didn't 'look' like *noir*.

Instead they embraced more modern themes of identity crises, urban decay and social alienation. Films like *Dirty Harry*, *The French Connection* and *Get Carter* (all 1971) all featured a central male protagonist who was very contradictory and torn between obeying the law and committing serious crimes. *Serpico* (1973) and *Chinatown* (1974) both dealt with corruption in American society. Martin Scorsese is a director who has been influenced by and influential in the Noir genre and associated styles of film – most notably the gangster film, perhaps. Taxi Driver (1976) uses many noir themes but updates the context for post-Vietman New York, with approaches to colour, voice-over, non-diegetic sound and camera movement that can all be seen as 'classic' Noir conventions, as Pete Fraser explains, in his 'York Notes' on Taxi Driver:

> *In Taxi Driver, this is made apparent particularly in the use of anti-realist devices such as the issolves, overhead shots and the slow motion. These expressionist features, allied to the noir lighting style, the hero's paranoid world view and voice-over, the use of literal and symbolic reflections in this rainy night in the city and even its imagined femme fatale (Betsy) give the film many of the characteristics of noir. (Fraser, 2000: 86)*

Future *noirs* such as *Blade Runner* (1992) *Twelve Monkeys* (1995) and Gattaca (1997) were in essence science fiction movies, but they still embodied many of the themes and narrative characteristics of *film noir*. However they were also concerned with the social implications of rapid technological change; in *Blade Runner*, the femme fatale is an android who seduces the conflicted male protagonist.

In the 1990s, there was something of a return to more 'classic' noirs, as a new generation of filmmakers, such as the Coen brothers and Quentin Tarantino, paid homage to the films that inspired them. Of these we can include *The Grifters* (1990), *Miller's Crossing* (1990), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1995), *Mulholland Falls* (1996) and *L.A. Confidential* (1997).

The new decade saw *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *The Road to Perdition* (2002), *A History of Violence* (1995) and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011). Rian Johnson's 2005 film, *Brick*, even used the dialogue of the 'hardboiled' detective novel – some of it directly from Dashiel Hammett's novels – but set the story in a modern high school. So, *noir* certainly has longevity in a variety of different forms and in a variety of different media.

NOW THINK ABOUT THIS…

In terms of plot, style and narrative, what are the essential differences between 'classic' *film noir* and *neo-noir*?

Does *L.A. Noire* then fit more comfortably in the 'classic' model or the more modern one?

NORDIC NOIR.

More recently *noir* has had a new lease of life in a rejuvenated form of *noir,* which like 'classic' *noir*, has its origins in literature. Like Dashiel Hammett and Raymond Chandler before them, the Swedish writers Stieg Larsson and Henning Mankell, as well as the Norwegian author Jo Nesbø, are considered to be the creators of what is now known as *Nordic noir*. This is a term used to describe a particular type of gritty crime novel usually set in Sweden, Denmark or Norway. The icy landscape of these countries, and the rivalry which often exists between them, lends these stories a dark potency.

In cinema, Ingmar Bergman was an influential director in the Noir genre in the 1950s, with films as Through a Glass Darkly cited as key influences on contemporary Nordic Noir. However, it is important to note that there is a debate among Nordic Noir fans about Bergman's influence with some critics arguing that it is inappropriate to talk about the director as a Noir auteur because his films focus more on broader, philosophical and existential themes than political issues, crime and corruption.

Mankell's world-weary detective, Kurt Wallander, has been featured in several long-running Swedish TV series, and these have been successfully remade for English-speaking audiences with Kenneth Branagh in the title role.

Larsson's blockbuster *Millenium Trilogy* (2005 – 2007) has probably been the most high profile *Nordic noir* narrative, having been adapted into a series of acclaimed Swedish films in 2009. His male protagonist is Mikael Blomkvist, a crusading journalist, who is joined by a 'femme fatale' in the shape of socially awkward computer hacker, Lisbeth Salander.

The Swedish films were almost immediately remade by an American studio, starring Daniel Craig. The first in the series, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), was well received by audiences and compared favourably to the original film and the novel it was based on.

The Danish television series *The Killing* (2007 – present) and the Danish-Swedish co-production *The Bridge* (2011 – present) both perform an interesting gender role reversal: a strong female protagonist is this time the

downbeat detective at the centre of an investigation into a series of particularly grim crimes.

Despite being female, both Sarah Lund (*The Killing*) and Saga Norén (*The Bridge*) fulfil the archetype of the ambiguous investigator at the heart of the 'classic' *film noirs* from the 1940s and 1950s; both Lund and Norén are loners and rule-breakers and both find it difficult to accept traditional social boundaries and rules.

The Killing was remade into an American TV series from 2011, and is very popular in the US and UK.

To this list of *Nordic noirs* we can also add crime dramas such as the Danish *Borgen* (2010 - present) and the Swedish *Sebastian Bergman* series (2010 – present). This shows us that while *noir* has moved successfully into other genres and media in other countries, it still significantly influences American forms of *noir* today.

L.A. NOIR.

"AS A FORM OF FICTION, THE GAME FICTION DEMANDS THAT IT BE 'READ' AND NOT SIMPLY 'EXPERIENCE'. AS THE EARLIEST CINEMA CRITICISM RECOGNISED THAT FILM WAS A FORM OF TEXT ONLY MOBILISED BY THE ACT OF READING, AND NOT SOMETHING APPROXIMATING THE RE-REPRESENTATION OF UNMEDIATED LIVED EXPERIENCE, SO SHOULD CRITICISM OF THE COMPUTER GAME-FICTION RECOGNISE THE ACT OF READING THAT IT DEMANDS"
(BARRY ATKINS)

In the above quote, Atkins is arguing that some videogames embody the properties of literature, and that they should be 'read' in the same way we 'read' novels and films.

The videogame *L.A. Noire* is set in 1947 Los Angeles. So historically, this is right in the period the 'classic' *film noirs* were being made. The plot centres on 21 unsolved crimes all linked by a central story. The main protagonist is Cole Phelps, who begins as a uniformed cop before becoming a detective from the 5th case onwards.

NOW THINK ABOUT THIS...

Throughout this study guide we have asked you to consider the ways in which *L.A. Noire* embodies the properties of the 'hardboiled' literary heritage of *noir*, and the detective films of the 1940s and 1950s.

Can *L.A. Noire* then, be compared favourably to *noirs* in other media?

Is there a case to be made for arguing that *L.A. Noire* can be thought of as literary?

The opening voiceover of *L.A. Noire* is:

"A CITY ON THE VERGE OF GREATNESS. A NEW TYPE OF CITY, BASED NOT ON THE MAN BUT ON THE AUTOMOBILE. THE CAR – THE SYMBOL OF FREEDOM AND VITALITY. WERE EVERY MAN CAN OWN HIS OWN HOME, AND HAVE ROOM TO BREATHE, AND NOT BE OVERLOOKED BY HIS NEIGHBOURS. A CITY WHERE A MAN'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE. A QUARTER ACRE OF THE DREAM MADE POSSIBLE BY VICTORY. THE CITY OF OPPORTUNISTS. THE CITY OF DREAMS WHERE HOLLYWOOD WILL SHAPE THE THOUGHTS AND DESIRES OF THE ENTIRE PLANET. A CITY OF PIONEERS. A CITY OF DREAMERS. A CITY OF UNDERCURRENTS, WHERE NOT EVERYTHING IS AS IT SEEMS. A TWENTIETH CENTURY CITY THAT WILL BECOME A MODEL FOR THE WORLD. A CITY THAT HAS NO BOUNDARIES. THAT WILL STRETCH AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE."

How does the above quote differ from these two 'classic' *noir* openings, and what could be the reasons?

EXTRACT 1:

Desk Sgt.: "Can I help you?"

Frank Bigelow: "I want to report a murder."

Desk Sgt.: "Where was this murder committed?"

Bigelow: "San Francisco, last night."

Desk Sgt.: "Who was murdered?"

Bigelow: "I was."

From the film *D.O.A* (1950).

EXTRACT 2:

They threw me off the hay truck about noon. I had swung on the night before, down at the border, and as soon as I got up there under the canvas, I went to sleep. I needed plenty of that, after three weeks in Tia Juana, and I was still getting it when they pulled off to one side to let the engine cool. Then they saw a foot sticking out and threw me off. I tried some comical stuff, but all I got was a dead pan, so that gag was out. They gave me a cigarette, though, and I hiked down the road to find something to eat.

That was when I hit this Twin Oaks Tavern. It was nothing but a roadside sandwich joint, like a million others in California. There was a lunchroom part, and over that the house part, where they lived, and off to one side a filling station, and out back a half dozen shacks that they called an auto court. I blew in there in a hurry and began looking down the road. When the Greek showed, I asked if a guy had been by in a Cadillac. He was to pick me up here, I said, and we were to have lunch. Not today, said the Greek. He laid a place at one of the tables and asked me what I was going to have. I said orange juice, corn flakes, fried eggs and bacon, enchilada, flapjacks, and coffee. Pretty soon he came out with the orange juice and the corn flakes.

"Hold on, now. One thing I got to tell you. If this guy don't show up, you'll have to trust me for it. This was to be on him, and I'm kind of short, myself."

"Hokay, fill'm up."

I saw he was on, and quit talking about the guy in the Cadillac. Pretty soon I saw he wanted something.

EXTRACT 2 (CONTD):

"What you do, what kind of work, hey?"

"Oh, one thing and another, one thing and another. Why?"

"How old you?"

"Twenty four."

"Young fellow, hey. I could use young fellow right now. In my business."

"Nice place you got here."

"Air. Is a nice. No fog, like in a Los Angeles. No fog at all. Nice, a clear, all a time nice a clear."

"Must be swell at night, I can smell it now."

"Sleep fine. You understand automobile? Fix'm up?"

"Sure. I'm a born mechanic."

He gave me some more about the air, and how healthy he's been since he bought this place, and how he can't figure it out, why, his help won't stay with him. I can figure it out, but I stay with the grub.

"Hey? You think you like it here?"

By that time I had put down the rest of the coffee, and lit the cigar he gave me. "I tell you how it is. I got a couple of other propositions, that's my trouble. But I'll think about it. I sure will do that all right."

Then I saw her. She had been out back, in the kitchen, but she came in to gather up my dishes. Except for the shape, she really wasn't any raving beauty, but she had a sulky look to her, and her lips stuck out in a way that made me want to mash them in for her.

"Meet my wife."

From the novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) by James M. Cain.

Learning Outcome = understand and recognise the importance of medium, convention and genre as linked factors in literary practice

Key Concepts = point of view, mode of narration and intertextuality

Preparation

Read this statement from Jeremy Hawthorn's '*Studying the Novel*'.

> One of the extraordinary achievements of realism (and not just in the novel) is that it gives us something that to us resembles the world even though it is formed by constrained by conventions of representation different from those that operate in the real world. (Hawthorn, 1992: 111)

L A Noire is a digital novel in the form of a videogame. Like a conventional novel, it constructs realism and uses conventions of representation.

Now you've worked through several sections of the study guide, you should have an understanding of how we can look at L.A Noire as a **genre** text, how it constructs a **narrative** and how it **represents** key themes. These elements combine to construct realism – to resemble the world convincingly. In this case, the world we 'recognise' is one we have in the vast majority of cases never experienced – Los Angeles in the 1940s.

This means that the 'realism' will be heavily mediated and intertextual – we will 'recognise' it from other texts rather than from real life experience. These texts are likely to be linked to one another – and to *L A Noire* – by **genre**. The 'Film Noir' genre often uses **first person narration** so there is a particular *point of view* that is privileged by this mode of narration. Of course, *L A Noire* is a videogame – a digital transformation of the novel – so the point of view and narration may be even more 'fixed' as the reader is also **embodied** in the lead character.

In '*Studying Literary Theory*', Roger Webster describes a result of i**ntertextuality** being the reduction of the importance of the author in literature – the author is 'decentred'. This is, of course, of great importance in our analysis of *L A Noire* as a piece of authorless literature:

> *Literary textuality then can be seen as a kind of discursive recycling, although the new relations which come to exist between the discourse appropriated and incorporated into a text ensure that literary writing is never the same, never completely repeated.* (Webster, 1990: 97).

We can, then, easily locate L A Noire in this analysis – the videogame will be the latest act of discursive recycling in the 'Noir' tradition, a network of intertextual meanings but with the 'twist' of being a videogame, drawing

together literary, filmic and ludic (play) elements in this new 'reconfiguration' of the Noir novel.

This stage of analysis asks you to look at a range of Film Noir and 'Hard Boiled Detective Novel' texts and to draw an 'underground map' to make connections between them. You are also free to research other formats – videogames, television, anything else you think is relevant.

1. ACTIVITY (INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP)

Here is a 'tube map' of musical genres produced by music journalist and writer Dorien Lynskey:

http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/culturevulture/archives/2006/02/03/post_51.html

You will see that Lynskey has identified a range of 'routes' based on broad musical genres and then 'mapped' out all these bands and artists to show the interconnections between them.

In this activity*, you'll be doing the same but starting from a different place. You need to position *L.Noire* as a 'station' in the centre of the map, then identify between five and eight genres that can act as 'lines' which will all travel through *L A Noire*. These genre 'lines' MUST include literature and film but they can also include games and any other formats you think should be included.

On the 'lines', plot other texts that share genre conventions with L A Noire. Put those that are most similar closer and others further away. Make sure you indicate which texts act as 'intersecting stations' – those that contain element from multiple genres.

How to do this –

First, write the names of a variety of texts that have something in common with *L A Noire* on post it notes or slips of paper.

Then think about about how all these various texts can be categorised in different ways – by the kinds of conventions they share – these conventions can be related to narrative / narrator, representation, setting, game mechanics, time period – anything that combines them into groups / sub-groups.

The important thing is to start out from *L A Noire* as an inter-connecting text (a hybrid) and work out from there.

Next, organize the texts into the five to eight 'routes' with a particular eye on overlapping areas. Finally, plot the texts onto the underground map.

Here are some web-resources to get you started –

General resources:

- *L A Noire: Collected Stories:*
  http://www.rockstargames.com/lanoire/features/stories//
- Daniel Chandler – An Introduction to Genre:
  http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/intgenre1.html
- Film Noir Studies: essays all on things noir:
  http://www.filmnoirstudies.com/
- Website on women in noir:
  http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/noir/np06good.html
- The Film Noir Foundation:
  http://www.filmnoirfoundation.org/resources.html
- John Cawelti on the 'Hard Boiled Detective' formula:
  http://faculty.washington.edu/cbehler/teaching/coursenotes/hardboiled
  .html

'Classic' Noir texts:

- The Maltese Falcon (1941):
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lLD76XTAtA
- Double Indemnity (1944):
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3wjJcuGsVE
- The Big Sleep (1946): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjJlBnfyiI4
- Gilda (1946): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRwdVlY2_rE
- The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946):
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mi4UaQWN_H8
- Big Heat (1953): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44KmtnTl-n4
- Touch of Evil (1958): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qarsXV_d4cA
- Chinatown (1974): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aifeXlnoqY
- The Postman Always Rings Twice (1981 remake):
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBo7Mg3FUtE

'Neo-noir' texts:

- Blade Runner (1982):
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNxNqvpaat0
- Se7en (1995): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4YV2_TcCoE
- LA Confidential (1997):
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4XbnrmbEME
- Mulholland Drive (2001):
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KgH9n1c4mM

2. DISCUSSION (GROUP)

In 'The Art of Fiction', David Lodge uses the German world *Gestalt* to describe the novel as "*a perceptual pattern or structure possessing qualities as a whole that cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts*" (2011:230).

How does this work for a videogame that you read by playing – literally – the part of the main character. If the reader is embodied in the lead character, are there more 'parts' combining to form this 'perceptual structure'?

Returning to the suggestion that L A Noire can be understood as a new contribution to a long-running literary and filmic genre – 'Noir fiction / Film Noir' – then many of these 'parts' will be generic elements.

Looking at your finished 'tube map' and reflecting on the process, how can you group the elements / conventions that L A Noire shares with other texts into these areas – medium / format (videogames + types of), genre / sub-genres and narration / point of view.

In doing this, you'll be thinking more deeply about the *extent to which* L A Noire is a 'classic' Noir text, despite it being a videogame rather than a film or a novel. In other words, can generic elements work so easily across formats and modes of reading / reception?

3. ESSAY PLAN (INDIVIDUAL)

Produce a plan for a 2000 word essay answering the following question –

"*L A Noire* is a classic genre text". To what extent do you agree with this statement and in what ways does its status as a videogame challenge this definition?

References

Hawthorn, J. 1992. *Studying the Novel*. New York: Bloomsbury.
Lodge, D, 2011. *The Art of Fiction*. London: Verso.
McDougall, J and Potamitis, N, 2010. *The Media Teacher's Book* 2nd Edition. London: Hodder.
Webster, R, 1990. *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Arnold.

*this activity is adapted from a 'learning plan' developed by Nick Potamitis in *The Media Teacher's Book* (2nd edition).

CREATIVE TASKS FOR LA NOIRE

Now you have worked through the study activities and considered *L A Noire* as a text with genre conventions and a particular mode of narration, these activities require you to create something new to show your textual understanding of *L A Noire* in a practical context.

The reason for our focus on **genre** is that this videogame is explicitly designed as a text that shares conventions with literature and film as well as other games. In the first section of Bradygames 'Signature Series' guide to L A Noire, the player is told "*Our story opens with a voiceover narrator giving an overview of Los Angeles in 1947. It sets a classic noire tone*". This is an important detail because it shows us that an understanding of what is meant by 'noire' is required for the gameplay – to solve cases – rather than it just being a separate category for academics and reviewers. The instructions in this guide combine a practical 'how to' style with language that echoes the Noir conventions of the game, such as "*Watch the bittersweet conclusion as Captain Donnelly appears with unexpected news about the shakeout. Although things don't play out as Phelps or Galloway expected, 'young Phelps' receives a reward of sorts: a promotion out of Homicide to the LAPD's glamour desk, Administrative Vice, based in Hollywood*".

CREATIVE TASK OPTION 1 – CREATIVE WRITING:

L.A Noire – the Collected Stories is a collection of short pieces of Noir literature based on the game.
http://www.rockstargames.com/lanoire/features/stories/

Consider how these three extracts a) relate to the game, from your gameplay experience and b) demonstrate conventions of the Noir literary genre – as we focused on in this study guide.

Extract 1 -

> *The 101 took me out of downtown and up into the Valley, and then I followed a curving road up to Mulholland and proceeded to drive down my own little memory lane high above the city. Before I knew it, I was recharting the peculiar topography of Bonnie and Me. The old familiar places looked strange in the naked daylight. I pulled onto the overlook where we'd first kissed and was startled by the number of houses clinging to the side of the hill. I thought we had been utterly alone up there in the darkness, perched on the rim of the bowl that was Los Angeles, where no one could see us. Now it felt like the entire city had been watching.* (from 'Hell of an Affair' by Duane Swierczynski).

Extract 2 -

> All summer I kept hearing people say desperate. Actors are always
> eavesdropping on strangers, picking up phrases, gestures, stuff we can
> use. And wherever I went, whenever I listened in, I heard: desperate,
> desperate, desperate!
>
> At the pharmacy, I heard a dame say "Hon, if my landlord evicts me,
> things are gonna get desperate." A buddy of mine said, "if my girl in
> New York doesn't call soon, man, I'm desperate." I overheard a bum
> on Skid Row say "That jerk better pay me back, I don't care how
> desperate he is."
> The funny thing was, this was 1947. Desperation was yesterday's
> mashed potatoes. Happy days were here again. The Depression was
> over, we'd dropped the bomb, we'd won. Guys like me had defended
> our country, and girls appreciated that. I'd been in the battle of
> Okinawa. That was pretty much all I had to say and gals would feel
> like it was their personal mission to heal whatever was broken. (from
> 'School for Murder' by Francine Prose).

Extract 3 –

> "Any idea who might have wanted her dead?", Coats asked.
> "She had slipped a little", Ali said. "That's all I know."
> "Slipped?"
> "Guess it was my fault. I tried to help her, but I didn't know how. I
> married Harris and I had money and I gave her a lot of it, but it didn't
> help. It wasn't money she needed, but what she needed I didn't know
> how to give. The only thing I ever taught her was how to make the
> best of an opportunity."
> (from 'Naked Angel' by Joe R. Lansdale)

Access the collection and read any 3 of the stories. Also have a skim through
the others, so you have an overview of what aspects of the game are covered
by the stories.

Next, read some of the fan fiction available here:
http://www.fanfiction.net/game/L_A_Noire/

Returning to the game, find a section, theme or element that is not
represented in either the short story collection or the fan fiction and **write
your own short story, using Noir fiction conventions** based on the
game.

CREATIVE TASK OPTION 2 – MACHINIMA

Machinima is a way of making a film within a video game or other 3D environment.

More information is here – **http://www.machinima.org/machinima-faq.html**

'Machinima for Dummies' explains how to make a machinima text – http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=g-hPBG4BV0AC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false

Watch this example of a machinima film based on *L A Noire.*
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkOm6sLkFYI

Search for other examples. Then, return to the game and produce your own *L A Noire* machinima which shows your **understanding of the key literary themes of the game – genre, narration, point of view and representation.**

CREATIVE TASK OPTION 3 – WIKI TASK

Visit the L A Noire wiki - http://lanoire.wikia.com/wiki/L.A._Noire_Wiki

Add either a new 'case', walkthrough, new character, suspect profile or any other item that involves **presenting information for an audience in either written or audiovisual form.**

AND FINALLY...

Noir began in novels, and developed natrually into cinema where it has been in existence for pretty much half a century (at least). The videogame *L.A. Noire* is just the latest incarnation of a type of gritty, realistic detective story conceived by writers such as Dashiel Hammett and Raymond Chandler as far back as the 1930s.

The Second World War and the emancipation of women did much to fuel the stories in *noir* fiction, and later *film noir*.

If we can think of *L.A. Noire* as a type of fiction, or literature, then could it be adapted?

Many of the most famous *film noirs*, where adapted from novels. Could we do the same with *L.A. Noire*?

NOW THINK ABOUT THIS...

Noir writers often looked to real-life for ideas and inspiration, and many *noir* stories were based on actual crimes and cases.

EITHER:

Find a crime story in a local or national newspaper and write a short treatment for a *noir* adaptation of your own, choosing your own title.

OR:

Create a poster for the film adaptation of *L.A. Noire*. You must also carefully choose your cast, although you can set your film in any period – so the 1940s, if you want to cast Barbara Stanwyck as Elsa, for example.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND L A NOIRE

Now you have got to grips with L A Noire as a Noir text, here are a series of 'deeper' theoretical questions to consider. These will help you formulate your analysis of L A Noire as a literary text:

Identify other characters from novels, films or plays that the central characters in L A Noire remind you of or share features with. With this intertextual approach in mind, what academic concepts / analytical approaches from your literature studies would be useful for putting L.A Noire into any particular categories? Are there any obvious theoretical ways of describing L.A Noire that would link it to other 'texts'?

In *LA Noire* the reader adopts a character's perspective as she / he explores the story-world. When playing the game, how far would you say you try and inhabit the 'character' you're 'playing'? How far do you try and see the world through their eyes? Does the character you're playing shape your behaviour or attitudes towards to other characters you encounter in the game? Would you say your 'game identity' is all you, partly made-up of you and the character you're 'playing' or as much as possible, is it entirely the character you're 'playing'?

How does the text represent gender? Does the game represent men and women in stereotypical ways? What about other categories - age and ethnicity for example? Time period? Setting?

Can we describe HOW a game represents groups of people and places / situations, compared to a novel or a film? Is it the same, or does the fact that you play the game, in character, make any difference - how does it compare to reading a character or narrator's point of view or watching a film?

Building on this, can you say about narration in L.A Noire - is there any, and if so, how does it work? What kind of narration is this?

Finally, you can develop these ideas into an academic essay on L A Noire, responding to either of these questions:

Either: Film noir's portrayal of the "femme fatale" supports the existing social order by building up a powerful, independent woman, only to punish her.

To what extent do you agree with this in relation to the portrayal of women in 'LA Noire'?

Or: 'LA Noire' is set in 1940s Los Angeles. To what extent do you feel that this game would provide an effective introduction to the concept of 'genre'? What are the key characteristics of 'noir'?

In your answer you should consider form, structure and language, as well as subject matter.