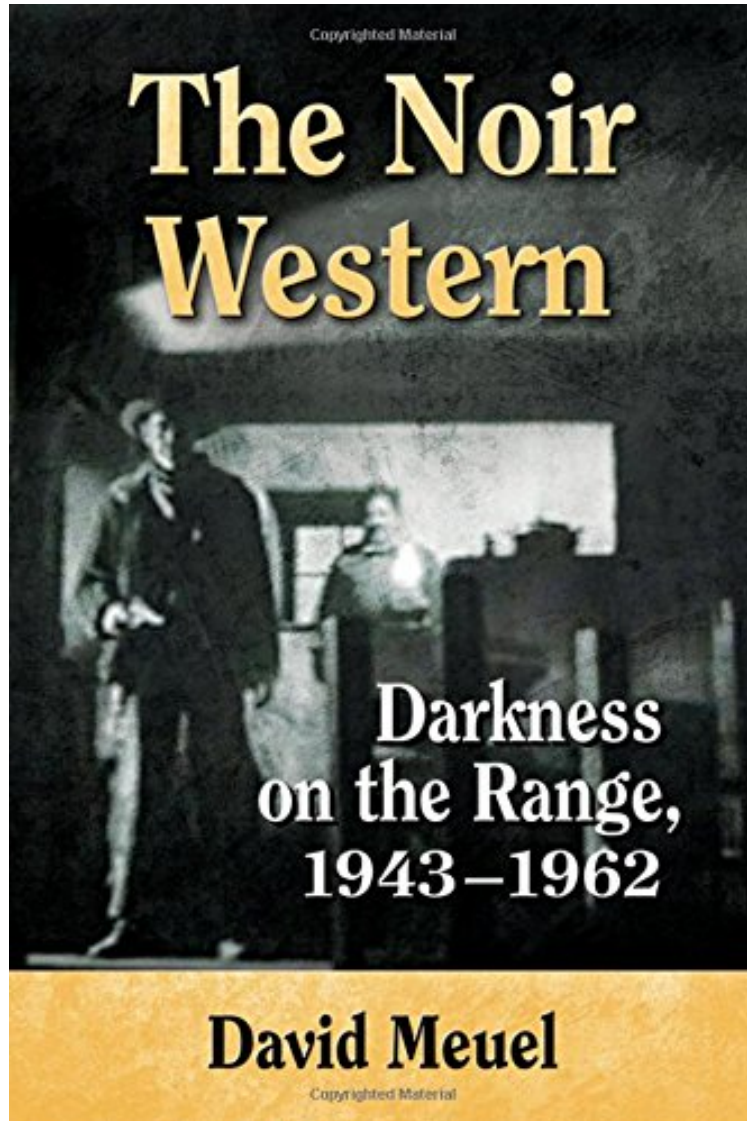


[Download] The Noir Western: Darkness on the Range 1943-1962

## The Noir Western: Darkness on the Range 1943-1962

*David Meuel*

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**David Meuel : The Noir Western: Darkness on the Range 1943-1962** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Noir Western: Darkness on the Range 1943-1962:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Excellent pioneering studyBy Patrick MurthaEven though the literature on film noir continues to grow at a dizzying pace, there is still some virgin territory to be claimed. David Meuel's The Noir Western: Darkness on the Range, 1943-1962 would appear to be the first book-length treatment of its subject (I say "appears to be" because such assertions have a way of being disproven later). The concept of noir westerns as a subset of "off-genre noirs" goes back a long way, and has been discussed in sections of books (such as

Alain Silver et al.'s *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*, which first appeared in 1979) and in articles (such as Michael Shepler's 2008 "Sagebrush Noir: The Western as 'Social Problem' Film," which oddly goes unmentioned by Meuel). But it has long merited fuller treatment, and Meuel's well-written, engaging study is an excellent start on that. There will certainly be more books on the subject ahead. Discussions of film noir can easily bog down in definitional disputes, which even though I am a participant at one of the best noir discussion boards, The Blackboard, I try to steer clear of. Although "film noir" was first used as a descriptor in France in the late 1940s, it was not a recognized term in the United States until the early 1970s. Therefore, as one of our finest noir scholars James Naremore has pointed out, it is "a concept that was generated ex post facto." No director or screenwriter of the "classic noir period" (fairly close to Meuel's defined dates of 1943 to 1962) would have known at the time that noir films were what they were making. It was inevitable that complete consensus on the use of the term would never be reached, and it has not been; as Naremore states, "no writer has been able to find the category's necessary and sufficient characteristics." The edges of the phenomenon are blurry even if the core is not. In dealing with a branch of off-genre noir, David Meuel is necessarily operating at the edges, where disputes about what is in and what is out are potentially the most bruising. I'm not going to worry it. He has chosen 21 films by 11 directors to concentrate on, while identifying another 50 relevant movies in an appendix. His arguments on behalf of the inclusion of the 21 films are reasonably persuasive without amounting to a "Meuel test" for what constitutes a noir western. Thematic complexity, psychological depth, visual style, and bleakness of outlook all figure into his analysis, but in differing proportions with respect to each title and director. When you look at it that way, the scope of the noir western could be construed very broadly. Any double fan of noir and westerns, and there are many, will readily think of some titles that Meuel has not listed - Joseph Kane's *Ride the Man Down* or Don Siegel's *The Duel at Silver Creek*, for instance (both 1952). In fact, it is harder to EXCLUDE many 1946-1960 Westerns from consideration than it is to include them. If one combs carefully through any of the numerous printed iterations of Phil Hardy's indispensable work on the Western, many of the descriptions of obscure A-/B+ Westerns spring off the page as meriting viewing and additional research in connection with this theme. And no one, as far as I am aware, has even started working on the noir strain in television Westerns. So Meuel is a pioneer, and all that ultimately matters is whether he is a GOOD pioneer, which he manifestly is. He found the spot-on publisher for this sort of material, McFarland, which has long specialized in offering the findings of independent scholars in popular culture, whose work is many cuts above mere fan writing, but generally more accessible and less jargon-ridden than the books that university presses put out. (Many such volumes are invaluable, but may present more of a challenge to the uninitiated.) Well before the tag "noir" was applied to Westerns, the sort of movies that Meuel discusses were called adult, psychological, serious, and literary Westerns, and later, as we headed into the Sixties and Seventies, revisionist Westerns. An equally good description for some of them would be "arthouse Westerns"; in fact, a book parallel to Meuel's and covering many of the same films could be written that minimized references to noir and concentrated on how the arthouse attitude came to shape a genre one might think would be immune to it. I have a soft spot for many of the more extreme arthouse Westerns that Meuel resists a little bit - Anthony Mann's *The Furies*, William Wellman's *Track of the Cat*, Delmer Daves' *Jubal* - although he does very well by Wellman's *The Ox-Bow Incident*, one of the very first arthouse Westerns. Somehow John Ford always escapes being labeled "arthouse," despite the obvious fact that every single last thing in his films, every frame, is intensely CONSIDERED. The shift to more "adult" Westerns involved a number of directors, among whom Anthony Mann has received his just due, and Delmer Daves definitely has not. Meuel has a fine feel for the different personalities and strategies of these directors and honors all of them, who in addition to Mann, Ford, Wellman, and Daves include Budd Boetticher and Sam Fuller (long cult favorites), Raoul Walsh (not one bit inferior to the more celebrated Howard Hawks), Robert Wise (a supreme craftsman), Henry King, Allan Dwan, and Andre De Toth. In short, this is a highly worthy addition to the film buff's bookshelf. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Lasso Yourself a Copy! By Natalie Varney I can't recommend *The Noir Western: Darkness on the Range* enough. The concept is fascinating: the fusion of two seeming polar opposites, film noir and the American western, to create a distinct sub-genre all its own. It was fun how the author approached the subject through specific directors and their representative films, too. While some of the westerns Meuel spotlights are familiar, many of them are brand new discoveries for me, which is another reason to read the book. Finally, the book gave me a greater appreciation for BOTH film noir and westerns. For those interested in either subject, this is a must-read. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. 3.75 stars. Engrossing and insightful By Kris Sanderson *The Noir Western: Darkness on the Range 1943-1962* is a fantastic addition to those interested in film critique, the film noir genre and westerns. It is accessible as a great non-fiction read for people interested in the subject but is well foot noted and researched and is appropriate as an academic text in any film program. The author chose the dates between 1943-1962 to highlight a prevailing feeling that people had in the post-World War II era. Veterans came back from the European theater of war having seen the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi regime. In particular, U.S. troops had participated in the liberation of Dachau and had witnessed the inhuman treatment of one man to another. Other vets had spent time in the Pacific theater and were witness to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A more pessimistic view of humanity crept into films. Gone were the bright and breezy musicals of the 1930s. Many of Hollywood's actors and directors had served in the armed forces and were not

only exposed to war but also to European film makers, many of whom brought their world view and craft to the United States as they escaped their home countries and the ravages of war on their lives and crafts. Film noir is generally attributed to the world of crime films. In this book, the genre is explored in depth as it influenced westerns, the auteurs and others who worked in this genre. Eleven directors are examined. There are famous names like John Ford to those like Robert Wise whose work is not usually associated with westerns. For each director, two works are chosen to represent an entry to the noir western. Each chapter is set out similarly. A short discussion summing up the number of westerns that director made with a brief explanation as to why the author selected the two films he chose to discuss. This is followed by a biography of the director brief but each is well detailed and leads the reader to understand the director's whole work product and where the western sits in their overall body of work. Two films are then looked at separately. A synopsis of the film, the cast and then a more in depth look at the noir elements that make up the film. The organization of the book is strong and makes the reading easy and accessible. This is very important for students because often they are trying to get the maximum amount of information in a limited time frame. There are extensive chapter notes, footnotes and a bibliography for those interested in delving deeper in either noir or westerns. This book is 3.75 stars. The marks off come from two areas. One is a production issue: there are some photographs placed incorrectly. Right caption description, wrong director. The other is an editorial issue. The word noir is used way too much. There are times it doesn't need to be used at all and other times where there just has to be another word or description that can be used. I noticed it throughout but in the final chapters, it is particularly noticeable. There are certain descriptions that are also over used. Claustrophobic, noir-ish and complexity are a few examples. This is where writing is its most tricky finding new words to convey your idea without wearing others out. This is also where great editors rise to assist the author. These are small nit picks but they are noticeable to the reader. I would highly recommend this book. I found it interesting, entertaining and engrossing. I had never looked at the western genre from this perspective and it definitely has made me want to seek out these westerns on streaming services and have a look at what was very well explained in the book. Don't be put off by the small stuff. For film students especially, take a look. It will give you some insight into current work like *Django Unchained*, *There Will Be Blood* and *Unforgiven*.

Beginning in the mid-1940s, the bleak, brooding mood of film noir began seeping into that most optimistic of film genres, the western. Story lines took on a darker tone and western films adopted classic noir elements of moral ambiguity, complex anti-heroes and explicit violence. The noir western helped set the standard for the darker science fiction, action and superhero films of today, as well as for acclaimed TV series such as HBO's *Deadwood* and AMC's *Breaking Bad*. This book covers the stylistic shift in westerns in mid-20th century Hollywood, offering close readings of the first noir westerns, along with revealing portraits of the eccentric and talented directors who brought the films to life.

"Meuel manages to find new insights and areas not previously explored by other writers." - Barry Forshaw, CrimeTime and DVD Choices websites, October 2015  
About the Author  
A lifelong student of films, David Meuel has also published more than 100 poems, numerous short stories, and hundreds of articles on subjects ranging from theater to U.S. national parks, to writing and speaking for business. He lives in Menlo Park, California.